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## A DIPLOMATIC EXPERIMENT OR A POLICY OF TWO CHINAS?

### THE DYNAMISM OF THE 2018–2023 VATICAN–BEIJING AGREEMENT

#### ABSTRACT

The complex contexts of the Chinese world generated various approaches of the Vatican diplomacy, which represented interests of Catholics of two Chinese states: the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC). Backing the Taipei government, the Vatican was drawn into a direct rivalry between PRC and Taiwan for the diplomatic recognition of the latter in the world. Until 2018, the official relations of the PRC authority with Chinese Catholics were limited exclusively to the Beijing-dependent Catholic Patriotic Association. After many fruitless attempts to establish relations with PRC by papal diplomacy, "The 2018 Vatican–China Agreement" (2018 *Nián de fàn zhōng xiéyì*) became the first official bridge in the process of establishing diplomatic relations between these ideologically conflicted entities, in the context of maintaining diplomatic relations between the Holy See and ROC. However, after this agreement was concluded, the condition of the Catholic Church in PRC remains difficult and controversial. The divergences of interests and expectations of both parties to the agreement are considerable. However, what looks like a 'diplomatic experiment' of Vatican diplomacy actually becomes the specific asymmetric policy of two Chinas. Depending on the priorities and other circumstances – the focus of Vatican diplomacy shifts – not always consistently, either to Beijing or lately less frequently towards Taiwan.

**Keywords:** Vatican diplomacy, policy of two Chinas, Vatican–Beijing agreement of 2018, ROC–Vatican relations, PRC–Vatican relations, Catholic Patriotic Association, Catholic Church in China

The Holy See is the only European country that does not have full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). For long decades, negotiations between Beijing and the Vatican have been fruitless because of disagreements over religious freedom, the ordination of bishops, and Beijing's persecution of the unofficial, so-called 'underground' segment of the Catholic Church. To this day, the Holy See does not officially recognize the PRC government in Beijing, but acknowledges Taiwan as the representative and successor of the Republic of China (ROC).

## 1. TOWARDS AN AGREEMENT: THE DYNAMISM OF THE TRIANGULAR RELATIONS OF THE VATICAN, PRC AND ROC BEFORE 2018

The Vatican policy of two Chinas was born as a result of the expulsion of the nuncio Antonio Riberi (1897–1967) from mainland China by the communist government in 1951. Initially, the policy of the Holy See took the form of confrontation with Beijing by recognizing Taiwan as the successor of the Republic of China in the hope of returning nationalist rule in mainland China. However, the Vatican never gave up its ties with Catholics in the PRC, whose number exceeds the number of Catholics in Taiwan several dozen times. Although the deterioration of the Holy See's relations with the People's Republic of China in the 1950s or during the Cultural Revolution (*wénhuà dà géming*) was an extremely difficult problem to solve, the papacy always – usually using ineffective means – sought a solution to this difficult problem for the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> Not renouncing contacts with Taipei, the Vatican tried to establish relations with Beijing, as a rule pursuing insufficient actions under the two-China policy.<sup>2</sup> The policy of the

<sup>1</sup> Pius PP. XII, "Cupimus imprimis. Epistula Apostolica ad venerabiles fratres ac dilectos filios archiepiscopos, episcopos, aliosque locorum ordinarios ceterumque clerum ac populum Sina," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis Commentarium Officiale*, vol. 44 (1952), pp. 153-158; Pius PP. XII, "Ad Sinarum Gentem. Epistula Encyclica entem ad venerabiles fratres ac dilectos filios archiepiscopos, episcopos, aliosque locorum ordinarios ceterumque clerum ac populum sinarum," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis Commentarium Officiale*, vol. 47 (1955), pp. 5-15; Pius PP. XII, "Ad Apostolorum Principis. Epistula Encyclica entem ad venerabiles fratres ac dilectos filios archiepiscopos, episcopos, aliosque locorum ordinarios ceterumque clerum ac populum sinarum," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis Commentarium Officiale*, vol. 50 (1958), pp. 601-614; Paul VI, "Message to Chinese Leaders," in E. Wurth, B.A. Maheu (eds), *Papal Documents Related to China 1937-2005*, Hong Kong 1991, p. 141; Paulus PP. VI, "Son Excellence le Président Mao Tse Tung, Secrétaire Comité Central du Parti Communiste de la République Populaire de Chine – Pékin," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis Commentarium Officiale*, vol. 58 (1966), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Ioannes PP. XXIII, "Sacra Consistoria. Consistorium Secretum. Feria secunda, die x v mensis Decembris anno MCMLVIII, in consueta aula Palatii Apostolici Vaticani fuit Consistorium Secretum, cuius acta ex ordine referuntur," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis Commentarium Officiale*, vol. 50 (1958), p. 481; Ioannes PP. XXIII, "Quotiescumque Nobis. Epistula Apostolica Ad E.mum P. D. Thomam tit. S. Mariae in Via S. R. E. Presbyterum Cardinalem Tienchensin, Archiepiscopum Pechinensem ac Apostolicum Administratorem archidioecesis Taipehensis, atque ad Exc.mos Episcopos ceterosque eiusdem Provinciae Ecclesiasticae Ordinarios, ob tres dioeceses in insula Formosa noviter erectas," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis Commentarium Officiale*, vol. 53 (1961), pp. 465-469; "Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Chinese Catholics Communities in Asia," *Vatican*, 18 February 1981, at [https://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/addresses/1981/02/19810218\\_chinese\\_catholics\\_communities\\_in\\_asia\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/addresses/1981/02/19810218_chinese_catholics_communities_in_asia_en.html).

Secretary of State Cardinal Augustino Casaroli (1914–1998) to withdraw the Apostolic Nunciature from Taiwan to Beijing collided brutally with the unilateral appointment of Catholic bishops in 2000 and 2006 by the government in Beijing.<sup>3</sup>

Relations with both the Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) became very important to the Holy See. The significance of establishing relations with China for the Vatican is evidenced, among others, by Paul VI's Letter to the Chinese Leader Mao Zedong<sup>4</sup> and John Paul II's Letter to the Chinese Leader Deng Xiaoping.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, for the Vatican, Taiwan became a bridging endeavor for the Chinese Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup> However, due to the complicated international situation, the Republic of China (Taiwan) lost its membership in the United Nations in 1971, being replaced by the People's Republic of China. Thus, the center of gravity in Chinese diplomacy was shifted from Taipei to Beijing.

This failure of the ROC policy made the recognition of Taiwan by the Vatican an extremely important issue for Taipei because of the so-called 'Vatican factor' (*Fàndigāng yīnsù*), which became one of Taiwan's foreign policy priorities.<sup>7</sup> The statement that *the*

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vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf\_jp-ii\_spe\_19810218\_manila-comunita-cattoliche-cinesi.html, 10 October 2022; "Guidelines on China from the Vatican: Issued by Josef Cardinal Tomko," *The Cardinal Kung Foundation*, 3 September 1988, at <http://www.cardinalkungfoundation.org/ar/ARchina8point.php>, 12 November 2022; "Message of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Catholic Church in China," *Vatican*, 8 December 1999, at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/pont\\_messages/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19991210\\_china.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/pont_messages/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19991210_china.html), 11 November 2022; John Paul II, "True Christian and Authentic Chinese," in E. Würth, B.A. Maheu (eds), *Papal Documents Related to China 1937-2005*, Hong Kong 1981, pp. 182-186; John Paul II, "To Our Venerable Brother Dominic Tang Yee Ming," in E. Würth, B.A. Maheu (eds), *Papal Documents Related to China 1937-2005*, Hong Kong 1991, pp. 330-331; John Paul II, "Cardinal Ignatius Kung Pin-Mei," in E. Würth, B.A. Maheu (eds), *Papal Documents Related to China 1937-2005*, Hong Kong 1991, pp. 334-335; John Paul II, "Faithful Can Be Truly Catholic and Chinese," in E. Würth, B.A. Maheu (eds), *Papal Documents Related to China 1937-2005*, Hong Kong 1994, pp. 273-274; "Message of the Holy Father..."; "Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China," *Vatican*, 27 May 2007, at [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_china.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china.html), 10 October 2022.

<sup>3</sup> "Episcopal Ordination in Kunming 'Destroys Mutual Trust between Holy See and Beijing,'" *PIME Asia News*, 2 February 2006, at <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Episcopal-ordination-in-Kunming-destroys-mutual-trust-between-Holy-See-and-Beijing-6046.html>, 12 October 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Paulus PP. VI, "Son Excellence le Président Mao Tse Tung..."

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to Chinese Leader Deng Xiaoping," in E. Würth, B.A. Maheu (eds), *Papal Documents Related to China 1937-2005*, Hong Kong 1983, pp. 202-203.

<sup>6</sup> B. Leung, "The Catholic Bridging Effort with China," *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 28 (2000), pp. 185-195; B. Leung, W.-b. Kuo, "Taiwan's Role in the Chinese Catholic Church: The Bridging Endeavor," in C.Y.-y. Chu (ed.), *Catholicism in China, 1900-Present*, New York 2014, pp. 169-187.

<sup>7</sup> "北京要打教廷牌？台灣大選與兩岸關係的「梵蒂岡因素」意識形態、兩岸關係、外交局面，諸多因素都會影響中梵之間的未來互動 [Beijing Wants to Play the Holy See Card? Taiwan's Election and the "Vatican Factor" in Cross-Strait Relations: Ideology, Cross-Strait Relations, Diplomatic Situation, and Many Other Factors Will Affect the Future Interaction between China and the Vatican]," *Initium Media*, 1 January 2020, at <https://theinitium.com/article/20200101-taiwan-election-the-holy-see/>, 10 October 2022.

*Holy See is Taiwan's last remaining diplomatic mission in Europe* (Jiàotíng shì táiwān zài ōuzhōu de wéiyī bāngjiāo gōu) has been repeated for years in Taiwanese official statements and press.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the Vatican was not only a European but also a unique Western state which recognized the Taipei government as the successor of the Republic of China among 14 countries in 2022.<sup>9</sup> Taipei was anxious to see the decrease in the number of allies. In 2009, Taiwan was recognized by 23 countries, and 2016 by 22 countries.<sup>10</sup> In just five years, Taipei lost 8 allies. In the context of the loss of international recognition and the historic agreement of the Holy See with Beijing,<sup>11</sup> the Taiwanese press was alerting with dozens of headlines, such as *Beijing has made no secret of its desire to poach Taiwan's most important ally* (Běijīng háo bù yǎnshì de xiāng wā zǒu táiwān zuì zhòngyào de méngyǒu). For Taiwan, whose diplomatic space in the world became increasingly narrow in recent years, an opening of the Vatican to the People's Republic of China brought new challenges.<sup>12</sup>

The complex political and social contexts of the Chinese world generated various approaches of the Vatican diplomacy, which represented Catholic interests of two Chinese states with different political and economic systems. The diplomacy of the Holy See found itself in an exceptional situation for many reasons. Firstly, the Vatican backing Taipei government was closely related to the rivalry between China and Taiwan for diplomatic recognition and supremacy in the world. Secondly, the long-term impact of the Cold War made the current stalemate between the two Chinas and the Vatican side extremely difficult to resolve.<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, the positions of the Vatican and PRC were deeply marked by an ideological tension between religious idealism and the dialectical materialism of Marxist-Leninism and Maoist thought.<sup>14</sup> Fourthly, the relatively large number of Catholics (about 12 million) and the divisions within the Catholic Church

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Sh. Wang, “台灣在歐唯一邦交國梵蒂岡 只是件國王的新衣 [The Vatican, Taiwan's Only Ally in Europe Is Just the King's New Clothes],” 上報 [Up Media], 22 October 2016, at [https://www.upmedia.mg/news\\_info.php?Type=2&SerialNo=6152](https://www.upmedia.mg/news_info.php?Type=2&SerialNo=6152), 22 September 2022.

<sup>9</sup> “Diplomatic Allies,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan)*, at <https://en.mofa.gov.tw/AlliesIndex.aspx?n=1294&sms=1007>, 22 September 2022.

<sup>10</sup> E. Berg, R. Toomla, “The Sustainability of De Facto States: Forms of Normalisation in the Quest for De Facto Statehood,” *The International Spectator*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2009), p. 31; BBC News 中文, 聖多美普林西比: 台灣曾經的第22個邦交國 [Sao Tome and Principe: Taiwan's 22nd Diplomatic Allies]. 主頁, 2016, at <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese-news-38388110>, 22 October 2022.

<sup>11</sup> “Communiqué Concerning the Signing of a Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops,” *Holy See Press Office*, 22 September 2018, at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/22/180922d.html>, 22 October 2022.

<sup>12</sup> F.D. Wang, “北京毫不掩飾地想挖走台灣最重要的盟友 [Beijing Has Made No Secret Of Its Desire to Poach Taiwan's Most Important Ally],” *Yaboo!*, 23 September 2018, at <https://tw.stock.yahoo.com/news/北京毫不掩飾地想挖走台灣最重要的盟友-100500619.html>, 22 September 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Sh.-S. Kung, “The Cold War and the China–Taiwan Impasse,” in S.O. Abidde (ed.), *China and Taiwan in Africa: The Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition and Hegemony*, Cham 2022, pp. 55–71; L.T. Chu, “Vatican Diplomacy in China and Vietnam,” in P. Seib (ed.), *Religion and Public Diplomacy*, New York 2013, pp. 57–73.

<sup>14</sup> B. Leung, *Sino-Vatican Relations: Problems in Conflicting Authority 1976–1986*, Cambridge 1992.

in Mainland China posed a great challenge to the Apostolic See, which recognized Taiwan with only a small community of 300,000 Catholics.<sup>15</sup> Finally, with over 1.3 billion Catholics in the world, the sphere of influence of the Holy See is obviously much greater than its small physical size and economic possibilities. Taking into account the atypical international status of the Holy See, globalizing Catholicism and its supranationalism in the sphere of authority (despite the internal problems of the Catholic Church), the Vatican still remains a very important partner, which has relations with 180 countries out of 195 countries of the world.<sup>16</sup>

After many failed attempts to establish relations with Beijing, the 2018 Vatican–PRC agreement became the first official bridge in the process of establishing diplomatic relations between these ideologically conflicted entities. The provisional agreement between the Vatican and Beijing in 2018, abbreviated in Chinese-language literature as “The 2018 Vatican–China Agreement” (2018 Nián de fàn zhōng xiéyì), did not lead to a break in the relationship between the Holy See and Taipei according to the official “Communiqué concerning the signing of a Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China”,<sup>17</sup> which seems to be an attempt to continue the Vatican’s dualistic approach to the Chinese world. Basically, until 2018, the official relations of mainland Chinese Catholics with the communist authorities of the PRC were limited exclusively to Beijing’s relations with the Catholic Patriotic Association (*Zhōngguó Tiānzhǔjiào Àiguó Hui*). After the signing of the interim agreement between the Vatican and Beijing, relations between these countries entered a new phase. From the perspective of several decades, it will be possible to judge whether these ongoing negotiations and the successive extension of the provisional agreement will lead to something new or just another crisis. Nevertheless, this is a key moment for the Vatican–PRC–ROC relationship;<sup>18</sup> it seems

<sup>15</sup> J. Kindopp, “An Introduction,” in J. Kindopp, C.L. Hamrin (eds) *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church–State Tensions*, Washington, D.C. 2004, p. 1; “中國有多少天主教? [Statistics about Catholics in China],” *University of Dayton*, 2022, at <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/zh/statistics-about-catholics-in-china.php>, 22 September 2022; Taiwan Government Information Office, *Taiwan Yearbook*, 2006, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20070708213510/http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/22Religion.htm>, 10 October 2022..

<sup>16</sup> M. Barbato, “A State, a Diplomat, and a Transnational Church: The Multi-layered Actorness of the Holy See,” *Perspectives*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2013), pp. 27–48; A. Chong, J. Troy, “A Universal Sacred Mission and the Universal Secular Organization: The Holy See and the United Nations,” *Politics, Religion, and Ideology*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2011), pp. 335–354; M.N. Bathon, “The Atypical International Status of the Holy See,” *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2001), pp. 597–632; J. Casanova, “Globalizing Catholicism and Return to a ‘Universal’ Church,” in S.H. Rudolph, J. Piscatori (eds), *Transnational Religion & Fading States*, Boulder 1997, pp. 121–143.

<sup>17</sup> “Communiqué Concerning the Signing of a Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops,” *Holy See Press Office*, 22 September 2018, at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/22/180922d.html>, 10 October 2022; “圣座与中华人民共和国就主教任命问题签署临时性协议 [The Holy See and the People’s Republic of China Sign a Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops],” *Vatican News*, 22 September 2018, at <https://www.vaticannews.va/zh/vatican-city/news/2018-09/zh-china-holy-sec-agreement-appointment-bishops.html>, 22 November 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), *2020–2021 Taiwan at a Glance*, Taipei 2020, at [https://multilingual.mofa.gov.tw/web/web\\_UTF-8/MOFA/glance2020-2021/2020-2021%20](https://multilingual.mofa.gov.tw/web/web_UTF-8/MOFA/glance2020-2021/2020-2021%20)

that the Holy See has more or less effectively been implementing the two-Chinas policy, although the Vatican does not verbalize it openly.

## 2. A DIPLOMATIC BREAKTHROUGH IN 2018? NEW DISCUSSIONS AND CONTROVERSIES

Before the first agreement in 2018, only the clergy of the segment of 'the underground Catholic church' would pledge loyalty to the Pope. Under the provisional agreement on September 22, 2018, the second segment of Chinese Catholicism, i.e. the State Church could recognize the pontiff as the supreme leader of the Church. The secret text of the agreement was signed in Beijing by Antoine Camilleri (born 1965), Undersecretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, and Wang Chao (*Wáng chāo*, 王超, born 1960), Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

The Vatican–Beijing deal is partial because it concerns only the appointment of bishops, and is provisional as it involves a reassessment. From a diplomatic point of view, it is seen as a step towards a concordat with China. Despite its limited scope, the Vatican hailed the document as 'historic.' The Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin (born 1955), described the China deal as *sui generis*<sup>19</sup> since it was stipulated between two international entities that still did not officially recognize each other. Moreover, the agreement with the Vatican, officially recognizing Taiwan, suspended the application of the principle of the one-China policy in Beijing's pragmatism. In fact, mutual mistrust made this agreement temporary.

This document remains secret. Unofficial information from the Vatican suggests that the unpublished text broke the impasse because it agreed to greater control by the Chinese government than was the case with the Vietnamese concordat.<sup>20</sup>

The Vatican only published a communiqué informing about some official consensus with Beijing. The agreement was presented as *the fruit of a gradual and reciprocal rapprochement*. The document concerns *the nomination of bishops, a question of great*

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Taiwan%20at%20a%20Glance%20 (English).pdf, 22 September 2022; "MOFA Response to the Extension of the Holy See–PRC Provisional Agreement on Bishop Appointments," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan)*, 22 October 2020, at [https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content.aspx?n=1eaddcf4c6ec5678&s=1fdaad5fe1dd89b1](https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1eaddcf4c6ec5678&s=1fdaad5fe1dd89b1), 22 October 2022; "Diplomatic..."; Ph. Pullella, "Holy Father's Interview with Reuters," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 July 2022, at <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/2022-07/ing-027/holy-father-s-interview-with-reuters.html>, 14 September 2022; "Exclusive: Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine, U.S. Bishops and More," *America: The Jesuit Review*, 28 November 2022, at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/11/28/pope-francis-interview-america-244225>, 12 December 2022; "Cardinal Vatican-China Deal Must Be Implemented, Parolin Says," *The Catholic World Report*, 1 March 2019, at <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/03/01/vatican-china-deal-must-be-implemented-parolin-says/>, 22 October 2022; "VATICAN – Cardinal Parolin: An Agreement on Aspects Essential to Daily Life of Church in China," *Agenzia Fides*, 22 October 2022, at <http://www.fides.org/en/news/72966>, 10 December 2022.

<sup>19</sup> "Cardinal Vatican-China..."

<sup>20</sup> "Worldwide Extension of Concordats," *Concordat Watch*, 11 July 2018, at <https://www.concordat-watch.eu/worldwide-extension-of-concordats-11072018--t48936#>, 10 October 2022.

*importance for the life of the Church but at the same time the agreement creates the conditions for greater collaboration at the bilateral level.*<sup>21</sup>

While the agreement is about the appointment of bishops, it actually has the long-term goal of the Vatican to improve relations with Beijing and stabilize Chinese Catholic communities. The Vatican wants to open an office in Beijing despite its ties with Taiwan but the PRC authorities reportedly refused to allow any official Vatican representative to reside in the capital of the PRC.<sup>22</sup> It was mentioned that the text of the agreement of September 22, 2018 had not been published. Nevertheless, on the basis of the pragmatics used, some Chinese authors<sup>23</sup> reconstruct its scope as follows:

1. The People's Republic of China (according to Taiwan, the 'continental China') recognized the Pope for the first time as the leader of the Catholic Church in China in its broadest sense (*yī, dàlù shǒu dǔ chénggrèn jiào zōng wèi 'zhōngguó' jìngnèi tiānzhǔjiào huì de lǐngdǎo rén*).
2. PRC has a 'substantial right to appoint' bishops within its borders (*dàlù yǒngyǒu jìngnèi zhǔjiào rén xuǎn de 'shízhì tíngqǔ quán'*).
3. The pope has the 'formal authority to approve' candidates for bishops (*jiào zōng yǒngyǒu zhǔjiào rén xuǎn de 'xíngshì hé kě quán'*).

This agreement is, according to the Vatican, an important step towards the unification of the Catholic Church in the PRC. The Holy See hopes that this is a way of gradually assimilating the underground church with the Catholic Patriotic Association. However, due to the wounds inflicted on the Church by the communists and the lack of religious freedom in the PRC, this agreement was condemned by many Chinese Catholics. Cardinal Joseph Zen, former Archbishop of Hong Kong, who had led the opposition to promulgate this agreement, accused Vatican negotiators of selling themselves to the communist government. He stated bluntly that *they're [sending] the flock into the mouths of the wolves. It's an incredible betrayal.*<sup>24</sup>

The great opposition of some Chinese Catholics in the PRC, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and the resulting confusion in connection with this agreement, prompted the Holy See to issue a special statement entitled "Pastoral guidelines of the Holy See concerning the civil registration of clergy in China, 28.06.2019". The document emphasizes *the complex reality of China and the fact that there does not appear to be a uniform praxis with regard to the application of the regulations for religious affairs*. The Holy See also states that the Vatican *does not intend to force anyone's conscience*. Moreover, the

<sup>21</sup> "Communiqué Concerning the Signing..."

<sup>22</sup> M. Strong, "Vatican Wants to Open Office in Beijing Despite Ties with Taiwan: Jesuit Magazine," *Taiwan News*, 16 September 2020, at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4010104>, 2 October 2022.

<sup>23</sup> M.C.-S. Chang, "The Internal Development of the Taiwan Catholic Church: 1950s-1960s," in F. So, B. Leung, E. Mylod (eds), *The Catholic Church in Taiwan: Problems and Prospects*, Singapore 2018, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> H. Sherwood, "Vatican Signs Historic Deal with China – But Critics Denounce Sellout," *The Guardian*, 22 September 2018, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/22/vatican-pope-francis-agreement-with-china-nominating-bishops>, 22 October 2022.

Vatican believes that *the experience of clandestinity is not a normal feature of the Church's life*. Finally, the Holy See continues to demand that *the civil registration of the clergy take place in a manner that guarantees respect for the conscience*.<sup>25</sup>

There have been many critical views on the practical consequences of this agreement. Some authors referred to as *the most systematic and brutal attempt to control Chinese religious communities since the Cultural Revolution*.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, based on the analyses of the communist-controlled institutions exploring ethnic and religious aspects of social life in China (e.g. the Northwest Minzu University), the assessment of total state control over religious communities is accepted.<sup>27</sup> However, it is difficult to speak of freedom of research and freedom of expression in these cases. It is known that the Vatican and PRC are fundamentally different in terms of ideology. In the latest version of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, ruling party members still commit to study Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought (*xuéxí mǎkèsī lièníng zhǔyì, máozédōng sīxiǎng*), which favors atheism.<sup>28</sup> The novelty of the latest version is the clear recommendation to study *Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era* (*Xìjīnpíng xīn shídài zhōngguó tèsè shèhuì zhǔyì sīxiǎng*)<sup>29</sup>.

In fact, the Vatican – PRC agreement was signed at a very unfavorable moment, i.e. shortly after the promulgation of the Revision of the Regulation on Religious Affairs (*Zōngjiào shìwù tiáolì*, 宗教事务条例). This document was prepared in 2017 by the State Council for Legislative Affairs (*Zhōnghuá rénmin gònghéguó guówùyuàn*) and entered into force on February 1, 2018.<sup>30</sup> The document is supposed to have a negative attitude towards religion. It describes the potential negative influence of religion, i.e. it recognizes all religions equally (Islam, Christianity, etc.) as potentially dangerous communities whose adherents may commit themselves to *advocating, supporting and funding religious extremism* (*Xuānyáng, zhīchí, zīzhù zōngjiào jíduān zhǔyì*) or *using religion to endanger national security and public security* (*Huòzhě lìyòng zōngjiào jìn xíng wéihài guójiā ānquán, gōnggòng ānquán*), *undermine ethnic unity* (*Pòhuài mínzú*

<sup>25</sup> “Pastoral Guidelines of the Holy See Concerning the Civil Registration of Clergy in China,” *Holy See Press Office*, 28 June 2019, at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2019/06/28/190628c.html>, 12 October 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Th.F. Farr, *The Vatican Accord with China: Riding the Dragon*, 28 November 2018, at [https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/Thomas%20Farr\\_Testimony%20on%20Vatican%20Accord%20with%20China\\_Cong\\_Exec%20Cttee%20on%20China\\_11.28.18.pdf](https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/Thomas%20Farr_Testimony%20on%20Vatican%20Accord%20with%20China_Cong_Exec%20Cttee%20on%20China_11.28.18.pdf), 10 October 2022, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> See Y. Feng, “行动中的《宗教事务条例》——中国宗教事务管理调查及其法律评价 [Regulations on Religious Affairs in Practice: China's Religious Administration Procedure and Legal Assessment],” *Journal of Northwest University for Nationalities*, vol. 2 (2015), pp. 1-38.

<sup>28</sup> “中国共产党章程 (全文) 共产党员网 [Constitution of the Communist Party of China],” 22 October 2022, at <https://www.12371.cn/special/zggcdzc/zggcdzcqw/>, 26 October 2022, 1.3.1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> State Council for Legislative Affairs, 中華人民共和國國務院令 第686號 [Regulation of the State Council of the People's Republic of China No. 686], 2018, at [http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-09/07/content\\_5223282.htm](http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-09/07/content_5223282.htm), 5 October 2022.



*tuánjié*), or *disrupt social management order* (*Fángbài shèhuì guǎnlǐ zhìxù*).<sup>31</sup> This document directly concerns religious activity (*Dì liù zhāng zōngjiào huódòng*). All activities of religious communities must be under the control of the Department of Religious Affairs (*Zōngjiào huódòng chǎngsuǒ yīngdāng jiēshòu zōngjiào shìwù bùmén de jiāndū jiǎnchá*<sup>32</sup>). This department supervises and controls the legality of the activities of individual religious communities, the activities of the place of worship, the implementation of place management systems, changes to registered facilities and religious activities related to foreign contacts. Places of religious activity are under the supervision and control of the department of religion<sup>33</sup> and *the content of Internet religious information services shall comply with relevant laws* (*Dì sìhíā tiáo huìliánwǎng zōngjiào xīnxī fúwù de nèiróng yīngdāng fúhé yǒuguān fǎlǜ*<sup>34</sup>) *after the approval of the religious affairs department of the government* (*Fǔ zōngjiào shìwù bùmén shěnhé tóngyì hòu*<sup>35</sup>). The regulation introduced an absolute obligation to register the clergy and also requires self-financing of religious communities. Nevertheless, failure to register results in very serious penalties. According to the regulation, if a large-scale religious activity is held without authorization, the religious affairs department and relevant departments shall order to stop the activity, and may concurrently impose a fine of not less than 100,000 yuan but not more than 300,000 yuan; if there are illegal gains and illegal properties, the illegal gains and illegal properties will be confiscated.<sup>36</sup> The regulation also introduces stringent regulations not only regarding the construction of places of worship – which require permits at various levels – but also the erection of crosses, statues, their dimensions, colors and placement.<sup>37</sup> Further restriction of religious freedom through stricter supervision and management is governed by the Order of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, No. 13, published in 2019.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, before signing the provisional agreement with Vatican, Beijing had introduced complete control over the Church and religious communities in the PRC. In fact, Beijing is consistently implementing a project to create a national Catholic Church that dates back to the 1980s. The Chinese Church is to be an exclusively national church that belongs solely to the state and, similarly to Taoism or Confucianism, it can directly be controlled by the authorities.

Moreover, the signing of the Vatican–Chinese agreement was supposed to result from a kind of blackmail. Namely, some authors cite an unofficial conversation

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., art. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., art. 27.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., art. 48.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., art. 47.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., art. 64.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., art. 30.

<sup>38</sup> State Administration for Religious Affairs, 国家宗教事务局令 第13号 [Order of the State Administration of Religious Affairs No. 13], 2019, 4: art. 25–36, at [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2019-12/30/content\\_5538935.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2019-12/30/content_5538935.htm), 22 October 2022.

between Pope Francis and the Bishop of Xiapu of the underground church, Vincent Guo Xijin (*Guōxījīn*, 郭锡进, born 1958). The Pope was to express that if the agreement was not signed, the Chinese government would threaten to ordain 45 illegitimate bishops, 'independent' from the Vatican, and this would create a *de facto* schism. Ultimately, even before the signing of the Beijing agreement with the Holy See, the policy of 'zero tolerance for underground religious communities' was being implemented vigorously. There are many examples of the removal of Catholic clergy from office, the destruction or closure of churches, the liquidation of crosses and chapels.<sup>39</sup>

From the first decades of the 21st century onwards, there was also a return to an extreme process of Sinicization and the politicization of religion using all historical analogies. For example, the Jesuit Wang Liangzuo (*Wángliángzuō*; 1920–1997) is portrayed as a pioneer in the anti-imperialist and patriotic movements of the Chinese Catholic Church, and so are the activities of the Jesuit.<sup>40</sup> Obviously, this 'politicization' of religion is extremely one-sided. It is basically about promoting 'communist values,' and in this case, it is commendable. By contrast, promoting liberalization is already perceived as a negative political commitment. For example, at the CCP's 19th National Party Congress on October 20, 2016, Zhang Yijiong stated that the overriding goal of CCP is to fully *sinicize religion* in China and make socialist values play a leading role in individual religious communities.<sup>41</sup>

For Xi Jinping, the politicization of religion means a complete assimilation of religion to Chinese culture, elimination of external influences and full independence from all foreign influences and, finally, absolute submission to the Communist Party of China and its leadership.<sup>42</sup> It is no wonder that the Taiwanese press aptly sarcasm assessed the idea of the PRC leader saying that *when religions in China have to 'speak politics,' it reflects that Xi's thinking has surpassed Jesus* (*Dāng zōngjiào zài zhōngguó dū dé 'jiǎng zhèngzhì' fānyīng xí sīxiàng yǐ língjià yēsū*). This is evidenced by the guidelines of the National Joint Conference of Religious Organizations of July 2019, which recommend that the national anthem and the national flag should be sung at religious gatherings, the Chinese constitution and law should be analyzed, basic socialist values proclaimed (*Xuānjiǎng shèhuì zhūyì héxīn jiàzhíguān*) and the 'perfect Chinese traditional culture' promoted (*Xuānchuán 'zhōnghuà yōuxiù chuántǒng wénhuà*). In fact, it

<sup>39</sup> B. Cervellera, "Religious Policy in China before and after the Sino-Vatican Agreement," *PIME Asia News*, 9 December 2019, at <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Religious-policy-in-China-before-and-after-the-Sino-Vatican-agreement-47980.html>, 22 October 2022.

<sup>40</sup> See for example: Department of Ethnic & Religious Affairs of Chengdu, 王良佐与推动天主教中国化的《自立革新宣言》[Wang Liangzuo and the "Declaration of Self-reliance and Innovation" that promoted the Sinicization of Catholicism], 2011, at [http://mzzj.chengdu.gov.cn/cdsmzj/c139287/2011-04/13/content\\_6c48fb95aae74ba0b9e608cb57d63b4b.shtml](http://mzzj.chengdu.gov.cn/cdsmzj/c139287/2011-04/13/content_6c48fb95aae74ba0b9e608cb57d63b4b.shtml), 22 October 2022..

<sup>41</sup> Ch. Gao, "Chinese Communist Party Vows to 'Sinicize Religions' in China: Remarks at the Congress Continue Last Year's Campaign to Force Religions to Adapt to 'Socialist Society,'" *The Diplomat*, 24 October 2017, at <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/chinese-communist-party-vows-to-sinicize-religions-in-china/>, 12 October 2022.

<sup>42</sup> B. Cervellera, "Religious Policy in China..."

is about implementing and building 'true' patriotic Catholicism, which paradoxically is strengthened by the Vatican agreement with Beijing.<sup>43</sup>

So, long before signing the provisional agreement, the religious policy orchestrated by Xi Jinping had a very detrimental effect on the growth and tolerance of religious beliefs in China, especially among recognized 'foreign religions' (*Yángjiào*), such as Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism.<sup>44</sup>

It is difficult to determine to what extent the Vatican is aware that the 'sinicization of religion' of the People's Republic of China is not merely a movement of 'self-transformation' of the religious community (better acculturation of Chinese Catholics). This 'sinicization' is rather a reality controlled by the government, which has its own political goals. An agreement concluded in such an unfavorable context must only show the determination and asymmetric position of the Holy See. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about partner negotiations in this situation. The Vatican was the weaker party and was forced to make far-reaching compromises, constantly rubbing against unacceptable spaces of the deal. This is probably why it is not only a 'provisional' but also a 'secret' agreement.

In the Chinese world, elites are discussing the fundamental issue of 'whether practicing socialist core – as communists want – is really the core value of religious belief' (*Jiàn xíng shèhuì zhǔyì héxīn jiàzhíguān shì zōngjiào xìnyǎng de héxīn jiàzhí ma?*). In fact, the 'rule of law,' emphasized in the PRC's religious legislation today, is essentially an increasingly effective means of controlling religious institutions. In truth, the PRC's propaganda equates protection of the religious freedom of citizens with strict control and persecution of all those who dare to have a different opinion.<sup>45</sup>

Critics of the Vatican–PRC agreement emphasize that the deal did not change Beijing's anti-religious course, even if it is embellished with rhetoric about religious freedom. The most blatant restrictions for Catholics are the prohibition of religious education and encouraging the practice of minors. This restriction is contrary to the Chinese constitution, which guarantees religious freedom without determining the age limit. Secondly, Vatican diplomacy, international Catholic orders, associations and organizations have a problem with isolating Chinese Catholics who are forbidden to contact

<sup>43</sup> Y. Wang, „當宗教在中國都得「講政治」 反映習思想已凌駕耶穌、活佛之上 [When Religions in China Have to 'Speak Politics,' It Reflects That Xi's Thinking Has Surpassed Jesus],” *Radio Taiwan International*, 23 June 2021, at <https://www.rti.org.tw/news/view/id/2103469>, 5 October 2022.

<sup>44</sup> M. Sainsbury, “Xi Takes Charge in China, Religion in His Sights,” *UCA News*, 19 October 2017, at <https://www.ucanews.com/news/xi-takes-charge-in-china-religion-in-his-sights/80578>, 12 October 2022.

<sup>45</sup> F. Xing, “踐行社會主義核心價值觀是宗教信仰的核心價值嗎? [Is Practicing Socialist Core Values the Core Value of Religious Belief?],” *Inmediabk*, 9 September 2017, at <https://www.inmediabk.net/%E6%94%BF%E7%B6%93/%E8%B8%90%E8%A1%8C%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E4%B8%BB%E7%BE%A9%E6%A0%B8%E5%BF%83%E5%83%B9%E5%80%BC%E8%A7%80%E6%98%AF%E5%AE%97%E6%95%99%E4%BF%A1%E4%B-B%B0%E7%9A%84%E6%A0%B8%E5%BF%83%E5%83%B9%E5%80%B-C%E5%97%8E%EF%BC%9F>.

foreigners. Interestingly, this pragmatics violates the UN Conventions on Religious Freedom and Civil Rights, which Beijing signed on October 5, 1998, but never ratified. Finally, there is a whole host of burdensome restrictions that disrupt religious activity. These include the prohibition of singing without permission and of public presenting evangelical content, the prohibition of publishing religious content on the Internet, and a strict prohibition of talking about religious topics during hospital visits.<sup>46</sup> Any sum of money greater than the equivalent of 100,000 yuan transferred to the Catholic Church must be approved by the relevant state supervisory authorities.<sup>47</sup>

The government also encourages the population to spy on and report 'illegal religious activities.' This presents itself as a civic duty that contributes to ending illegal espionage activities. This kind of espionage is rewarded with benefits, cash or other prizes.<sup>48</sup>

The objections of many Catholics were supported by human rights organizations. For example, in 2019 the Congressional-Executive Commission on China stated that the human rights situation had deteriorated and the rule of law continued to deteriorate. Significantly, a US government report says human rights abuses in China have escalated in the context of the 2018 Vatican–China deal.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the signing of a provisional agreement between the Vatican and Beijing, representatives of the Catholic Church in Taiwan strongly supported the Holy See's two-Chinas policy. This was expressed clearly during the ad limina visit of Taiwanese bishops to the Vatican in May 2018; Archbishop of Taipei Hung Shan-ch'uan (Hóng Shānchūān, 洪山川, born 1943) said: *China and Taiwan are two churches, two nations, two different ways of life.*<sup>50</sup> The hierarch further stated that the Holy See would not see Taiwan as part of China: *they can establish diplomatic ties, but the rights and interests of Taiwan should not be sacrificed, [...] I tried to tell the pope not to hurt Taiwan but to protect us.*<sup>51</sup>

The Vatican's initiatives to improve relations with the PRC have always been closely watched by the Taipei government. Taiwanese diplomacy elegantly and very accurately brought out what the Achilles heel of the relationship between the Vatican and Beijing is, namely the lack of religious freedom in the PRC. For example, the response to the extension of the Holy See–PRC provisional agreement on bishop appointments issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Republic of China – Taiwan in states at a high diplomatic level that *the Holy See has publicly stated on numerous occasions that the provisional agreement with the PRC only deals with pastoral issues and does not touch*

<sup>46</sup> B. Cervellera, "Religious Policy in China...", p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> The State Administration for Religious Affairs..., art. 26 §6.

<sup>48</sup> "Religious Reporting Hotline Launches in China: Church Members in Xingtai Worry about a Return of Cultural Revolution-Style Repression," *UCA News*, 18 July 2019, at <https://www.ucanews.com/news/religious-reporting-hotline-launches-in-china/85657>, 22 October 2022; CBN News Staff, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> "Freedom of Religion," in *Congressional-Executive Commission on China: Annual Report 2019*, Washington 2019, p. 1, at [https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/2019AR\\_FREEDOMOFRELIGION.pdf](https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/2019AR_FREEDOMOFRELIGION.pdf), 22 October 2022.

<sup>50</sup> "Archbishop Asks Pope to Protect Taiwan," *UCA News*, 22 May 2018, at <https://www.ucanews.com/news/archbishop-asks-pope-to-protect-taiwan/82368>, 21 October 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

on diplomatic or political matters.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the ‘MOFA response’ states: *as a country that fully respects religious freedom, Taiwan hopes that it can help improve the worsening situation of religious freedom in the PRC. Unfortunately, as the PRC government has stepped up measures to persecute local Catholic communities.*<sup>53</sup> Many Taiwanese Catholics believe that the Holy See should rethink whether the Chinese Catholic world and the Vatican itself really need the so-called ‘one China’ policy.

It is interesting that Beijing’s actions, which limit the rights of believers and subordinate religions to the state, do not seem to alienate the Holy See. From the perspective of the last years, however, it is clear that Pope Francis consistently believes in the secret agreement with the PRC. A few months after the Vatican’s makeshift deal with Beijing had gone into effect (in January 7, 2019), the Pope gave a speech to members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See stressing that the Vatican would remain committed to its long-standing obligation to ‘a lengthy and thoughtful institutional dialogue’ with the PRC. Pope Francis stated: *It is to be hoped that further contacts regarding the application of the signed Provisional Agreement will help resolve questions that remain open and make needed room for an effective enjoyment of religious freedom.*<sup>54</sup> The Pope expressed the same view in 2022, affirming that although the provisional agreement with Beijing was not perfect, it was consistent with the long-term vision and strategy of the Catholic Church.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. COMPLICATIONS OR PROGRESS? THE VATICAN-BEIJING AGREEMENT EXTENDED IN 2020 AND 2022

Finally, the Interim Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China of September 22, 2018 was extended on September 22, 2020, and again on October 22, 2022, for another two years. Many analysts are surprised that despite the above-mentioned restrictions and persecutions, the internment of priests and bishops, or the closing of Catholic churches, which were reported by various sources,<sup>56</sup> the Holy See is engaged in deepening its ties with China. Thus, recent history shows how many hot spots and unclear points still remain in the Vatican–China deal. For example, the second renewal of the provisional Vatican–China agreement was preceded by a visit of a Vatican delegation led by the former President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications Monsignor Claudio Maria Celli (born 1941) in August/September 2022. The delegation visited Tianjin, a metropolis in northern China where there has

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), *2020-2021 Taiwan...*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “Pope Francis’ Address to Diplomatic Corps,” *Vatican News*, 7 January 2019, at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-01/pope-francis-address-to-diplomatic-corps.html>.

<sup>55</sup> “Pope Francis’ Address...”; Ph. Pullella, “Holy Father’s Interview...”.

<sup>56</sup> Ph. Lawler, “The Bitter Fruit of the Secret Vatican-Beijing Accord,” *Catholic Culture*, 22 April 2020, at <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/bitter-fruit-secret-vatican-beijing-accord/>, 10 October 2022.

been no official bishop since 2005. There, on behalf of Pope Francis, Celli secretly handled the renewal of the 2022–2024 agreement. The symbolic date of the anniversary of signing the first agreement (October 22) coincided with the end of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China in the Great Hall of the People. The key moment in the negotiations in Tientsin was the visit of the Vatican delegation to the 92-year-old Monsignor Melchior Shi Hongzhen (*Shihóngzhēn*; 石鸿禎; born 1929), bishop of the ‘underground Catholic church,’ ordained as a coadjutor with the approval of the Holy See by his predecessor, Monsignor Stefano Li Side (*Lisidé*; 李思德; 1926–2019). Tianjin has not had an ‘official church’ bishop since 2005, and Shi Hongzhen has never been recognized by Beijing authorities for refusing to join the Patriotic Association. The Vatican delegation, led by Archbishop Celli, visited the interned hierarch under house arrest. Beyond the symbolic significance of the meeting, the Grand Diocese of Tientsin continues to be an important test case for the Agreement on the appointment of bishops. On the one hand, the meeting appears as a sign of admiration for the perseverance of the older bishop, and on the other hand, there is the issue of a new bishop who will have the legitimacy of both the communist state and the Holy See.<sup>57</sup>

The complex situation hardly allowed either uncritical optimism or exaggerated criticism. Nevertheless, the statement of Pope Francis that *the Agreement is good, and I hope it can be renewed in October*<sup>58</sup> met with particular criticism.<sup>59</sup> Pope Francis, recalling the diplomatic efforts of Cardinal Agostino Casaroli (1914–1998) declared: *Many people said so many things against John XXIII, against Paul VI, against Casaroli. But diplomacy is like that. Faced with a closed situation, one must seek the possible, not the ideal, path. Diplomacy is the art of the possible and making what is possible become a reality.*<sup>60</sup> The Pope’s flexible position on Catholicism in China can also be better understood in the context of his reluctance to polarize views. In an interview with America Media on November 22, 2022, he even stated that *polarization is not Catholic and the more polarization there is, the more one loses the Catholic spirit and falls into a sectarian spirit.*<sup>61</sup>

The Pope explained that *diplomacy with China is being carried out by Parolin, who is great in this area.*<sup>62</sup> The words of the Pope show that the provisional agreement between the Vatican and China is largely the work of the Vatican’s Secretary of State,

<sup>57</sup> “Exclusive: The Secret Negotiations That Led to the Renewal of the Vatican-China Agreement,” *Nova News*, 20 October 2022, at <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/the-secret-negotiations-that-led-to-the-renewal-of-the-vatican-china-agreement-are-exclusive/>, 22 December 2022; G. Bernardelli, “Renewing the Sino-Vatican Agreement and the Case of Tianjin,” *PIME Asian News*, 9 November 2022, at <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Renewing-the-Sino-Vatican-Agreement-and-the-case-of-Tianjin-56630.html>, 20 December 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Ph. Pullella, “Holy Father’s Interview...”

<sup>59</sup> Introvigne, 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Ph. Pullella, “Holy Father’s Interview...”; “Holy See: Regret for Installation Ceremony of Bishop in China,” *Vatican News*, 26 November 2022, at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-11/vatican-surprise-and-regret-installation-chinese-bishop.html>, 27 November 2022.

<sup>61</sup> “Exclusive: Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine...”

<sup>62</sup> Ph. Pullella, “Holy Father’s Interview...”

Cardinal Pietro Parolin (born 1955). Therefore, in order to find the justification for extending the Vatican's agreement with Beijing, it is worth referring to Parolin's words.

According to the Secretary of State, *the heart of the Agreement certainly has to do also with the consolidation of good institutional and cultural dialogue, but it mainly concerns aspects that are essential to the daily life of the Church in China*.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the cardinal emphasizes that the agreement of September 22, 2018 is a *provisional* document. He recognizes that the Vatican is in the experimentation phase, and very controversial and sensitive areas regarding the functioning of the Catholic Church *require adequate time for implementation*. The diplomat notes that it is necessary to gain the right perspective to verify the effectiveness of the results and identify possible ranges that can be modified.<sup>64</sup> Regarding the relatively 'spontaneous' extension of the agreement, Cardinal Parolin explained that the Covid-19 pandemic *has created understandable obstacles to meetings between the delegations, which are closely monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Agreement itself*. For this reason, the validity of the contract was extended almost automatically for the first time in 2020 and then in 2022. According to the Vatican cardinal, Pope Francis *with determination and patient foresight has decided to continue along this path not under the illusion of finding perfection in human rules, but in the concrete hope of being able to assure Chinese Catholic communities, even in such a complex context, of the guidance of pastors who are worthy and suitable for the task entrusted to them*.<sup>65</sup>

Concerning the controversial procedures for the appointment of new bishops in China, some evolution can be observed in the cooperation with the government in Beijing. It is worth remembering, however, that in the past, the appointment of bishops often led to tensions between the political authorities of different countries and the Catholic Church. This brought about the development of many compromises and models.<sup>66</sup> In addition, the actions of the Vatican resulted from the fact that the end of a certain model of Catholicism and the emergence of 'something new' was currently being observed throughout the Church.<sup>67</sup> Cardinal Parolin, aware of this historical pluralism, states that the Holy See has accepted many compromises on this delicate and important matter. The point is not to neglect the aspect of 'quality' for the Church, taking into account the specific conditions of a given country, that is, care for the appointment of good and worthy shepherds. According to the Vatican Secretary of State, *the Agreement was carefully considered, taking into account the particular characteristics of Chinese history and society and the consequent development of the Church in China*.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> "VATICAN – Cardinal Parolin...".

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> R.F. Costigan, "State Appointment of Bishops," *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1966), pp. 82-96.

<sup>67</sup> G. Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*, New York 2013, pp. 111-256.

<sup>68</sup> "VATICAN – Cardinal Parolin...".

Vatican diplomacy found itself in a very awkward situation as, in the opinion of most Western governments and NGOs, human rights in the PRC were routinely violated.<sup>69</sup> This raises the question of what benefits the Holy See can derive from a country with such a low human rights record. Cardinal Parolin, taking into account the years 2018–2022 of validity of the Provisional Agreement, lists three areas in which, in his opinion, the Holy See has been successful. First, for the first time since the 1950s, all the bishops of the Catholic Church in China have been in full communion with the Successor of Peter, and there are essentially no more illegitimate episcopal consecrations. In all Catholic churches in China, the Pope is explicitly mentioned in the Eucharistic Prayer, which was unthinkable many years ago. The second effect is several episcopal consecrations, which took place in the spirit of the Agreement and according to the established procedure, which leaves the last and decisive word to the Pope. Thirdly, during this period the first six bishops from the ‘underground Catholic church’ have been consecrated. As maintained by the cardinal, to the outside observer, these may seem like a small progress, but from within the fractured Catholic community, they are an important step *toward the progressive healing of the wounds inflicted on ecclesial communion by the events of the past*. For the Vatican diplomat, it is most important that *millions of Chinese faithful that they will be able to live out their faith in full Catholic communion, without thereby being suspected of not being loyal citizens to their country*.<sup>70</sup>

Despite his optimism about the provisional agreement, the Secretary of State is aware of the serious limitations of the agreement. During these four years of the *ad experimentum* agreement, only six new episcopal consecrations took place. Only a few cases are pending, many dioceses are vacant or have very elderly bishops. There are also dioceses where there are problems with reconciling the ‘underground’ and ‘official’ church. Perhaps the most conspicuous problem is dioceses in which ‘despite all efforts and good will, no fruitful dialogue exists with local authorities.’

Optimism about the Vatican China deal was expressed also by Gianni Valente (born 1963). According to the author, the agreement with the Chinese authorities, although it is not comparable to the standards of agreements reached by the Holy See with other governments (e.g. the last one with Kazakhstan), nevertheless *the Agreement on the appointment of Chinese bishops touches the deepest fibers of the apostolic nature of the Church and the very dynamism of her sacramental life*. It is significant to depart from emphasizing the juridical relationship of the Catholic Church in China with Rome and failing to emphasize the heroism of the resistance of the underground church. Trying to solve the dilemmas and paradoxes of the dualism of the official and underground Catholic church, Gianni Valente to some extent expresses the diplomacy paradigms of Pope Francis. Namely, the preservation of the Catholic faith was *not out of heroism or stubborn voluntarism, but out of a gift of grace*. This leads to a very practical conclusion for understanding Vatican diplomacy. The communion of the Vatican with the Catholic Church in China *was not to be restored with instruments of juridical supremacy, simply because such*

<sup>69</sup> S. Sceats, S. Breslin, *China and the International Human Rights System*, London 2012, pp. 3–56.

<sup>70</sup> “VATICAN – Cardinal Parolin...”



*communion was already in place, based on the sharing of the same Catholic faith.* In other words, the Vatican considers the preservation of the Catholic faith to be *the only treasure to be relied upon, even in the most enigmatic and controversial events of the present time.* Valente also notes the evolution of the attitudes of the PRC leaders towards Catholicism. During the Maoist period, the bishops and the Vatican were generally defined as the ‘watchdogs’ of Western imperialism in official Chinese propaganda. In the last decade, even in the phase of the growing international tension, no one in China thinks of insulting the Pope and the Catholic Church as agents of hostile forces.<sup>71</sup>

Regardless of the loftiest motivations and interpretations of the Vatican–Beijing agreement on the part of the Holy See itself, the reality remains difficult, and the divergence of interests of the parties is considerable. It seems that Beijing has consistently been implementing what was programmed in 1982. It is about the famous document 19,<sup>72</sup> under which the Chinese Communist Party ended attempts to directly eliminate religion from social life because such actions were counterproductive. The currently ruling Chinese communists claim the right to take complete control over religions. This approach results in absolute registration of the Catholic clergy, and the very fact of recognizing the Pope as the ‘head of the Catholic Church’ or better ‘the Vatican’ does not in the least change the vision of Beijing, which can be paraphrased as *The Chinese Church belongs to the state and no foreign state can in the slightest influence her.* On the other hand, the silence or restraint typical of the Pope’s policy on persecution confirms Beijing in its vision: the Chinese Church is a national Church belonging exclusively to the state.<sup>73</sup>

Complications soon emerged in this regard. Only a month after the optimistic statement of the Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin (October 22, 2022) and two months after the enthusiastic assessments of Gianni Valente (September 22, 2022), the government of the People’s Republic of China revealed with all its might its absolute supremacy over the Catholic Church by appointing a bishop without consulting the Vatican. The Holy See reacted immediately with *surprise and regret.*<sup>74</sup>

It seems that the agreement with the Vatican is primarily a success of the Chinese communists. Beijing’s failure to fully respect the arrangements with the Vatican does not result only from the implementation of the famous document 19 “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country’s Socialist Period”.<sup>75</sup> It seems that many problems arise from understatements and shortcomings in the Vatican–China agreement, which basically concerns only the appointment of bishops. It does not address other important issues that the Vatican wanted to raise, such as the

<sup>71</sup> G. Valente, “VATICAN – The China-Holy See Agreement and the Treasure of Faith,” *Agenzia Fides*, 22 September 2022, at [http://www.fides.org/en/news/72835-VATICAN\\_The\\_China\\_Holy\\_See\\_Agreement\\_and\\_the\\_treasure\\_of\\_faith](http://www.fides.org/en/news/72835-VATICAN_The_China_Holy_See_Agreement_and_the_treasure_of_faith), 10 October 2022.

<sup>72</sup> D.E. MacInnis, “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country’s Socialist Period,” in D.E. MacInnis (ed.), *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice*, New York 1989, pp. 8–26.

<sup>73</sup> B. Cervellera, “Religious Policy in China...”.

<sup>74</sup> “Holy See: Regret for Installation Ceremony...”.

<sup>75</sup> D.E. MacInnis, “The Basic Viewpoint...”.

fate of underground bishops and priests, the status of the Chinese Bishops' Conference, which Rome does not recognize (since only bishops recognized by the state belong to it), or the problem of the administrative organization of the Catholic Church in the PRC (number of dioceses). These issues have successfully been blocked by Beijing at the negotiation level.<sup>76</sup> The Chinese side refused to discuss them before signing the agreement. Therefore, the whole range of problems is to be dealt with on an ongoing basis, which is becoming an increasingly difficult task in the context of the tightening religious policy in the PRC.

For this reason, even before the first extension of the provisional agreement, some analysts of the life of the Catholic Church in the PRC alerted the public opinion with numerous critical observations about the very limited scope of the mentioned agreement. Of the 394 Catholic dioceses in China in 2020, as many as 74 of them did not have a bishop, and among the then-incumbent bishops, many were well over the retirement age (six were 90 and four were 85). The problem of appointment of Catholic bishops has not fully been resolved. Moreover, considering that the imprisonment of the Catholic clergy since the entry into force of the Vatican–China agreement, the closed churches and the ban on the religious education of Christian youth, one gets the impression that, as Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke (born 1948) aptly put it, *China enjoys a place of privilege with the Vatican despite an appalling record of anti-Catholic oppression*.<sup>77</sup>

The Chinese side refers to a rather specific, general and somewhat mysterious wording of the Constitution of the PRC, namely, *the state shall protect normal religious activities* (*Guójiā bǎohù zhèngcháng de zōngjiào huódòng*<sup>78</sup>). The problem is that the term 'normal' (*zhengchang*) is nowhere more precisely defined in Chinese legislation. To the question of 'what are normal religious activities protected by the state?' (*Nǎxiē shì guójiā bǎohù de zhèngcháng zōngjiào huódòng?*) Chinese lawyers and interpreters give equally imprecise answers. A typical example is the concise explanation published in the scientific journal *Fǎ yīn* in 1992.<sup>79</sup> The interpretation of the constitution's 'normal religious activities' clearly gives grounds for relatively broad interpretations (or even over-interpretations) of the Constitution in the pragmatics of state administration. It seems that Vatican diplomacy knows very well the foundations of the Chinese Interpretation of Religious Policy (*Zōngjiào zhèngcè jiědú*) with its main postulate of state control of the church. However, while striving to find common ground with Beijing, it does not seem to place too much emphasis on these areas for the public opinion.

<sup>76</sup> G. O'Connell, "The Vatican Is Ready to Renew Its Deal with China. Privately, officials Admit They're Walking a Tightrope," *America: The Jesuit Review*, 15 September 2020, at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/09/15/vatican-renew-china-deal-pope-francis>, 12 October 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Ph. Lawler, "The Bitter Fruit..."

<sup>78</sup> "中华人民共和国宪法 [Constitution of the People's Republic of China], 2019, chapter 2, para. 36, at [https://www.gov.cn.translate.googleusercontent.com/translate/guoqing/2018-03/22/content\\_5276318.htm?\\_x\\_tr\\_sch=http&\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=zh-CN&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=pl&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=pl&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://www.gov.cn.translate.googleusercontent.com/translate/guoqing/2018-03/22/content_5276318.htm?_x_tr_sch=http&_x_tr_sl=zh-CN&_x_tr_tl=pl&_x_tr_hl=pl&_x_tr_pto=sc), 22 October 2022.

<sup>79</sup> D. Teyan, "什么是正常的宗教活动? What Are Normal Religious Practices?," *Fayin*, vol. 11 (1992), p. 36.

Nevertheless, this area generates a constant conflict of interests and interpretations on both sides because it is related to the Marxist vision of religion.<sup>80</sup>

Naturally, the level of religious freedom in the PRC disappoints many Catholics and human rights activists around the world, which is clearly shown in the November, 16, 2022 Report of Congressional-Executive Commission on China which states: *The PRC continued to exert pressure on unregistered Catholic communities in 2021 and 2022.*<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, Taiwan's reaction to the yet another extension of the Vatican's provisional agreement with Beijing, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China expressed the belief that *this accord deals with pastoral issues, aims to advance Chinese Catholic adherents' right to a normal faith life, and does not touch on diplomatic or political matters. The Republic of China (Taiwan) attaches great importance to this solemn commitment by the Holy See.*<sup>82</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

For many decades, Vatican diplomacy has tried to continue its two Chinas policy. The situation after 2018 is unique in the recent history of the Chinese Church. The Holy See has consistently maintained bilateral relations with Taiwan and Communist China, working out an operational agreement without any formal diplomatic ties. However, the last extension of the provisional agreement with Beijing by the Vatican in 2022 was automatically met with an abuse of power by the Chinese communists against the Catholic Church, undermining mutual trust.<sup>83</sup>

It is worth stressing the asymmetry in the treatment of the Holy See by the two Chinese states. While the Vatican–Taiwan relations are dominated by fully partnership pragmatics, the position of the Vatican in relations with the People's Republic of China basically reduces the Holy See to the role of a 'requesting supplicant.' It shows the realistic and sarcastic maxim of Vatican diplomacy: *while it's not a good agreement, it's better than no agreement, and there's hope it can be improved.*<sup>84</sup> In fact, this 'hope' is the only thing left for the Vatican regarding its relationships with the PRC, while the realism of the partnership draws from the Taipei relationship.

The position of the Vatican recognizing two Chinas is not without foundation. Although the formal and legal status places Taiwan among the countries with questioned sovereignty, the Republic of China with its capital in Taipei is *de facto* an independent

<sup>80</sup> T. Ming, "宗教信仰自由刍议 [A Short Opinion on the Freedom of Religious Belief]," *Research on Socialism* (社会主义研究), vol. 1 (1990), pp. 43-44.

<sup>81</sup> "Freedom of Religion," in *Congressional-Executive Commission on China: Annual Report 2019*, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> "MOFA Response to the Extension of the Holy See–PRC Provisional Agreement on Bishop Appointments," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan)*, 22 October 2020, at [https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content.aspx?n=1eaddcf4c6ec567&s=1fdaad5fe1dd89b1](https://en.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1eaddcf4c6ec567&s=1fdaad5fe1dd89b1), 22 October 2022.

<sup>83</sup> "Holy See: Regret for Installation Ceremony..."

<sup>84</sup> G. O'Connell, "The Vatican Is Ready..."

country. The statehood of Taiwan can concisely be defined as ‘Formally no, in practice – yes.’ Taiwan is fully sovereign, independently conducting its economic, social and foreign policy. Taiwan also has its own armed forces, and its government is democratically elected. A total of 170 countries and territories accord visa-free, landing visa or e-visa privileges to Republic of China (Taiwan) passport holders. Taiwan is the only nation included in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program that does not maintain formal diplomatic relations with the United States.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, one should only partially agree with the authors who claim that the Vatican-Taiwanese relations are based on premises that ceased to be valid several decades ago, and that relations will be broken off as soon as the Vatican can establish its nunciature in Beijing.<sup>86</sup> It seems – having no insight into the content of the secret agreement itself – that the Vatican will, nevertheless, continue the two-Chinas policy, even though so far – depending on the priorities of the Pope and other circumstances – the focus will now shift to Beijing, other times more towards Taiwan. There are several considerations behind this.

First of all, Beijing’s unpredictability has regularly been revealed in relations between the Vatican and China for many decades, and even recently after the extension of the agreement (2022). Secondly, for the time being, the Vatican seems to be giving up its far-reaching and idealistic premises about the democratization of the PRC in favor of a short-term and pragmatic settlement. Nevertheless, the topic of religious freedom will have to return sooner or later, and if the Vatican disregards it, the Holy See will lose much of its worldwide authority.

From the Vatican’s perspective that takes into account the painful experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the provisional agreement with the PRC is functional because it creates a space for face-to-face dialogue, which was previously lacking. In addition, the dialogue with Beijing allows us to go beyond the issue of appointing bishops (which is not necessarily a top priority), but also other issues, such as the normalization of the life of the Catholic Church in China and attempts to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing,<sup>87</sup> despite the fact that the Holy See pursues a two-Chinas policy by recognizing the government in Taipei.<sup>88</sup>

From the Chinese perspective, the agreement with the Vatican is basically seen as facilitating the official registration of all Catholic bishops, priests and communities, including the so-called underground church. Beijing, however, does not seem to be willing to tolerate the autonomy of the Catholic Church and even the slightest external influence in accordance with “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious

<sup>85</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), *2020-2021 Taiwan...*, pp. 32-37.

<sup>86</sup> P. Moody, “Beijing’s Evolving Taiwan Policy and Taipei’s Relationship with Vatican: The Vatican and Taiwan: An Anomalous Diplomatic Relationship,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 29, no. 124 (2020), pp. 553-567.

<sup>87</sup> Ph. Pullella, “Holy Father’s Interview...”; “Exclusive: Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine...”; “VATICAN – Cardinal Parolin...”

<sup>88</sup> “Diplomacy Vatican Envoy Vows Support,” *Taipei Times*, 23 November 2005, at <https://www.taipei-times.com/News/taiwan/archives/2005/11/23/2003281360>, 5 October 2022.

Question during Our Country's Socialist Period".<sup>89</sup> Against this background, disagreements and disappointments are growing, which was expressed – despite earlier optimism – by the Holy See in November 2022.<sup>90</sup>

It is significant that while Vatican officials publicly defended the agreement with enthusiasm, privately they are more thoughtful in their assessments of the complicated situation. Cardinal Parolin, who negotiated the provisional agreement as *a prototype of a concordat with China*, emphasizes that the Vatican is guided by the traditional goals of *saving souls* and *freedom of the Church*. In other words, the Vatican wants to create new mission fields, especially since mainland China is now dominated by Protestant communities<sup>91</sup> that are not burdened with the political consequences of the Vatican's recognition of Taiwan.

It is difficult to say to what extent Beijing will allow these ambitious desires of the Holy See to be fulfilled. The legal regulations of the PRC, introduced after the signing the agreement, appear to be rather pessimistic. Just before the agreement was concluded, the Chinese government had sharpened its policy of Sinicization and ideologization of Catholicism very effectively. The PRC government understands this, allowing the Vatican to forcibly merge the underground church with the state-controlled church. One of the Canadian diplomats to China described it aptly: *the Chinese Communist Party interprets the agreement as Rome's tacit consent to sideline and ultimately eliminate the Underground Church and all significant ties to Rome*.<sup>92</sup>

Some scholars claim that the Vatican's approach towards Beijing is not a special initiative of Pope Francis. Rather, the relationship is a consequence of numerous changes in the post-conciliar diplomacy of the Holy See.<sup>93</sup> It seems that this author is only partially right. It is certainly necessary to note the evolution in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church. Nevertheless, there are some features typical of Pope Francis' diplomacy, such as his reluctance to polarize positions as an 'un-Catholic' phenomenon<sup>94</sup> and his recognition that the issue of the appointment of bishops is not necessarily a priority.<sup>95</sup> This is why the old problems of Chinese Catholicism have basically been reduced to evangelization. The extreme implementation of such a policy may, however, lead to only symbolic ties between Chinese Catholicism and Rome and to the emergence of a national church, which will be subject only *de iure* but not *de facto* to the Vatican. Then Taiwan, with its high implementation of human rights and religious freedoms, will still remain an important and credible partner of the Holy See.

<sup>89</sup> D.E. MacInnis, "The Basic Viewpoint..."

<sup>90</sup> "Holy See: Regret for Installation Ceremony..."

<sup>91</sup> Y. Sun, "Reversal of Fortune: Growth Trajectories of Catholicism and Protestantism in Modern China," *Theory and Society*, vol. 48 (2019), pp. 267-298.

<sup>92</sup> "Worldwide Extension..."

<sup>93</sup> M. Masláková, "The Role of Successive Popes in the Process of Unification of the Church in China," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, vol. 19 no. 2-3 (2019), pp. 133-148.

<sup>94</sup> "Exclusive: Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine..."

<sup>95</sup> "VATICAN – Cardinal Parolin..."

A separate question is how long the People's Republic of China will tolerate the Vatican's recognition of the government in Taipei. The Vatican itself sent ambiguous statements to Taipei. On the one hand, in 1999 Cardinal Angelo Sodano (1927–1992) stated that if China agreed, the Vatican would be ready to move its nunciature from Taipei to Beijing overnight.<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, there were assurances from the Holy See that it did not intend to break with the government in Taipei. For example, in 2005, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran (1943–1998), a former Vatican foreign minister, said that the Holy See would find an *appropriate way* to maintain ties with Taiwan. The cardinal stressed that the Vatican had never taken any initiative to break diplomatic relations with its allies.<sup>97</sup> The Vatican possibly makes so many concessions in the field of hierarchical structure in the PRC in order to gain Beijing's trust without breaking its relations with Taiwan. A future solution could be – if Beijing agreed – to establish a nunciature in Beijing and maintain the Vatican's lower-level diplomatic mission in Taipei. In consequence, the Vatican is trying to develop a specific two-Chinas policy.

In this confusing situation, the Vatican also finds itself in an uncomfortable position due to the real threat of Beijing's aggressive policy towards Taiwan. It cannot be ruled out that this provisional agreement between the Holy See and China may contribute to the silence of the former in the event that Beijing organizes a bloodless coup d'état in Taipei. Pope Francis' ambiguous diplomacy avoids the topic of the rising tensions between Taiwan and China. All this arouses suspicions as to whether the secret Vatican–China pact also applies to the silence of the Catholic Church in the event of the Chinese communists' annexation of Taiwan.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Vatican's reported desire to move China nunciature to Beijing,” *The Union of Catholic Asian News*, 14 February 1999, at [https://www.ucanews.com/story-archive/?post\\_name=/1999/02/15/vaticans-reported-desire-to-move-china-nunciature-to-beijing-stirs-reactions&post\\_id=13032](https://www.ucanews.com/story-archive/?post_name=/1999/02/15/vaticans-reported-desire-to-move-china-nunciature-to-beijing-stirs-reactions&post_id=13032), 12 October 2022.

<sup>97</sup> “Diplomacy Vatican Envoy Vows Support,” *Taipei Times*, 23 November 2005, p. 3, at <https://www.taipetitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2005/11/23/2003281360>, 5 October 2022.

<sup>98</sup> B. Joseph, “The Vatican–China Pact and Taiwan's Diplomatic Isolation: Diplomatic Circles See the Newfound Love between Rome and Beijing as a Hint of a Shift in Relations,” *UCA News*, 11 November 2021, at <https://www.ucanews.com/news/check-the-vatican-china-pact-and-taiwans-diplomatic-isolation/94918>, 12 December 2022.

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