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Asia in 2022: The impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on local crises

Edited by
Michelguglielmo Torri
Filippo Boni
Diego Maiorano

viella



CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

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The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

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CONTENTS

IX	MICHELUGUGLIELMO TORRI, <i>Foreword. Asia in 2022: The consequences of the war in Ukraine, US-China rivalry, democratic decline and popular protests</i>
1	SILVIA MENEGAZZI, <i>China 2022: The 20th party congress and popular discontent in Xi Jinping's China</i>
23	GIULIA SCIORATI, <i>China 2021-2022: A foreign policy of «re-branding»</i>
43	MARCO MILANI & ANTONIO FIORI, <i>Korean peninsula 2022: Stuck between new leadership and old practices</i>
79	COREY WALLACE & GIULIO PUGLIESE, <i>Japan 2022: Putin and Abe Shocks thwart Kishida's enjoyment of three golden years despite major defence overhaul</i>
131	AURELIO INSISA, <i>Taiwan 2022: Cross-Strait security spirals further down</i>
157	CLAUDIA ASTARITA, <i>Hong Kong 2021-2022: A new life in the shadow of China</i>
177	RIWANTO TIRTOSUDARMO & PETER B.R. CAREY, <i>Indonesia 2019-2022: The authoritarian turn as leitmotif of president Jokowi's second term</i>
215	GEOFFREY C. GUNN, <i>Timor-Leste 2021-2022: Electoral change and economic reset</i>
233	SALEENA SALEEM, <i>Malaysia 2022: 15th general elections and deepening political polarisation</i>
249	EDOARDO SIANI, <i>Thailand 2022: The «post-pandemic» era</i>
261	MATTEO FUMAGALLI, <i>Myanmar 2022: Fragmented sovereignties and the escalation of violence in multiple warscapes</i>
281	SILVIA TIERI, <i>Bangladesh 2022: Challenging post-pandemic times</i>
299	DIEGO MAIORANO, <i>India 2022: Political realignments in a BJP-dominated system</i>
327	MICHELUGUGLIELMO TORRI, <i>India 2021-2022: Playing against China on different chessboards</i>
371	DIEGO ABENANTE, <i>Sri Lanka 2022: The aragalaya protest movement and the Rajapaksas' fall from power</i>
387	MARCO CORSI, <i>Pakistan 2022: The geopolitics of Imran Khan's fall and the fledgling government of Shehbaz Sharif</i>
411	FILIPPO BONI, <i>Afghanistan 2022: Life under the Taliban</i>
425	GIORGIA PERLETTA, <i>Iran 2022: Domestic challenges to state legitimacy and isolation in the global arena</i>
447	CARLO FRAPPI, <i>Armenia 2022: Looking for a way out of the Nagorno-Karabakh impasse</i>
479	<i>Review article</i>
505	<i>Reviews</i>
573	<i>Appendix</i>

REVIEWS

SIGNALS OF DIALOGUE: EXPLORING SINO-VATICAN RELATIONS

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Chu, Cindy Yik-yi, and Paul Philip Mariani, eds. *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. xix+157 pp. ISBN: 978-981-15-1679-5.

On 22 October 2022, the Holy See announced a second two-year extension of the controversial Provisional Agreement with People's Republic of China (PRC) regarding the appointment of Bishops. The volume *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China* provides a comprehensive view of the complex relations between the Vatican and Beijing, especially in light of the absence of any official diplomatic relations between the two sides (the Holy See is one of the 13 states currently recognising the Republic of China in Taiwan instead of the PRC). The volume brings together nine scholars to provide an insightful examination of the Catholic Church in China after 1949 and its relations with the Vatican. One of the strengths of the book is its interdisciplinary approach, with contributors coming from a range of fields, including history, sociology, and theology. This approach allows for a rich and nuanced understanding of the Catholic Church in China and highlights the many ways in which it has interacted with Chinese societies in the post-Maoist era. This multifaceted approach is reflected in the opening chapter, 'The Chinese Catholic Church in Changing Times', written by the editor Cindy Yik-yi Chu, which provides an overview of the entire volume.

In detail, the volume consists of four sections. The first section is titled Policies. The chapter 'An Overview of the Catholic Church in Post-Mao China', written by Gianni Criveller, offers a detailed description of the Chinese Catholic Church since 1978, a year that saw both the launching of the 'Reforms and Opening-Up Period' in China, and the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II. Criveller first focuses on John Paul II's very critical attitude toward the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and its repression and control of religious organisations. Successively, Criveller notes how

under Pope Francis Sino-Vatican relations experienced a noticeable thawing, marked by the signature of the Provisional Agreement between the two sides in September 2018. The agreement, however, has not resulted in an actual improvement for Chinese Catholics, who have continued to experience «limitations on the practice of religion» (24). Criveller concludes the chapter with an examination of the challenges currently facing the Catholic Church in China, an institution besieged on one side by modernization and secularisation, and on the other side by the increasing control over Chinese society exercised by the CCP under the leadership of Xi Jinping. The third chapter, authored by Sergio Ticozzi, covers the history of the «underground» Church in China – a clandestine organisation separated from state-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association – since Deng Xiaoping’s liberalisation of religious policy in 1978. Tracing back to the 1950s, the underground Church was ignored in the early years of the Denghist era, its existence was eventually acknowledged by Chinese authorities in the late 1980s. According to Ticozzi, due to Beijing’s intensification of Party-State’s control over Chinese civil society, as well as the thawing between the Vatican and Beijing under Francis’ papacy, the future of the underground Church is increasingly isolated and precarious.

In the second section, *People*, the authors examine two significant figures of contemporary Chinese Christianity, Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian and Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun. In the fourth chapter, Rachel Xiaohong Zhu discusses Bishop Jin’s role in the relations between the Church and the Chinese state within the diocese of Shanghai. Bishop Jin defined Shanghai as a «four-horse carriage» (p.48), since the four organisations, the Shanghai diocese, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the Chinese Catholic Church Administrative Committee and the Shanghai Catholic Intellectual’s Association cooperated efficiently and highlighted the importance of «Church’s unity in diversity» and that «local Churches should fit into the national context under the guidance of the Holy Spirit» (54). In the fifth chapter, Beatrice K.F. Leung discusses the social and political activism of Cardinal Zen, the Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, recently arrested for «collusion with foreign forces» in the aftermath of Beijing’s repression of the 2019 protests in the former British colony. Zen is described as a «prophetic figure» (62), and as the «new conscience of Hong Kong» (66) because of his campaigning for democracy and human rights, including religious freedom. Leung’s chapter also covers Zen’s antagonistic relationships with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region’s government, and his opposition to the Sino-Vatican Provisional Agreement, in light of the repression of underground Catholics in China (72).

The third section of the volume is titled *Organizations*. The sixth chapter, authored by Raissa De Gruttola, concerns the activities of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (Sigao Shengjing Xuehui) since 1976. The Studium is a biblical institute of the Franciscan Order. Established in Bei-

jing in 1945, it coordinated the first translation of the Bible in Mandarin Chinese in 1968 in Hong Kong. De Gruttola's chapter examines how the Studium has provided translation and publishing of critical texts of Catholicism in Mandarin Chinese since the late 20th century. The seventh chapter, 'The Jinde Charities Foundation of Hebei Province and Catholic Charities in China', by Zhipeng Zhang, examines the eponymous Catholic non-profit charity organisation founded in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province – one of the first non-profit organisations of Chinese Catholicism. Through an overview of the Catholic charities in China since 1979, Zhang shows how, over time, Jinde Charities has expanded its work into eight main services: «emergency humanitarian assistance, social development, education training, grants, AIDS prevention, anti-human trafficking programs, and elderly services» (105). Zhang argues that the provision of social services by organisations such as Jinde Charities have played a significant role in raising the status of the Church in China in recent decades.

The final section is titled Communities. In the eighth chapter, Bruno Lepeu examines the Catholic youth ministry in contemporary China, an institution which he argues is critical to understand the evolution of the Catholic Church in an increasingly urbanised China. The editor Paul P. Mariani concludes the volume with the ninth chapter, «The Sheshan 'Miracle' and Its Interpretations». The chapter investigates an episode of religious fervour that occurred in Shanghai in 1980, when thousands of people visited the Sheshan Basilica in the western district of the city hoping to witness a miracle. Mariani notes how years of Party-State propaganda and top-down communication have failed to «stop the youth from going to holy sites or attending church» (140).

The authors of this volume cover a gap in research over religions in China, as both the Catholic Church and Chinese Catholics have been under-researched when compared to the other religions officially recognised by Beijing (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism). The volume is well organised, with a coherent thematic division. One of the key themes that emerge from the book is the complex and often fraught relationship between the Catholic Church and the Chinese state. The authors provide a detailed account of the various ways in which the Church has sought to navigate the often-difficult political landscape in China and its current efforts to engage with the CCP. Overall, *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China* is a valuable and important addition to the literature on the Catholic Church in China. It provides a rich and nuanced account of the Church's history and current state, and it offers important insights into its future prospects in a rapidly changing China. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the history and current state of the Catholic Church in China.