

## News Update on Religion and Church in China September 26 – December 2, 2016

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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](http://www.china-zentrum.de)). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2016, No. 4, pp. 3-20) covered the period July 1 – October 2, 2016.*

### General – Civil Society, Law

November 28, 2016:

#### Ministry of Public Security publishes guidelines for the registration of foreign NGOs

On January 1, 2017, the controversial “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in the Mainland of China” went into effect. This new law allows foreign NGOs to engage in activities in Mainland China only after registering a representative office. If the foreign NGO has no registered representative office, it may carry out temporary activities in Mainland China after its Chinese cooperation partner has submitted documentation on the planned activities to registration authorities for the record.

On November 28, the Ministry of Public Security issued Guidelines for the Registration of Representative Offices and Submitting Documents for the Record of Temporary Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations. According to Kristin Shi-Kupfer of the Mercator Institute for Chinese Studies (MERICS) in Berlin, this guideline is consistent with the very restrictive nature of the law. In a November 29 press release, she said it was still not clear on what legal basis foreign NGOs (and their staff) already working in China could continue to work beyond December 2016: “To date, for example, there is no list of the possible NGOs or Chinese partners and supervisory organizations, which will be needed for registration in the future. [Such a list has been published in the meantime, on Dec 20, 2016. RCTC editors’ note.] It is also questionable whether NGOs currently in China will be able to continue to use their previous transfer channels and accounts for funds.” In addition, “there are hardly any incentives for Chinese institutions to cooperate with foreign NGOs but there are plenty of risks.” Chinese institutions would be held legally responsible should their foreign NGO partners violate regulations.

On November 8, following a briefing on the new law in Shanghai for representatives of 11 consulates, the Ministry of Public Security announced that there would be no transitional period for non-regis-

tered foreign NGOs (merics.org, China Update 21/2016 and China Flash Nov. 29).

An official English translation of the Guidelines (境外非政府组织代表机构登记和临时活动备案办事指南) can be found at [www.mps.gov.cn/n2254314/n2254409/n4904353/c5587463/content.html](http://www.mps.gov.cn/n2254314/n2254409/n4904353/c5587463/content.html).

## Religious Policy

September 26, 2016:

### State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) holds conference on the Sinicization of Religions

The conference was attended by religious representatives, experts in religious studies, ethnologists, lawyers and representatives of the religious authorities of the government. It originated with a call issued by President Xi Jinping at a conference on united front work in May of 2015 which he repeated at the National Conference on Religious Work held in April 2016, demanding that in the area of religious work the principle of Sinicization must be firmly adhered to. In the paper which he delivered at the conference on September 26, SARA Director Wang Zuo'an explained what was meant by the Sinicization of religions. Among his comments, Wang said that all religions – those of foreign origin as well as indigenous religions – must be Sinicized (i.e., made Chinese). He reasoned that a religion which may have been adapted to Chinese society in the past may not necessarily be adapted to Chinese society today. Wang emphasized the importance of Sinicization with regard to a religion's adaptation to socialist society. According to Wang, Sinicization is also a strategy for solving problems in the religious sphere, in particular infiltration from abroad by way of religion, the spread of religious extremism and "anti-Sinicization" (*ni Zhongguohua* 逆中国化). In addition to political identification with the leadership of the party, Wang called on the religions to engage in cultural fusion. In the interpretation of religious writings and teachings, in the form of religious activities, in religious music, clothing and buildings, a clear Chinese style should be expressed, Wang said. He further declared that reforms within China's religious systems should also be strengthened; care must be taken to prevent feudal privileges from gaining new life and Chinese religions from falling back under the control of a foreign power (*Zhongguo zongjiao* 2016, No. 10, or online at [http://fo.ifeng.com/a/20161118/44496106\\_0.shtml](http://fo.ifeng.com/a/20161118/44496106_0.shtml)).

October 10, 2016:

### "Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations" meets at the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) – Call made for the reduction of poverty

Representatives of the official religious organizations had already been called upon by SARA in the past to issue common statements on certain political or social problems. Now, as SARA reports, a "Joint Conference" has been established as a fixed mechanism. The Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations (全国性宗教团体联席会议) is meant to provide a platform for exchange, cooperation and dialogue among religions, said SARA Director Wang Zuo'an in his speech at the group's first meeting. In addition to the national organizations of the five officially recognized religions, the Chinese YMCA and YWCA are also part of the Joint Conference.

At their October 10 meeting, the religious organizations adopted a call for the five major religions to participate in poverty reduction efforts in Sandu County. According to the statement, approximately

800,000 registered poor currently live in the Sandu Autonomous County of the Sui Nationality in Guizhou Province. The region was declared the “National Basis for the Practice of Charitable Welfare of the Religious Circles.” Since 2015, the five major religions have been conducting investigations and projects in the region (the report and the text of the call can be found at: [www.sara.gov.cn/xwzx/xwj/378386.htm](http://www.sara.gov.cn/xwzx/xwj/378386.htm)).

See also the entry of October 24–27 / November 1, 2016 in this section.

**October 11, 2016:**

## **New: Institutes for religious education now included in database of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)**

Since 2014, the SARA has been in the process of building an online database on its website. Since the end of 2015, all of the sites for religious activities (temples, etc.) of Buddhism and Daoism which have been registered with the state are now available on that website (see also an evaluation in *RCTC* 2016, No. 2, pp. 26-28).

On October 11, 2016, a second online database was set up containing all registered institutes for religious education. The information listed includes the religion, the sponsoring organization of the respective educational institution, the school’s name and address, as well as the name of the person in charge. According to the database, there are currently 36 Buddhist, 10 Daoist, 10 Islamic, 21 Protestant and 9 Catholic educational institutes registered. According to the report provided at the launch of the database, there are approximately 10,000 people currently studying at the 86 institutes for religious education. Since the reopening of the institutes for religious education, some 40,000 students have completed their studies there. The report stresses that each [official] religious organization on the national or provincial level must first apply for permission to establish an institute for religious education and that the institute must then be approved by the SARA.

The list of the nine Catholic seminaries registered in the database includes the two seminaries in Taiyuan and Shanghai which have been temporarily closed. The seminary in Jilin, however, is not listed among those officially approved.

The database may be consulted at: <http://sara.gov.cn/zjxyys/index.htm>.

**October 24–27 / November 1, 2016:**

## **Plenum of the CP Central Committee meets, declares Xi Jinping to be its “core” / Religious representatives study the “spirit” of the plenum**

In the communiqué adopted by the plenum, the whole party is called to “closely unite around the Central Committee of the CPC with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core.” The news agency *Reuters* has written that having been given the title of a “core” leader, Xi has effectively been put “on par with previous strongmen Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.” In addition, the plenum adopted a policy statement titled: “Certain Norms on Inner-Party Political Life under the New Situation.” In a chapter on political discipline, the statement reaffirms that party members “are forbidden from engaging in feudal superstitions, practicing religions and joining cults, as well as from tolerating and supporting religious extremist forces, ethnic separatist forces, violent terrorist forces and their activities.”

Already on November 1, the newly founded “Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations” was convened in order that they might discuss the spirit of the party’s Central Committee. According to a report from the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the assembled religious representatives

promised “to lead the believing masses to closely unite around the Central Committee of the Party with Xi Jinping as its core” (*Reuters* Oct. 27; *sara.gov.cn* Nov. 2; *Xinhua* Oct. 27 according to a translation provided by *BBC Global Monitoring*; *Xinhua* Nov. 2).

See also the entry of October 10, 2016, in this section.

November 1, 2016:

## Xinjiang: “Regulations for the Prevention of Offenses Committed by Minors” prohibit parents from “inducing” their children to participate in religious activities

The new administrative legal measure was adopted on September 29, 2016, by the People’s Congress of the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang of the Uyghurs. It was published on October 12 and became effective on November 1. The new regulations state in article 9 that “Parents or other guardians and relatives of minors shall not: [...] 3. Organize, induce, or force minors to participate in religious activities; [...] 5. Incite, force or induce minors to participate in terrorist or extremist activities or in underground studies of the Qur’an, or to tolerate their [participation] in such activities; [...]. Should any of the above-mentioned acts be committed against minors, each organization and individual has the duty to stop them and report them to the police.”

The text of the regulations 新疆维吾尔自治区预防未成年人犯罪条例 can be found at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2016-10/13/c\\_129321033.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2016-10/13/c_129321033.htm) (*guancha.cn* Oct. 12; *xinjiangnet.com.cn* Oct. 13).

## Daoism

October 23, 2016:

## Public sacrificial rites for Zhuangzi offered in Mengcheng (Anhui Province)



Group recitation from the book *Zhuangzi* at the sacrificial ritual for the Daoist sage in Mengcheng on October 23, 2016.

In the Zhuangzi Temple in Mengcheng, considered the home of Zhuangzi, about a hundred Zhuangzi researchers and lovers performed a solemn autumn sacrifice in honor of the Daoist philosopher. Photos on the website of the official newspaper *China Daily* show rituals such as the sacrifice of tea and incense, the veneration of a statue of Zhuangzi and readings from the classic text *Zhuangzi*. According to *China Daily*, the ceremonies were part of an old sacrificial ritual that has existed since the Song Dynasty, but which had been interrupted for a long time and has now been spontaneously resumed in 2012 by the local population. In a report on the website *Anhui wang*, it was said that the local authorities are encouraging such events as part of their efforts to establish cultural tourism (ahwang.cn Oct. 24; chinadaily.com.cn Oct. 24; xinhuanet.com Oct. 24).

## Buddhism

October 27, 2016:

### First forum on “Heart-Sutra’ Culture” in countries along the new Silk Roads

In Nanjing, around 240 high-ranking monks, scholars, diplomats and foreign students from 30 countries came together for a forum organized by the magazine *Renmin Zhongguo* and the Buddhist Association of Jiangsu. Jiang Jianyong, vice-director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, said at the opening that up to the present the Silk Roads have served to further not only trade relations, but also cultural exchange. In this grand tradition, Buddhism is embedded as a particularly beautiful, radiant pearl, thus Jiang. In a joint action, forum participants were invited to write out the verses of the Heart Sutra in their respective mother tongues (sara.gov.cn Oct. 28).

The new Silk Roads (“One Belt One Road”) are a geostrategic project sponsored by the government of Xi Jinping; cf. *China heute* 2016, No. 3, pp. 172-183 (in German).

November 19–23, 2016:

### Dalai Lama visits Mongolia, confirms high ranking reincarnation of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism – China protests

According to a report on the website of the Dalai Lama, more than 12,000 of his followers participated in a teaching given by the 14th Dalai Lama in Ulaanbaatar on November 20. In a message directed to Mongolian youth, the Dalai Lama paid tribute to the preservation of the Buddhist faith throughout the time of Communist rule and exhorted young monks to study hard. On November 23, he told a press conference that he was convinced that the reincarnation of the 9th Jebtsundamba Khutuktu was born in Mongolia.

The Jebtsundamba Khutuktus are the patriarchs of Mongolian Buddhism and belong to the Gelug school (also referred to as “Yellow Hat” school), of which the Dalai Lama is the head. The geopolitical significance of this reincarnation is complex, as M.A. Aldrich has pointed out in an article in *The Diplomat*. The first eight patriarchs were officially recognized by China’s Qing government as the religious leaders of northern Mongolia. The 8th patriarch died in 1924 and in 1929 the communist People’s Republic of Mongolia, prohibiting any attempt to locate his reincarnation, declared an end of the lineage. Nevertheless, a reincarnation was found in Tibet in 1936, but his identity was kept secret; he fled to India in 1959. In 1991, after the end of communism in Mongolia, the 14th Dalai Lama publicly recog-

nized this reincarnation. For his part, before his death in 2012, the 9th Patriarch declared that he would be reborn in Mongolia. Aldrich suspects that already ahead of the trip, Beijing was deeply concerned that the Dalai Lama could harm Chinese interests among Tibetan Buddhists by his recognition of the 10th Patriarch. Moreover, Aldrich considers it possible that the process of identifying the 10th Patriarch is, in effect, a “dry run” for a future identification of the 15th Dalai Lama outside the PRC. China protested vigorously against the visit of the Dalai Lama and afterwards called off bilateral talks on the question of Chinese loans to Mongolia, which is in a deep economic crisis (*Associated Press* Nov. 19; *dalailama.com* Nov. 20, 22, 23; *The Diplomat* Dec. 3; *South China Morning Post* Nov. 26; *Xinhua* Nov. 20).

## Islam

November 26–28, 2016:

### 10th National Assembly of the Representatives of Islam in China

Following its regular cycle of leadership change, the highest official body of the Chinese Muslims has elected the new leadership of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA). The new chairman is Imam Yang Faming, an ethnic Hui from Ningxia, who was born in 1965. He replaces Chen Guangyuan, born in 1932, who had been chairman of the association since 2000. Yang Faming, who was previously vice-chairman of the CIA, is a member of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference. He has, among other things, taken courses at the Chinese Koran Institute (1990/1991), the Central School of Socialism (1994) and the Al-Azhar University in Cairo (1999). Wang Zhongping was elected secretary general. In



Top: Address by the new chairman of the Chinese Islamic Association, Imam Yang Faming.  
Bottom: Deputies during the National Assembly of the Muslims. Photos: [chinaislam.net.cn](http://chinaislam.net.cn).



addition, the delegates also chose 20 vice-presidents of the CIA. The former secretary general, Guo Chengzhen, also a Hui, who served as a staff member of the State Administration of Religious Affairs from 1989 to 2011, no longer appears among the ranks of the new leadership. As reported by Renmin University, eight members of the new leadership of the CIA, including Yang Faming, are graduates of Renmin University’s “course for patriotic religious figures.” In these 4-month courses, which were initiated in 2006, 600 representatives of the 5 major religions have been educated politically, culturally and professionally; many of the graduates hold positions at the national level in their respective religious organizations.

The 10th National Assembly adopted revisions to the statutes of the CIA, which place stronger emphasis on the fight against extremism. The delegates were welcomed by Yu Zhengsheng, chairman of the Political Consultative Conference (*China Daily* Nov. 29; [news.ruc.edu.cn](http://news.ruc.edu.cn) Dec. 1; [sara.gov.cn](http://sara.gov.cn) Nov. 26, 29; [takungpao.com](http://takungpao.com) Nov. 28; *Xinhua* Nov. 28).

## Protestantism

November 8, 2016:

### Amity Printing Company celebrates its 30th anniversary – 150 million Bibles printed

According to the website of the Amity Printing Company in Nanjing, the firm celebrated its 30th anniversary on the 8th of November. Founded in 1986, by 2007 the company had printed 50 million Bibles. “From 2007 to 2012 it took only five years to print the next 50 million copies. From 2013 to 2016 it took only three years for the third 50 million.” By June of 2016, the production of Bibles – both hardback and paperback editions – had already passed 2 million copies a month. On July 18, Amity’s 150-millionth Bible rolled off the presses. The company was founded in 1986 as a joint venture between the Amity Foundation and the United Bible Societies (UBS). One way the United Bible Societies have been supporting biblical printing over the decades has been by donating fine Bible-quality paper to publishers. Amity’s website proudly states that since its beginning, the company has printed more than 74 million Bibles for export in over 90 different languages (*AsiaNews* Nov. 17; <http://amityprinting.com/news-events/item/838-celebrating-the-completion-of-the-150-millionth-bible>; see also *RCTC* 2013, No. 1, p. 11).

November 29–30, 2016:

### Official Protestant leadership bodies decide on work plan for 2017

At a joint meeting of the Standing Committees of the Chinese Christian Council and the Protestant Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) in Shanghai, attended also by representatives of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, a report was presented on the bodies’ work in 2016. As to their goals for the year 2017, Pastor Xu Xiaohong, vice-chairman of the TSPM, identified the following focal points: 1) continuing with theological construction and a renewed reflection on the Sinicization of Christianity; 2) further research on Church Order and on the basic situation of the church(es); 3) standardization of seminary training; 4) integration of the various resources for social services, active participation in welfare activities, etc.; 5) increased exchange with foreign countries; resistance to foreign infiltration (*sara.gov.cn* Dec. 1).

## Orthodox Church

September 29, 2016:

### Orthodox Cathedral of Harbin recognized as a part of China’s architectural heritage

The former Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Sophia in Harbin, along with 97 other sites throughout the country, has been chosen to be on the first list to be made of China’s architectural heritage sites from the 20th century. The list was published on September 29 by the China Cultural Relic Association and



Cathedral of St. Sophia in Harbin. Photo: mospat.ru.

the Architectural Society of China. According to experts quoted in *AsiaNews*, the members of the jury also selected other sites such as the Great Hall of the People in Beijing and the Yangtze River Bridge in Wuhan, both of which were chosen as architectural witnesses of Chinese history in the 20th century. The Cathedral of St. Sophia was built in neo-Byzantine style in 1907 and was already listed as a national cultural heritage site in 1996. In 1997, the church was extensively restored and is now being used as a museum.

On May 1 last year, the first Orthodox priest to be ordained in China in 60 years, Alexander Yu Shi, an ethnic Chinese, celebrated the Divine Liturgy on Easter Day for the small Orthodox community of Harbin, which has been without a priest for the past 15 years. The liturgy was to have taken place in the Pokrov Church (Protection of the Mother of God) but it was under scaffolding during a state-sponsored renovation, so Father Shi celebrated the Easter liturgy in both Church Slavonic and Mandarin at the altar of the Catholic church opposite. Then, swinging his incense-filled thurible, he led the small congregation in procession across the square to the scaffold-clad Orthodox Church of the Protection of the Mother of God where he cried aloud three times in Chinese: “Christ is Risen!” and the people responded with shouts of: “He is truly Risen!” The Orthodox Church in China is only recognized locally in a few areas. There are about 15,000 Orthodox Christians living in China, mostly in Heilongjiang, Harbin, Inner Mongolia (Labdarin) and Xinjiang (Kulj and Urumqi) (*AsiaNews* Oct. 12; [journeytoorthodoxy.com](http://journeytoorthodoxy.com) May 2016; see also *RCTC* 2016, No. 2, p. 9.).

## Catholic Church

October 12–13, 2016:

### Conference in Beijing on the inculturation and Sinicization of the Catholic Church

The state-sanctioned Catholic leadership bodies, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the official Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference, organized the fourth “Forum on the Inculturation of the Chinese Catholic Church and on a Sinicized Theology” in the National Seminary. Holding fast to Sini-



cization is key to the healthy development of the Catholic Church in China and must be “tackled with great energy,” declared Chen Zongrong, vice director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, at the forum’s opening. Bishop Ma Yinglin (who is not recognized by Rome), chairman of the Bishops’ Conference, reminded participants of past efforts at inculturation and Sinicization in history and since 1949, and described the process as a great and long-term task for several generations. The forum’s focus was on “Interreligious Dialogue and Sinicization.” A representative of the Chinese Islamic Association was invited to attend the forum as a dialogue partner (see forum report at: [www.chinacatholic.cn/html1/report/1610/70-1.htm](http://www.chinacatholic.cn/html1/report/1610/70-1.htm), Oct. 20).

**October 27, 2016:**

## Death of Bishop Francis Tong Hui of Yan’an

Bishop Emeritus Francis Tong Hui of Yan’an, Shaanxi province, has died of pneumonia at the age of 83. For the last five years the Diocese of Yan’an has been led by Bishop John Baptist Yang Xiaoting, who in 2010 was ordained coadjutor bishop and took on the role of local bishop, or Ordinary of Yan’an, in 2011, following the retirement of Bishop Tong Hui.

Bishop Tong Hui had been officially recognized by both the Vatican and the Chinese government. According to a report from *UCAN*, towards the end of his life Bishop Tong suffered for several years from symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease.

Bishop Tong was born on August 15, 1933, in Lintong, Shaanxi, and was ordained a priest in 1956. In 1965 he was arrested and was released only 15 years later. In 1994, he was consecrated Coadjutor Bishop of Yulin (now Yan’an) and took over the diocese in 1999, as the successor of Bishop Wang Zhenye. The territory of the diocese of Yan’an served as the finish line for Mao’s Long March and was for many years the power base of the Communist Party. Today, the diocese has 33 priests and 65,000 Catholics (*AsiaNews* Oct. 28; *UCAN* Oct. 28; <http://directory.ucanews.com/dioceses/china-yanan-yulin/238>).

**November 20, 2016:**

## Jubilee Year of Mercy ends – Holy Doors at pilgrimage sites are solemnly closed

At the end of the holy Jubilee Year of Mercy, which had been proclaimed worldwide last year by Pope Francis and which was intensively celebrated by the Church in China, the Holy Doors were solemnly closed during special rites in each diocese.



Closing of the Holy Door at the Cathedral of Jinan (Shandong Province) on November 13, 2016. Photos: [china-catholic.org](http://china-catholic.org).

November 22–23, 2016:

## 6th conference on “Role and Influence of Christianity in Contemporary Chinese Society” was held at Renmin University in Beijing

The 6th conference in the series was devoted to the theme “The Contemporary World Order and Its Relationship to Religion.” Organizers were once again the Advanced Institute for Religious Studies at Renmin University and two Catholic research institutions, the Yuan Dao Study Society (Hong Kong) and the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (Shijiazhuang).

At the opening ceremony, former high-ranking representatives of the party’s national United Front Work Department also took part. Zhuo Xinping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said in his opening speech that the process of Sinicization presented a great opportunity for Christianity in China. Peter Choy, director of the Yuan Dao Study Society and rector of the Holy Spirit Seminary in Hong Kong, extended greetings on behalf of Hong Kong’s Bishop John Cardinal Tong Hon.

A conference report carried by *Zhongguo minzu bao* (*China Ethnic News*) focused on the conference contributions on religion and on the new Silk Roads (“One Belt One Road,” OBOR). Among other things, Yan Kejia of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) said that China’s religions should “go out” and play an active role in the world as, for example, in the resolution of regional conflicts. Zhang Hua (SASS) pointed to the Protestant Amity Foundation as an example of how China’s religions are already active abroad – in 2015, Amity became the first Chinese NGO to formally establish an office in Africa, at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, and since March of 2016, an international office in Geneva, Switzerland. Fr. Michael Bauer, pastor of the German-speaking Catholic community in Shanghai, reminded listeners that President Xi Jinping had mentioned the Polish China missionary Father Michał Boym, SJ (1612–1659) during a speech in Poland in June 2016 and the Italian China missionary Fr. Matteo Ricci, SJ (1552–1610) at the G20 meeting in Hangzhou. He added that unless the exchange within OBOR has a theological and spiritual dimension, it will miss out on a deeper significance. Yang Huilin of Renmin University called for increased dialogue capability of China’s culture and religions with regard to OBOR. According to the conference report, conference participants also made “some constructive proposals on Sino-Vatican relations” ([chinacatholic.org](http://chinacatholic.org) Nov. 22; *Zhongguo minzu bao* Nov. 29 based on [iwr.cass.cn](http://iwr.cass.cn)).

The 5th conference of the series took place in Hong Kong in November 2015, see *RCTC* 2016, No. 1, p. 13. For a more detailed account of the 6th conference, see the conference report by Dominic Niu in this issue of *RCTC*.

## Sino-Vatican Relations

October 5, 2016:

### First public meeting of a pope with a bishop from the People’s Republic of China (Mainland)

Bishop Xu Honggen was in Rome with a pilgrimage group from his diocese of Suzhou (Jiangsu Province) and met Pope Francis during the public audience in St. Peter’s Square. A photo of the meeting quickly made the rounds among the Catholic social networks in China. Bishop Xu is recognized by both the Pope and by the Chinese government. Of course, bishops from both parts of the Church of China have visited various popes in Rome over the past decades. These meetings, however, have always

been treated very discreetly, because the Chinese government does not allow Chinese bishops (who, in any case, often have difficulty getting permission to go abroad) to visit the Vatican. According to *UCAN*, the meeting drew mixed reactions from Chinese Catholics: Whereas a blogger-priest from the official Church called the meeting “a sign of the spring blossom” for the Chinese Church, an underground priest told *UCAN* that the Pope “has fallen into a trap” (*UCAN* Oct. 13).

Around October 10 / November 7, 2016:

## Alleged ordinations of bishops in the underground Church without papal nomination made known publicly – Vatican warns about ordinations without mandate

Contradictory information has been circulating on the internet. According to *UCAN*, during Sunday Mass on May 22 of 2016 the underground priest Father Paul Dong Guanhua from the Diocese of Zhengding in Hebei Province announced that he had been secretly ordained as a bishop 11 years ago. He told *UCAN*: “I was ordained by an elderly bishop in 2005 but I will not tell you whom.” On September 11 Dong reportedly appeared for the first time as a bishop in public – complete with mitre and crozier.

The Diocese of Zhengding (called Diocese of Shijiazhuang by the official Church) already has a bishop, 81 year old underground Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo, who is recognized by the Pope. On September 13, Bishop Jia declared in a letter that Father Dong has incurred automatic excommunication according to Canon Law Article 1382 for accepting episcopal consecration without papal approval. Bishop Jia is thought to have suspended Father Dong from active ministry years ago.

At the beginning of September, Dong posted his cell-phone number on the Catholic website *Tianzhujiao zaixian*, and wrote that if any diocese needed a bishop to perform an ordination, they could call on him. Dong Guanhua told *UCAN* that on September 7 he had consecrated a 51-year-old bishop, whose identity he did not reveal. According to reports, Dong claims to be relying on special faculties granted by Pope John Paul II to the underground Church but repealed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 in his letter to the Catholic Church in China.

According to *UCAN*, the news of the illicit consecrations sent “shockwaves” among the Catholics in China. Reports point out that these incidents complicate the situation of the Catholic Church in China and the Sino-Vatican negotiations; but they are also seen by some as an indication that parts of the Church in the “underground” feel increasingly isolated.

The Holy See only responded publicly on November 7, 2016, when Vatican spokesman Greg Burke read a statement on the reports of bishops’ ordination of priests of the underground community without papal mandate: “In recent weeks, there has been a series of reports regarding some episcopal ordinations conferred without Papal Mandate of priests of the unofficial community of the Catholic Church in Continental China. The Holy See has not authorized any ordination, nor has it been officially informed of such events. Should such episcopal ordinations have occurred, they would constitute a grave violation of canonical norms. The Holy See hopes that such reports are baseless. If not, it will have to await reliable information and sure documentation before adequately evaluating the cases. However, it is reiterated that it is not licit to proceed with any episcopal ordination without the necessary Papal Mandate, even by appealing to particular personal beliefs” (*Églises d’Asie* Oct. 19; *UCAN* Oct. 19; Nov. 9; *Vatican Insider* Oct. 10, 24; Vatican Press Office Nov. 7).

Beginning of November 2016:

## Sino-Vatican Dialogue in Rome – Rumors of “early agreement” and warnings in the media

The latest round of negotiations between China and the Vatican took place in Rome in early November, according to sources cited by an *UCAN* report of November 25. Prior to this, various media such as *Reuters* reported that an agreement was to have been “finalized” at this meeting. *Reuters* reported that the Vatican was prepared to recognize four of the eight illegitimate bishops but this has not been officially confirmed by either the Vatican or the Chinese government. *Reuters* also claimed that the Vatican wanted to conclude an agreement on the ordinations before the convocation of the 9th National Assembly of Chinese Catholic Representatives in December so as to avoid tensions like those experienced in 2010 and prevent the danger of a “schism.” Similarly, the *Global Times*, which is under the auspices of *Renmin ribao*, wrote in an article of October 25 of the “final stage” of the negotiations. The *Global Times* listed some of the obstacles still existing, quoting the religious scientist Yang Fenggang of Purdue University (Indiana, USA), who warned that many Catholics in the underground could refuse to accept an agreement if they felt that the Vatican had made too many concessions. “However, if the compromises are perceived by underground Catholics as reasonable, it may help to bring all underground Catholics into the open, although it may take some time to heal and restore the relations between some underground and aboveground Catholic bishops and priests,” Yang added.

While the *Vatican Insider* and others of the media have argued strongly that an agreement should be reached, on the international front a number of dissenting voices are also being raised. In August 2016, for example, a “group of citizens from around the globe gravely concerned about the Vatican rushing to establish diplomatic relations with China” launched the website [VaticanChina.org](http://VaticanChina.org). The website is calling on people to send petitions to Cardinal Secretary of State Parolin and to Pope Francis. Sophie Richardson, director of the China Program of Human Rights Watch, warned the Vatican against “tak[ing] on faith any offers from Beijing until it offers religious freedom to all across China.” One prominent person, who has long been a voice among those warning against trusting Beijing too much is Hong Kong’s bishop emeritus Cardinal Zen (see below).

On November 25, citing one of its Church sources, *UCAN* wrote that an agreement is still a long way away. The presence of an illegitimate bishop at the episcopal consecrations in Chengdu and Xichang, as well as the convocation of the 9th National Assembly all give weight to this less optimistic view of things (see the entries of November 30, December 1, and December 2, 2016 in this section) (*Global Times* Oct. 25; Human Rights Watch Nov. 1; *Reuters* Oct. 21; *UCAN* Oct. 25; Nov. 25).

November 2016:

## Cardinal Joseph Zen warns repeatedly against the danger of “compromises” and “surrender” in Vatican negotiations with China

In China there is a totalitarian regime that wants to control everything; the danger of the Vatican’s being deceived is very great, said Hong Kong’s bishop emeritus in an interview with the German *Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur (KNA)*. He said pretty much the same thing when speaking with the *The Wall Street Journal*. In an event organized by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Hong Kong on 13 November, Zen said that any agreement which conceded the nomination of candidates for the office of bishop to the official (not recognized by Rome) Bishops’ Conference, should be avoided at all costs. This would reduce the Vatican to a passive role, and it is also not realistic to think that the Vatican

could repeatedly reject candidates proposed by the Chinese side. Speaking to the *KNA*, Zen emphasized firmly that he was criticizing the Vatican, not the Pope himself. He added that if the Pope should give his consent to an agreement, then he (Zen) would withdraw entirely from public life (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Nov. 26; *KNA* as taken from *katholisch.de* Nov. 21; *The Wall Street Journal* Nov. 3).

**November 10, 2016:**

### **Diocese of Changzhi (Shanxi): First public ordination for more than a year – with the consent of the Pope and the government**

54 year old Father Peter Ding Lingbin has been ordained bishop by Bishop Li Shan of Beijing; the co-consecrators were Bishop Li Suguang of Nanchang (Jiangxi) and Bishop Wu Junwei of Yuncheng (Shanxi). Bishops Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan, Zhang Yinlin of Anyang, and the 87 year old Bishop Jin Daoyuan concelebrated. In 2000, the latter was consecrated Bishop of Changzhi without papal mandate. The Vatican later recognized him, but without authorizing him to assume leadership of the diocese as its ordinary. All the bishops participating in the consecration of Bishop Ding are thus recognized by the Pope. As in other cases, the papal appointment had been read “privately” before the assembled priests, and the appointment by the official Chinese Bishops’ Conference (not recognized by Rome) was read in public. It was the first public bishop’s consecration since Bishop Zhang Yinlin’s in Anyang on August 4, 2015 and the second since that of Bishop Ma Daqin in Shanghai on July 7, 2012. According to *UCAN*, Ding was nominated by the Pope as a bishop in 2013 and shortly afterwards elected bishop candidate in the “democratic” procedure prescribed by the government. Though Rome appointed him to be the local bishop or ordinary, the Chinese government only recognizes him as a coadjutor of Bishop Jin Daoyuan.

Some 20 other priests in China have already been appointed by the Pope to be bishops of the many vacant dioceses, some of whom have not been approved by the government for consecration.

Bishop Ding Lingbin was born in 1962. Before entering the seminary, he worked as a doctor for several years. The Diocese of Changzhi currently has 55,000 Catholics, 47 priests and 19 seminarians (*AsiaNews* Oct. 24; Nov. 9, 10; *UCAN* Nov. 14, 30).

**November 30, 2016:**

### **Ankang and Chengdu: Episcopal ordinations with the consent of both Pope and government – in Chengdu, however, with the participation of an excommunicated bishop**

In the small Diocese of Ankang in the south of the Province of Shaanxi, Father Johann Baptist Wang Xiaoxun, born in 1966, was ordained a coadjutor bishop. After his appointment by the Pope, he had already been elected bishop candidate in 2010. The consecrating bishops, Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan’an, Bishop Dang Mingyan of Xi’an and Bishop Yu Runchen of Hanzhong, as well as the concelebrating Bishops Han Yingjin of Sanyuan, Tong Changping of Weinan and Wu Qinjing of Zhouzhi (all from Shaanxi) are all recognized by the Pope. The 85 year old local bishop Ye Ronghua, who is ill, did not take part in the consecration. The Diocese of Ankang has 4,000 Catholics, 9 priests and 6 sisters. The consecration in Chengdu (Sichuan Province) took place under a strong police presence. Already in the run-up to the ordination, *AsiaNews* reported that even before the ceremony, Catholics had protested against a possible participation of ex-communicated Bishop Lei Shiyin of Leshan, also in Sichuan Province. Father Tang Yuange, born in 1963, was elected bishop in 2014, and his appointment by the Pope was known in October 2015, according to *UCAN*. The principal consecrator was Bishop



The protest banner, signed: “The faithful of the Catholic Church of Ping’anqiao” (= the cathedral), reads: “According to Can. 1382, we strongly protest that automatically excommunicated Lei Shiyin comes to our church to take part in and celebrate at the episcopal ordination.” According to *AsiaNews*, it hung there in front of the church for several hours before and after Sunday Mass on November 27, until police finally removed it. Photo: china.ucanews.com.

Fang Xinyao of Linyi, Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, together with Bishops Luo Xuegang of Yibin and Bishop He Zeqing of Wanxian (Wanzhou) as co-consecrators. Bishops Chen Gong’ao of Nanchong, Xiao Zejiang of Guiyang and Lei Shiyin concelebrated. Apart from Bishop Lei Shiyin, all the other bishops are recognized by Rome. The Diocese of Chengdu has 100,000 Catholics, 20 priests and 9 religious sisters (*AsiaNews* Nov. 30; *UCAN* Nov. 30).

December 1, 2016:

### ***Vatican Insider*: National Assembly of Representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church to take place at the end of December 2016**

The scheduled date will be December 26–30, 2016, said *Vatican Insider*, this was also confirmed by *UCAN*. This means that the 9th Assembly will start immediately after Christmas and will last two days longer than the last Catholic National Assembly or the Muslims’ National Assembly of November 26–28, 2016 (see entry above).

As with the other four major religions of China, the five-year National Assembly is the highest-ranking body of official Catholic Church structures in China, prescribed and controlled by the state. It elects the leadership of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and of the official Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference, which is not recognized by Rome. This is the structure which Pope Benedict XVI described in his letter to the Catholic Church in China of 2007 (without mentioning organizations), as “extraneous to the structure of the Church” and “incompatible with Catholic doctrine.” The last or 8th National Assembly took place in December of 2010 under very great pressure and coercive measures on the part of the authorities (see: *China heute* 2011, No. 1, pp. 4-7 [in German]). The 9th National Assembly had been postponed due to the ongoing Sino-Vatican talks. That the Assembly has been re-scheduled to take place this year, veteran China watcher Father Jerom Heyndrickx, CICM, described as a “curve ball” for the Vatican (*Reuters* Oct. 21; *UCAN* Dec. 7; *Vatican Insider* Dec. 1).

December 2, 2016:

## Bishop's ordination in the Diocese of Xichang (Sichuan) with the consent of the Pope and the government, but with the participation of an excommunicated bishop

In Xichang, Father Johannes Lei Jiawei, born in 1970, was ordained as the local bishop or ordinary of the diocese under very strict security measures. The principal consecrator was once again Bishop Fang Xinyao of Linyi, Chair of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. The co-consecrators were Bishop Xiao Zejiang of Guiyang and Bishop He Zeqing of Wanxian (Wanzhou). Bishops Chen Gong'ao of Nanchong, Luo Xuegang of Yibin, Tang Yuange of Chengdu and Lei Shiyin concelebrated.

*UCAN* reported that priests of Xichang were told that the participation of excommunicated Bishop Lei Shiyin was “on order from higher state authorities.” Father Lei Jiawei had already been elected bishop candidate in 2010. In 2015, the Vatican appointed him to serve as administrator of the diocese, which had been without a bishop since 1999. According to *UCAN*, Rome had hesitated for a long time before finally appointing him bishop. Questions had allegedly been raised about his priestly morality but in an interview with *UCAN*, Bishop Lei Jiawei dismissed them as “rumors.” Bishop Lei was also infamous among Catholics across China for singing “red” Communist songs on stage while wearing his vestments in 2011.

The Diocese of Xichang has 11 priests and 11 religious sisters to serve some 25,000 Catholics spread out over 14 parishes and 10 mission stations. It is situated in an area which has the largest concentration of the Yi ethnic minority in China (*AsiaNews* Dec. 2; *china.ucanews.com* Dec. 2; *UCAN* Dec. 2).

There was no official reaction from the Vatican to the participation of Bishop Lei Shiyin at the two consecrations [it came later, on December 21]. The sentiment that swept among Chinese Catholics though was one of shock and consternation. Father Peter Peng from Hebei wrote in a blog entry that a legitimate consecration compromised by the participation of an illegitimate bishop was like “rice mixed with sand” – hard to swallow, even if some Church people in China were so accustomed to eating it that they called it delicious (*UCAN* Dec. 8).

## Hong Kong

November 13, 2016:

### Hong Kong: Auxiliary Bishop Michael Yeung appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Hong Kong

On 13 November, Pope Francis appointed 71-year-old Auxiliary Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung Coadjutor of the Diocese of Hong Kong with the right to succeed Cardinal Tong. In announcing his appointment during a Mass at the end of the Jubilee Year of Mercy in Hong Kong's Cathedral, Bishop Yeung expressed his gratitude to his two predecessors, Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, SDB, and Cardinal Tong Hon, who stand “like two big trees offering shelter” while storms are buffeting the people and society of Hong Kong.

Dr. Anthony S.K. Lam from Hong Kong's Holy Spirit Study Centre described the new coadjutor as a “man of great responsibility and serious about his principles. He [...] knows how to use the media in a healthy way [...]”

Michael Yeung was born in Shanghai in 1945 but came to Hong Kong with his family at the age of 14. After a few years in the business world, he entered the major seminary in Hong Kong at the age of 26

and began his studies for the priesthood. In 1978, he was ordained a priest for the diocese of Hong Kong. He graduated from Syracuse University in New York State (USA) with a major in Social Communication, followed by a degree in Educational Sciences at Harvard. In Hong Kong, prior to his episcopal ordination in 2014, he held various positions in both pastoral and administrative areas. Among his many tasks, he was appointed director of Caritas Hong Kong from 2003–2014. From 2009 onward, he was one of several Vicars General for the diocese.

Asked for details about his eventual retirement, Cardinal Tong told *UCAN* that he was waiting for further communication from the Holy See. Prior to the consecration of his three auxiliary bishops on August 30, 2014 – Bishop Ha Chi-shing, OFM, Bishop Lee Bun-sang (since transferred to Macau) and Bishop Michael Yeung – Cardinal Tong confided that the Holy See was extending his appointment as Bishop of Hong Kong for another three years. (Cardinal Tong turned 75 on July 31, 2014) (*Fides* Nov. 14; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Nov. 19; *UCAN* Nov. 14, 17; catholic.org.hk).

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