

P. Stephen Chow Sau-yan

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Pope Francis on May 17 named a new bishop for Hong Kong, tapping the head of his own Jesuit order in the region, P. Stephen Chow Sau-yan, for the politically sensitive position that has been vacant for two years.

Chow, a native of Hong Kong, was educated in the United States and Ireland. He headed two Jesuit-run schools while also teaching at the University of Hong Kong before being made provincial of the Jesuits in the China region in 2018.

He replaces the late Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung, who died in 2019.

The nomination comes at a sensitive time for Vatican-China relations, following the 2018 landmark agreement over bishop nominations on the Chinese mainland. Critics have said the Vatican sold out the underground Chinese church by signing the agreement, which allows the Chinese government a say in naming bishops.

Francis has refrained from commenting on the political tensions in Hong Kong, presumably to avoid riling Beijing.

One of Francis's most vocal critics is the emeritus bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen, who retired in 2009. He has bitterly criticized the Vatican's deal with Beijing.

AsiaNews, a Vatican-affiliated missionary news agency which follows the church closely in China, said Chow was a "balanced" choice to lead the church in Hong Kong. —Associated Press