

News Update on Religion and Church in China November 13, 2021 – March 27, 2022

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2022, No. 1, pp. 3-13) covered the period September 10 – December 4, 2021.

Religious Policy

March 1, 2022:

“Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services” come into force – training for “information reviewers” begins

More than three years after the publication of a draft to gather opinions (see RCTC 2018, No. 4, pp. 9-10), on December 3, 2021, the National Administration of Religious Affairs, together with four other agencies – including the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of State Security – published “Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services” (互联网宗教信息服务管理办法).

This very restrictive administrative regulation provides that for offering “information on religious teachings and precepts, religious knowledge, religious culture, religious activities, etc., transmitted as text, images, audio or video through means of Internet websites, applications, forums, blogs, micro-blogs, public accounts [e.g. on WeChat], instant messaging, webcasts, etc.” – that is to say, any utterance on religion on the Internet – to the public, an “Internet Religious Information Service License” (互联网宗教信息服务许可) has to be obtained first. Applicants must be legally established domestic organizations (Article 2). Licenses must be applied for from the religious affairs departments on provincial level, with a transitional period of six months for existing religious Internet services, and are valid for three years.

Sermons and religious training on the Internet are allowed only within extremely narrow limits – the latter may only be given by licensed institutes for religious education [such as theological seminaries, Buddhist academies, etc.], and only for their students or for religious personnel (Articles 15, 16). “No religious activities may be carried out on the Internet, and religious ceremonies such as Buddha worship, incense offerings, Buddhist or Daoist ordinations, script recitations, [Church] services, masses or

baptisms may not be transmitted directly or in recording in the form of text, images, audio and video” (Article 17) – this prohibition applies in general, i.e., also for providers holding an Internet Religious Information Service License. Fundraising on the Internet in the name of religion is prohibited; however, charities founded by religious organizations, institutes for religious education institutions or sites for religious activities may solicit donations on the Internet in accordance with the provisions of the Charity Law (Article 19).

In order to apply for the license, the applicant must prove, in accordance with Article 6, that it has an information reviewer (信息审核人员). On February 28, the Commission for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Zhejiang Province published a notice calling for registration for training as an “Internet religious information reviewer” (text of the “Measures” can be found at www.sara.gov.cn/bmgz/364755.jhtml, an informal translation at <https://bitterwinter.org/crackdown-on-religious-content-coming-march-2022; mzw.zj.gov.cn Feb. 28, 2022>). *kwt*

March 21, 2022:

Wang Zuo’an publishes an article on Sinicization and Marxism

The Vice Minister of the United Front Department of the CCP and Director of the National Administration of Religious Affairs published his article in *Xuexie shibao* (*Study Times*), the journal of the Central Party School. In it, Wang underpins the concept of Sinicization with the “historical logic” of Marxist religious theory. According to this argumentation, only those religions in China can be continued in the long term that “Sinicize,” i.e. adapt to the social transformations initiated by the Party. Wang also formulates consequences and measures for religious policy (www.zyztz.gov.cn/tzyw/368880.jhtml). For more details on the content of the article, see *China heute* 2022, No. 1, pp. 5-8 (in German). *kwt*

Religious Studies

March 18, 2022:

New Institute of Marxist Religious Studies inaugurated in Hangzhou

The new Institute of Marxist Religious Studies in the New Era (浙大城市学院新时代马克思主义宗教学研究院) is located at Zhejiang University City College in Hangzhou. It is led by two leading scholars in the field of religious studies, Professors Chen Cunfu 陈村富, born in 1937, and Wang Xiaochao 王晓朝, born in 1953. Both are known for their studies and publications on the philosophical foundations of Western thought and the history of Christianity. The opening ceremony was attended by representatives of the various religions in China. The Institute aims to establish Zhejiang as a model province for the Sinicization of religions in China and to contribute to the modernization of the work of the Chinese religious affairs authority. A training system for the new discipline of Marxist religious studies is to be created for the training of talent in this discipline. A special focus of the project will be on research into practical problems (https://difang.gmw.cn/zj/2022-03/20/content_35599005.htm?msclkid=9d7848a2aea211ecabacc8b19f90003b).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Religions in General

From December 2021:

New outbreaks of COVID-19 in China: Religions participate in relief efforts

Towards the end of the year, the number of COVID-19 infections increased in various regions of China. From December 23, 2021, a one-month strict lockdown was imposed on Xi'an. Other cities and regions have been placed under lockdown from mid-March 2022, such as Changchun in Jilin Province, Shenzhen, and, from March 28 also Shanghai. As in 2020, the religious communities participated in the relief measures, among other things by helping to carry out the Corona tests or by procuring and distributing relief supplies. Religious sites in many places had to remain closed for Corona prevention (see also the entry of March 20, 2022 in the section "Catholic Church"). *kwt*



Corona engagement of religions – here a few examples from Catholic communities: Loading relief supplies at Jilin Seminary (top left) and Xi'an Cathedral (bottom left). A community in Xi'an prepares *jiaozi* dumplings for aid workers in the field (top right). Conducting Corona testing in Xi'an (bottom right). Photos: xinde.org.

February 4–20, March 4–13, 2022:

Olympic Winter Games and Winter Paralympics in Beijing – Religions remain invisible

In 2008, in the run-up to the Beijing Summer Olympics, public blessing ceremonies and prayers for the success of the Games were held by all five recognized religions of China, and it was publicly reported how China's religious communities were preparing for providing religious services to the guests (cf. *China heute* 2007, No. 3, p. 66; No. 6, pp. 195-196; 2008, No. 3, pp. 71-72 [in German]). In 2022, China's religious communities were not publicly mentioned in connection with the Winter Games – which a number of Western states diplomatically boycotted with reference to the human rights situation in the country. On the websites of the umbrella organizations of the Chinese religions, the Games were almost not discussed at all. The exception was a series of Buddhist congratulatory calligraphies on the website of the Chinese Buddhist Association. The Catholic website *Xinde* brought a number of good wishes for the Games from representatives of the universal Church – including Pope Francis' greetings at the end of the General Audience of February 2, 2022 (see entry of February 22, 2022 in the section “Sino-Vatican Relations”) and a greeting from Bishop Nazzareno Marconi of Macerata, birthplace of the Italian China missionary Matteo Ricci SJ.

In Hebei Province – in the north of which the venues Zhangjiakou and Chongli are located – the churches (and presumably also the sites of the other religions) remained closed not only during, but also before and after the Games due to the pandemic situation. However, a number of Catholics are said to have volunteered in the preparation and implementation of the Games. About a quarter of China's Catholics live in Hebei, in northern Hebei most of them practice their faith in the underground. Chongli – better known in Church history under the local name Xiwanzi – was an important Catholic center in northern China from the early 19th century (chinabuddhism.com.cn Feb. 6 to March 3, 2022 [16 episodes]; faz.net Feb. 8, 2022; *Verbiest Update* No. 51, January 2022; www.xinde.org/show/52289 [Feb. 4, 2022]). *kwt*

March 2, 2022:

China Anti-Cult Network: Leader of the Mentuhui movement indicted as “head of a criminal organization”

The state-run website China Anti-Cult Network reported on March 2 that a man named Zi from Lu-liang County in Yunnan, a deacon of the Mentuhui 门徒会 (disciple community) “cult,” was taken into custody on May 7, 2021, and formally arrested on June 10. On behalf of the Kunming branch of the Mentuhui, he and two other deacons organized the Mentuhui small groups at the lower local level, carried out evangelization and in 2020 caused members of a small group to raise money for the Mentuhui by selling pesticides and fertilizers, the website reported. According to the China Anti-Cult Network, Zi has “voluntarily pleaded guilty” and will now be charged as the head of a criminal organization.

Already on November 25, 2021, the China Anti-Cult Network had reported that eight members of the Mentuhui had been sentenced to fines by the People's Court in the Dalat Banner, City of Ordos, Inner Mongolia, according to Article 300 of the Criminal Law (for “organizing/using a cult organization to undermine implementation of the law”). The defendants were said to have recruited followers for the group between 2017 and 2018. The portal *Bitter Winter* of CESNUR (Turin) also reported on this court case. According to *Bitter Winter*, in 2020 a nationwide campaign was launched against the Mentuhui, which – as *Bitter Winter* said – like other “illegal” religions has experienced some growth during the Corona pandemic.

The Christian-inspired Mentuihui movement was founded in 1989 by Ji Sanbao, who was previously a member of the True Jesus Church, and has been on the list of banned “heretical cults” since 1995. According to *Bitter Winter*, its doctrine is also known as “Teachings of the Third Redemption” because it sees itself as the third sign of salvation– after Noah’s Ark and the cross of Jesus Christ. Ji Sanbao is said to have called himself a representative of God or Jesus (bitterwinter.org Dec. 30, 2021; chinafxj.cn Nov. 25, 2021; March 2, 2022; <https://de.bitterwinter.org/eine-weitere-xie-jiao-die-apostelgemeinschaft/>; Kristin Kupfer, “Christlich inspirierte, spiritualuell-religiöse Gruppierungen in der PR China seit 1978 (I),” in: *China heute* 2002, Nr. 4-5, S. 119-127, Tabelle 1). *kwf*

Buddhism

December 1-2, 2021:

Buddhists on both sides of the Taiwan Strait hold “Online Conference 2021 on the Development of Humanistic Buddhism”

The theme of the conference was “New Tendencies for the Spread of the Dharma in the Post-Pandemic Era.” Organizers were the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) and the Taiwanese United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua (中華人間佛教聯合總會). Master Zongxing, vice chairman of the CBA, said at the opening that the Corona pandemic is a challenge for the spread of Buddhism and interaction with each other. It has caused anxieties among the people, so the contents of the Dharma dissemination must be aligned with the needs of the time; Master Zongxing said that this is also the basic meaning of the idea of humanistic Buddhism.

After an online group photo, the participants discussed the topic in four areas: 1. In which direction should Buddhism develop in the post-pandemic era? 2. New trends for the spread of the Dharma (I): Online and offline dissemination; 3. New trends (II): For students of Buddhism– how to continue learning when classes stop? 4. New Trends (III): Know yourself and the other – understand the thinking patterns of the e-generation. According to the participants, this time the exchange was particularly intensive and practical because there were a lot of common topics of discussion due to the pandemic; they said that they would like to see more such online meetings on specific topics – according to the report on the CBA website (chinabuddhism.com Dec. 3, 2021). *kwf*

December 27, 2021:

Conference in Beijing on “Humanistic Buddhism and the Sinicization of Buddhism”

The conference was organized by the Research Institute of Buddhist Culture of China, an institute under the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA), in collaboration with the CBA’s “Research Base for the Thinking of Humanistic Buddhism” established in 2020. Around 30 experts from various research institutions from all over China took part.

In his speech at the opening of the conference, Master Yizang, vice president of the CBA and head of the research base, stated that increased research on humanistic Buddhism is essentially the same as promoting the Sinicization of Buddhism. Similarly, many other participants equated humanistic Buddhism with the Sinicization of Buddhism. Wei Daoru of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said that traditional Chinese culture is the historical foundation of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics in the New Era. He stressed that Buddhism is also part

of traditional Chinese culture, but felt that this is not taken into account enough in publications on the “excellent traditional culture of China.”

For the future development of humanistic Buddhism, Hong Xiuping, director of Nanjing University’s Research Center for Eastern Philosophy and Religious Culture, saw two directions: first, as a religion, with the mission of transmitting the teachings of the Buddha; second, as a culture to provide spiritual-cultural nourishment to the whole society. – An overview of all lectures held can be found in the conference reports on chinabuddhism.com.cn (Dec. 29, 2021; Jan. 1, 2022).

The reform idea of “humanistic Buddhism” (人间佛教) goes back to the monk Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), who advocated a stronger this-worldly orientation of Buddhism and its adaptation to modernity. In the People’s Republic of China, the concept is placed in the foreground in the “Sinicization” of Buddhism demanded by religious policy and serves as a projection screen for various contents (cf. Carsten Krause, “Zur ‘Sinisierung’ der Religionen: Was heißt das für Buddhisten?,” in: *China heute* 2021, No. 1, pp. 37-51, here pp. 39, 42-43.). *kwt*

January 20, 2022:

International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) reports on efforts to curb the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to the East

ICT reports on various recent measures taken by Chinese authorities to curb the influence of Tibetan Buddhism in Han Chinese Buddhist circles. This includes the removal of Han Chinese practitioners from the Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Academy in Sertar County, Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Founded in 1980, around 10,000 followers of Tibetan Buddhism, including many Han Chinese, are said to have lived and studied at the academy before 2016. After massive expulsions in 2016/2017, there has been an informal quota of about 2,000 Han Chinese monks and nuns among the remaining approximately 5,000 practitioners in recent years, according to ICT. Now ICT reports it had learned that there is only a “minuscule number” of Han Chinese left in Larung Gar. ICT said that Chinese practitioners are sent back to their hometowns by the authorities where they have to report to the police on a regular basis. There are also checkpoints on the road to Larung Gar and security personnel on the trekking routes to the monastery. In addition, shelters of monks and nuns are regularly checked for unauthorized residents.

ICT also reports that the many groups of Han Chinese Buddhist practitioners which had sprung up in Chinese cities for the study of Tibetan Buddhism have been banned. It said that until a few months ago, Han Chinese practitioners still had internet access to their Tibetan teachers. However, ICT fears that this access most likely will be controlled significantly or even denied permanently with the entry into force of the “Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services” on March 1, 2022. According to ICT, the authorities have already shut down the successful webcasts of Larung Gar’s teachers in November 2021.

As a further indication of the effort to curb Tibetan Buddhism, ICT published the translation of a document available to it, which was issued on May 23, 2019 by the Buddhist Association of the Weibin District of Baoji, Shaanxi Province. It states that, without prior permission from the provincial authorities, Chinese temples in Weibin are prohibited from inviting Tibetan Buddhist religious figures to carry out religious activities or exhibiting symbols of Tibetan Buddhism, such as Tara statues, prayer wheels and prayer flags with Tibetan texts, thangkas or vajras (savetibet.org Jan. 20, 2022).

For Larung Gar, see also *RCTC* 2016, No. 4, pp. 3-4; 2017, No. 4, pp. 8-9; 2020, No. 2, pp. 8-9. *kwt*

Islam

January 7, 2022:

Radio Free Asia: Uyghur woman sentenced to 14 years in prison for teaching Islam to children and hiding copies of the Quran

The US broadcaster *Radio Free Asia* (RFA) cites two sources wishing to remain anonymous, as well as local authorities. According to the report, Hasiyet Ehmet, a 57 year old Uyghur woman living in Manas County of Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang, was arrested by police during the night of May 2017, interrogated and detained for 15 days. In September of the same year, she was formally arrested and then convicted. According to RFA, a Manas County court official confirmed that Hasiyet Ehmet had been sentenced to 14 years in prison “because of teaching kids the Quran and hiding two copies of Quran when authorities were confiscating them, and later getting caught.” According to RFA, her husband was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2009 on separatist charges.

In 2017, RFA had reported that from January 2017, authorities in Xinjiang had ordered residents to hand over all editions of the Quran published before 2012 and confiscated them because they contained “extremist content.” According to the State Council’s Xinjiang White Paper of 2015, in 2013, “the new Uygur edition of the Quran was published and 230,000 copies were sold” (rfa.org May 25, 2017; Jan. 10, 2022; White Paper “Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang,” September 24, 2015). *kwt*

Judaism

November 13, 2021:

Concert in Shanghai in memory of the Jewish refugees of the Second World War

The concert, which commemorated the lives of Jewish refugees in Shanghai during World War II, took place at the Shanghai Concert Hall and included songs, piano recitals and performances from the novel *Song of Survivors* by Chinese-Canadian writer Bei La. The book is based on the true love story of a young Jewish couple who fled the Holocaust and ended up in Shanghai. Their son Mike Medavoy is an award-winning American film producer. Bei La has been researching and writing about the Jewish community in China and Shanghai for years. *Song of Survivors* was translated from Chinese into English by Jewish sinologist and translator Howard Goldblatt and published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press in 2020. A film adaptation is to be released in cinemas in China and the USA next spring (*Sixth Tone* Nov. 16, 2021). *kf*

Protestant Churches

December 7, 2021:

Study Day on the National Conference on Religious Work

On December 7, 2021, the leaders of the two Protestant umbrella organizations gathered in China to study Xi Jinping’s speech at the National Conference on Religious Work, held in Beijing from December 3 to 4, 2021 (cf. *RCTC* 2022, No. 1, pp. 4-5). Pastor Xu Xiaohong, chairman of the two national

Protestant associations, Pastor Wu Wei, president of the two Protestant associations, Pastor Shan Weixiang, vice president and general director, Pastor Shen Xuebin, vice president of the China Christian Council, and Gu Mengfei, general secretary, attended the meeting in Shanghai. They welcomed General Secretary Xi Jinping's landmark speech as important and far-sighted, and declared themselves to be in line with the guiding ideology and new strategies of religious work, as well as policies to intensify Sinicization. Xu Xiaohong said the nine imperatives of the speech must become obligatory for every church and church leadership in the coming weeks and months. This means that Marxist religious theory must be internalized and put into practice; political slogans and terms should find their way into the sermons; national feeling and identification with the communist leadership must be strengthened (ccctspm.org Dec. 8, 2021).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Beginning of January 2022:

Seven years in prison for online bookseller Chen Yu

At the beginning of January, the sentence of seven years in prison and a fine of 200,000 RMB against the operator of the online bookstore "Wheat Bookstore" (小麦书房), Chen Yu, was handed down in the second instance. His arrest in September 2019 was followed a year later by the now confirmed verdict. His online trade, based in Taizhou, Zhejiang Province, was accused of distributing illegal Christian publications from Taiwan and the United States, as well as sending several thousand copies of the book "The Gospel Revolt" (福音的政变) by Pastor Wang Yi, of the Early Rainbow Covenant Church in Chengdu. On December 26, 2019, Wang Yi was sentenced to nine years in prison for "inciting the overthrow of state power" (cf. *RCTC* 2020, No. 2, p. 9). The remaining stock of 12,684 books was confiscated and destroyed. Customers of the "Wheat Bookstore" identified by the police should expect to be questioned. They have been instructed to return any ordered goods (bitterwinter.org Jan. 11, 2022; <https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2022/01/7.html?msclkid=5c2131e5b40b11eca8e19b9990a58aba>).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Between January 27 and March 27, 2022:

Participants in Christian conference in Malaysia released upon completion of prison sentences in Shanxi – two sentences are still pending

The parishioners of the Reformed Church of Zion (询城归正教会) in Fenyang, Shanxi Province, were sentenced to six, seven and eight months in prison in early January 2022 for "illegally crossing the border." Following their arrests on July 28, 2021, they had served prison sentences ending on January 27, February 27 and March 27 respectively. The background to their arrests was their participation in an international Christian conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, under the motto "Building the heavenly body of Christ on earth" (建立属天又地的基督身体), January 28–31, 2020. This conference was organized by Chinese evangelist Tang Chongrong 唐崇荣 who lives abroad. Because of his criticism of the CCP and its restrictive religious policies, Pastor Tang's sermons have been blocked on the Chinese Internet. In November of 2021, community leader An Yankui and Mr. Zhang Chenghao were also arrested on the same charges (cf. *RCTC* 2022, No. 1, p. 9). They are also accused of a close relationship with the Early Rainbow Covenant Church in Chengdu, which is critical of the government. A verdict in the case of the two is still pending (*UCAN* Jan. 14, 2022; <https://ipkmedia.com/132408/?msclkid=3fa7a6aeb41d11ecbf4dd0ff3f65d6f3>).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

February 20, 2022:

Arrest of Christian activist in Beijing's Zhongnanhai government district

On February 20, for a few moments, Zhou Jinxia held up a sign at the entrance to Beijing's Zhongnanhai government district, calling on President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan to embrace the Christian faith, citing God's love for the world. Pictures of it were briefly shared on social networks. Since 2009, Ms. Zhou has repeatedly attracted public attention with her demonstrative petitions. First, with written submissions, she demanded compensation for her destroyed residential property in the city of Dalian. Since her conversion to Christianity, she has hoped for the realization of divine justice through the conversion of political rulers to the faith. Since 2014, for example, she has been taking to the streets with evangelization messages in politically central places, first in front of the city government and the party committee of Dalian, and since Christmas of the same year, she has repeatedly done the same in the state capital. Ms. Zhou was arrested in Beijing in 2015, 2016 and 2018 and detained for 10 days each. In October 2020, she settled in the capital. In June 2021, an expulsion from Beijing and the confiscation of her property followed. One day after her arrest for "rioting" on February 20, Ms. Zhou was transferred to the Dalian authorities. In the course of her work as a petitioner, Zhou Jinxia has already been arrested over 50 times (*LiCAS* March 7, 2022; https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2022/03/blog-post_80.html?msclkid=97ed4d26b40211ecac5e1b7cc9179bec).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

December 5, 2021:

Diocese of Guangzhou ends the "Year of Saint Joseph" proclaimed by Pope Francis – Joseph action in the Diocese of Ningbo

At the end of the year dedicated to Saint Joseph, Bishop Gan Junqiu of Guangzhou held a solemn Mass in Guangzhou Cathedral. In his homily, the bishop called on young couples in particular to follow the example of Saint Joseph and to take responsibility for their families. The bishop encouraged all the faithful to be, like Saint Joseph, diligent, courageous, creative, loving, tolerant, honest and kind and, together with all nationalities, to build a modern socialist country.

That same day, a testimony meeting of the participants of a Joseph action was held in the Xushan parish in the diocese of Ningbo in Zhejiang. Seventeen representatives of the 148 families who took part gave testimony. They reported how the action "Saint Joseph comes into my family," combined with the seven virtues of the saint listed by Pope Francis [in the letter *Patris corde*], had revived their personal life, but also the life of the family and the community (*xinde.org* Dec. 6, 17, 2021).

Pope Francis had declared the period from December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021 the Year of Saint Joseph. Previous special years proclaimed by the popes have been celebrated intensively by the Chinese Church, such as the Holy Year 2000, the Pauline Year 2008/2009, the Year of Faith 2012/2013 and the Holy Year of Mercy 2015/2016. The Year of Saint Joseph, on the other hand, has left fewer traces, at least in the Catholic media. Joseph and Mary are the most popular patron saints of Chinese Catholics. *kwt*

January 9, 2022:

For the first time, Hangzhou Cathedral admits women to service at the altar

At Sunday Mass, twelve women of the cathedral congregation were entrusted with this liturgical ministry. In the future, they will carry it out together with the male altar servers of the parish. This should also give the lay women the opportunity to exercise their baptismal priesthood even more comprehensively, the report says. According to the report, this is also in response to Pope Francis' *Motu proprio Spiritus Domini* of January 11, 2021 [in which the Pope, by modifying Canon Law, officially decreed that women can also be entrusted with the liturgical ministries of lector and acolyte – as has long been customary in parish practice in many places]. The congregation is pleased that for the first time in the 400-year history of Hangzhou Cathedral, women have served as altar servers, the report said (xinde.org Jan. 12., 2022).

The incident shows that unity with the Pope continues to be very important to the Chinese Church. Female altar servers have been common in the Chinese Church for some time, but not yet everywhere. At the same time, in many places it is no longer possible for children to serve as altar servers because of the authorities' prohibition that prevents minors from entering churches. *kwt*

February 21, 2022:

Underground Bishop Zhang Weizhu of Xinxiang still in detention

Nine months after his arrest on May 21, 2021, Bishop Zhang Weizhu of the Apostolic Prefecture of Xinxiang in Henan Province remains in custody, a Catholic has told *AsiaNews*. During a police raid on an old factory building in Shaheqiao, Hebei Province, used by the prefecture as a seminary, 10 priests and 10 seminarians were arrested together with the bishop. All but the bishop were released a short time later. The seminarians, however, were not allowed to continue their seminary studies. During the Chinese New Year, two people were allowed to visit the bishop briefly. Bishop Zhang Weizhu, consecrated in 1991, was appointed Bishop of the Apostolic Prefecture of Xinxiang by Rome in 1998, but was never recognized as such by the government, which instead appointed an administrator for Xinxiang in 2010 (*AsiaNews* Feb. 21, 2022; see also *RCTC* 2021, No. 3, p. 13). *kf*

March 7, 2022:

Bishop Shen Bin speaks at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)

CPPCC member Shen Bin, Bishop of Haimen, Vice Chairman of the Chinese Bishops' Conference and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, gave a speech during the CPPCC's annual meeting as a representative of the religious circles on the topic "Raise the level of self-management, promote the healthy transmission of our country's religions." According to a report by the state news agency *Xinhua*, he called for the Sinicization and adaptation of religions to the socialist society with Chinese characteristics. The question of the correct "religious style" has to do with the healthy transmission of religious heritage and even with the survival of religions, Bishop Shen said. For healthy transmission, he called for "courage for self-purification." Outdated rules and bad habits that do not meet the requirements of the era and public interest should be abolished, he said. The understanding that the state is above religion, that state law is above religious law and that religious adherents are first and foremost citizens must be firmly anchored, said Bishop Shen, among others (*Beijing ribao* and *Xinhua* as found at chinacatholic.cn March 8, 2022). *kwt*

March 20, 2022:

Diocese of Shanghai cancels Marian pilgrimages to Sheshan again for May 2022

According to a letter from the Shanghai diocese, in view of the pandemic situation and in accordance with the city's Corona prevention requirements and regulations, the diocese has once again decided to suspend the May pilgrimages to Sheshan this year. During this time, the basilica at the top of Sheshan, the church halfway up the mountain and the corresponding areas [such as the Stations of the Cross] will be closed, no collective religious activities are carried out and no pilgrims will be received, the letter says. It is not signed by name – Bishop Ma Daqin of Shanghai has been under a kind of house arrest on the Sheshan since 2012 and is not allowed to exercise his office (www.xinde.org/show/52517). The pilgrimage to Sheshan has not taken place since the outbreak of the Corona pandemic. Sheshan is one of the most important Catholic pilgrimage sites in China. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI declared May 24, the Feast Day of Mary Help of Christians, who is venerated on the Sheshan, a “World Day of Prayer for the Chinese Church.” *kwt*

Sino-Vatican Relations

February 2, 2022:

Pope Francis greets participants and organizers of the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games

At the end of the General Audience, Pope Francis said, referring to the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Beijing: “I warmly greet all participants. I wish the organizers every success and to the athletes that they may give their very best. Sports, with its universal language, can build bridges of friendship and solidarity between individuals and peoples of all cultures and religions.” The pope further said: “With a special thought, I embrace the whole Paralympic world: we will win the most important medal together, if the example of athletes with disabilities will help everyone to overcome prejudices and fears and to make our communities more welcoming and inclusive. This is the real gold medal. I also follow with attention and emotion the personal stories of refugee athletes. May their witness help to encourage civil societies to open up with ever greater confidence to all, leaving no one behind. I wish the great Olympic and Paralympic family a unique experience of human fraternity and peace: blessed are the peacemakers! (Mt 5:9)” (www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20220202-udienza-generale.html). *kwt*

March 22, 2022:

Pope sends telegram after deadly crash of China Eastern Airlines plane

The day following the crash of a China Eastern Airlines Boeing 737 on March 21 en route from Kunming to Guangzhou, in which all 132 people on board died, Pope Francis offered his condolences to President Xi Jinping in a telegram. The text was signed, as is customary in such cases, by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State. The Pope expressed his “heartfelt condolences” to Xi and his fellow citizens. The Pope said he is saddened by the news and is praying for those who have lost their lives and for the consolation of those who grieve them. He asked for the “Divine blessing” for everyone, the telegram reads. *Xinde* published the text in a Chinese translation with a screenshot of the Ital-

ian original from the Vatican website (press release of the Holy See of March 22) (*Vaticannews* March 22, 2002; xinde.org March 22, 2022; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubbl-co/2022/03/22/0199/00433.html>). *kf*

Hong Kong

December 30, 2021:

Reuters: Chinese bishops exchanged views on Sinicization with Hong Kong clerics in October

According to a December 30, 2021 *Reuters* report, on October 31, 2021, in a one-day, non-public, formal online meeting, Chinese bishops and priests briefed senior clerics in Hong Kong on Xi Jinping's vision of a religion with "Chinese characteristics." The Hong Kong Central Government Liaison Office, as well as officials from the State Administration of Religious Affairs, are said to have monitored the Zoom meeting, which was attended by three leading bishops and about 15 religious figures from mainland China's official Catholic Church, as well as about 15 senior Hong Kong clerics. Names of mainland participants are not mentioned in the report. The speakers from the mainland had described how Xi's policy of "Sinicization" coincided with the Vatican's long-standing policy of inculturation – "without mentioning Xi," the report said. But Xi was the elephant in the room, according to one of the Hong Kong clerics interviewed. "We all know the word sinicization carries a political agenda behind it, and they didn't have to spell that out," another cleric said. The Hong Kong side was led by Reverend Peter Choy, who was considered close to Beijing by local Catholics and who used to be Beijing's preferred choice for the episcopate, *Reuters* says. Bishop Chow (who at that time was still awaiting his episcopal ordination on December 4) attended the event shortly after the opening, "which may give him room to manoeuvre in future," according to three of the clergy. Cardinal John Tong opened and closed the event, they said. The October meeting ended with a loose understanding by both sides that more meetings should be held in the future, but no dates were set, the clergy said. "The pressure is building on us in Hong Kong ... some of us see (sinicization) as code for Xi-nification," one of them said. "We are going to have to be clever to resist" (*Reuters* Dec. 30, 2021). *kf*

January 13, 2022:

Cardinal Joseph Zen reaches the age of 90

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium SDB, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, celebrated his 90th birthday on January 13. Cardinal Zen is known worldwide for his commitment to religious freedom and human rights in his native China. The Cardinal celebrated his birthday with a small group, which included his successors in the episcopate Cardinal John Tong and Bishop Stephen Chow.

Cardinal Zen was born on January 13, 1932 in the Diocese of Shanghai. He entered the Salesian Order and was ordained a priest in Turin in 1961. During his priestly ministry, he was a lecturer at the seminary in Hong Kong and in various seminaries in mainland China. He also served as provincial superior of the Salesian China Province. On September 13, 1996, a few months before Hong Kong was returned to China on July 1, 1997, he was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Hong Kong by Pope John Paul II, succeeding Cardinal John Baptist Wu in the episcopate in 2002. He was appointed cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006 and headed the diocese until 2009. Cardinal Zen has repeatedly made his convictions known in public, for example by taking to the streets personally alongside the students during the protests of the Umbrella Movement (*AsiaNews* Jan. 13, 2022). *kf*

January 31, 2022:

Chinese New Year: Leaders of the Six Religions send greetings for the Year of the Tiger

In its annual New Year's message, the Colloquium of Six Religious Leaders in Hong Kong, as in previous years, conveyed greetings and prayers to Hong Kong residents. The signatories are Most Ven. Kuan Yun, President of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association; Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan SJ, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong; Dr. Tong Yun-Kai, President of the Confucian Academy; Ibrahim Sat Che-Sang, Chairperson of the Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association; Rev. Wong Ka-Fai, Chairman of the Hong Kong Christian Council, and Leung Tak-Wah, Chairperson of the Hong Kong Taoist Association. Their message focuses on the Corona pandemic, which has hit Hong Kong hard, as well as the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's "return to the Motherland." At the end of the letter, the religious leaders summarize their wishes as follows: "That the pandemic will vanish, that everyone will live in peace and comfort and that every family stays safe and healthy. We also bless the World with peace and happiness, that our Motherland continues to thrive and prosper and that Hong Kong be blessed with long-lasting stability and peace" (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Jan. 31, 2022). kf

February 5, 2022:

Former representative of the Holy See in Hong Kong appointed Nuncio of the Republic of the Congo and in Gabon

In a press release dated February 5, the Holy See announced that Msgr. Javier Herrera Corona – the former head of the Holy See Study Mission in Hong Kong – has been appointed Apostolic Nuncio in the Republic of the Congo and in Gabon. Msgr. Herrera Corona was born on May 15, 1968 in Autlán, Mexico, and was ordained a priest on September 21, 1993. He holds a degree in canon law. According to the press release, Javier Herrera Corona entered the diplomatic service of the Holy See on July 1, 2003 and served in the pontifical representation in Pakistan, Peru, Kenya, Great Britain and the Philippines. His position in Hong Kong is not mentioned in the communication. Officially Msgr. Herrera Corona belonged to the Pontifical Nunciature in the Philippines. According to the *Sunday Examiner*, he has served on the Holy See's Study Mission in Hong Kong (responsible for the Church in Mainland China) since September 2016 and has been the leader of the Study Mission since January 2, 2020. Msgr. Herrera Corona countered speculation in the media that the Vatican had withdrawn its representatives from Taiwan (see entry of January 31, 2022 in the section "Taiwan") and Hong Kong because of possible diplomatic relations with China. Msgr. Herrera Corona said, according to *UCAN*, that these are regular transfers and that the Vatican will not give up its missions in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The establishment of a diplomatic mission in China is "the last of the least objectives" of the Holy See (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Feb. 6, 2022; *UCAN* Feb. 11, 2022; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/02/05/220205b.html>). kf

February 24, 2022:

Hong Kong churches closed again due to high Covid numbers

In accordance with the government's measures to combat the Corona pandemic, Hong Kong's churches and chapels, which regularly hold public masses, will remain temporarily closed from February 24 to April 20, unless it is a wedding (attendance no more than five people) or a funeral (no limit on the

number of participants). However, those who participate in the two religious ceremonies must meet the condition for entering churches or chapels, that is, present a vaccination certificate required by the government; all persons over the age of 12 must then be vaccinated at least once. All other divine services were again moved to the Net, as has been the case several times in the last two years. The celebrations during Holy Week and Easter will also take place exclusively online, many of which will be personally presided over by Bishop Chow.

Hong Kong was hit largely unprepared by a huge wave of infections with the Omikron variant of the coronavirus in the first months of this year. As of March 18, more than 1 million cases had already been recorded among the 7.5 million inhabitants – with over 5,000 Covid deaths. The reasons include low vaccination rates among the elderly, low rates of pre-infections and an overburdened health system coupled with the cramped housing conditions in Hong Kong (see the website of the Diocese <https://catholic.org.hk/en/cn20220224/>; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/cn20220314/>; *The Guardian* March 18, 2022). *kf*

March 17, 2022:

Bishop Chow visits Rome

According to a statement from the Press Office of the Holy See, on the morning of March 17, Pope Francis received in an audience “S.E. Mons. Stephen Chow Sau-yan, Vescovo di Hong Kong (Cina)” / Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan, Bishop of Hong Kong (China). This was confirmed by the Diocese of Hong Kong on March 22 on its website: “Bishop Stephen Chow Sau Yan, S.J. of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong was invited to make an unofficial visit to Rome in early March after his episcopal ordination [December 4, 2021]. During a meeting with Pope Francis, Bishop Chow suggested the Holy Father to give his Blessing to the Church in China and in Hong Kong during this pandemic, and the Pope gladly accepted. The Pope then gave his blessings in Italian.” In two video messages, which Pope Francis spontaneously recorded, he addressed his greetings and blessings to Catholics in mainland China as well as in Hong Kong (<https://catholic.hk/4t9>; <https://catholic.hk/7424e6>; <https://catholic.org.hk/en/media-20220322/>; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2022/03/17/0181/00389.html>). *kf*

Taiwan

January 31, 2022:

Chargé d’Affaires of the Holy See in Taiwan appointed Nuncio in Rwanda

A press release from the Holy See dated January 31 stated that Msgr. Arnaldo Catalan has been appointed Apostolic Nuncio in Rwanda by Pope Francis. This marks the end of his tenure as the Chargé d’Affaires of the nunciature in Taipei, a position that he has held since 2019. According to the press release, Msgr. Catalan was born on September 18, 1966 in Manila, Philippines. “He was ordained a priest on 25 March 1994, and incardinated in the metropolitan archdiocese of Manila. He graduated in theology and canon law. He entered the diplomatic service of the Holy See on 1 July 2001, and served in the pontifical representations in Zambia, Kuwait, Mexico, Honduras, Turkey, India, Argentina, Canada, Philippines and China (Taipei). He knows Italian, English and Spanish.” Interesting is the name “China (Taipei)” and not the official name “Republic of China.” It remains to be seen in what form the nunciature will be reoccupied, also in view of the Sino-Vatican relations. The Holy See main-

tains full diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan), but the mission there has been led by a Chargé d'Affaires for decades (<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/01/31/220131b.html>; see also the entry on Hong Kong of February 5, 2022). *kf*

February 15, 2022:

Tsou priest Fr. Norbert Pu Ying-hsiung is appointed Bishop of Chiayi in Taiwan

On April 2, in the diocese of Chiayi in central Taiwan, the episcopal ordination took place of the diocesan priest Norbert Pu, who is a member of the indigenous mountain people of the Tsou. Norbert Pu was born on August 26, 1958 in Alishan, Chiayi, Taiwan. He earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1980 and a degree in theology from the Faculty of Theology Saint Robert Bellarmine of the Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei in 1985. He was ordained a priest on January 1, 1987. From 1994 to 2000 he studied at the then Philosophical-Theological Faculty of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) in Sankt Augustin, Germany, where he obtained a licentiate degree in theology. Norbert Pu is one of the few priests belonging to the Tsou people. The Tsou traditionally live in the mountainous region of Alishan near Chiayi in southern central Taiwan. Today, the ethnic group has about 6,500 members. Pu Ying-Hsiung's grandfather was a tribal chief (<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/02/15/220215a.html>; personal information). *kf*

Singapore

December 11, 2021:

Singapore's Catholic Church celebrates its 200th anniversary

In his homily during the festive Mass on December 11, Archbishop William Goh of Singapore expressed gratitude for the continued growth of the Church in the city-state, as seen in the recent census. The Singapore government is secular but encourages the cooperation of religions in the development of social, moral and spiritual values in the population, the bishop explained. "Religions here in Singapore are respectful and supportive of each other," he said. Among the faiths in the city-state, there is a "very strong interreligious harmony ... something painstakingly built over many generations," the bishop said. According to the *LiCAS* report, the first Holy Mass in Singapore was celebrated by the Frenchman Saint Laurent Imbert, MEP, who landed in Singapore on December 11, 1821. The report puts the number of Catholics in Singapore at around 300,000 (*LiCAS* December 14, 2021).

Results of the above mentioned Singapore Census in 2020 will be discussed in the "Statistics on Religions and Churches in the People's Republic of China and Singapore" in this *RCTC* issue. The 2020 census identified 242,681 Catholics in Singapore's resident population over the age of 15. The higher number in the *LiCAS* report is probably due, among other things, to the inclusion of Catholic children under the age of 15. *kwt*

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