

News Update on Religion and Church in China September 29 – November 26, 2018

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2018, No. 4, pp. 3-30) covered the period June 26 – October 3, 2018.

Religious Policy

November 21–23, 2018:

“First Promotion of and Scientific Conference on The Chinese Character of Religious Buildings” in Xi’an

The high-level conference discussed questions concerning the “system of religious architecture,” such as its sinicization, history and present, artistic particularities, social function and social value. The organizers were the Institute for World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese Association for Religious Studies 中国宗教学会 and its commission for religious buildings. Zhuo Xinping 卓新平, former director of the IWR and now director of the Chinese Association for Religious Studies, said in his speech that experts had already compiled a first list of 50 religious sites that can be used as models to promote Chinese-style religious buildings; of these 50, some also reflect in a special way China’s “red revolution culture.” Zhuo said that they are an encouragement to hold on to China’s cultural self-confidence and to continue work on its realization of the Chinese Dream. The conference also featured a promotional film about these 50 model sites. 40 renowned scientists from the Chinese Daoist Association and various academies and universities throughout the country took part in the conference (see report on the website of the IWR, iwr.cass.cn, Nov. 23).

November 23, 2018:

***Bitter Winter*: Since September 2018, the Communist Party’s United Front Work Department (UFWD) has been carrying out its first, secretly kept, nationwide inspection of “religious work”**

Bitter Winter (BW), the news website of the Center for New Religious Studies (CESNUR) in Turin, based its report on government documents and sound recordings of sessions from various provinces

it had gained access to. A document from Gansu cited by *BW* states that the CCP Central Committee has decided “to conduct a nation-wide supervision on religious work, the first time in China’s history, with the aim to examine and measure how the central government’s policies and arrangements are promoted and implemented in practice through this high-degree, widespread, and in-depth supervision work.” According to *BW*, the program is made up of two stages. During the first stage, called “self-inspection and correction,” provincial and municipal authorities were called to review the implementation of religious policy measures in their jurisdiction and to report the findings to the UFWD. According to *BW*, the second stage began in October 2018 with the deployment of teams of Central Government officials across the country to review the results of the “self-inspection” and to identify problems. *BW* said that in one city of Henan Province, the following religious-political tasks, among others, have been identified as being in need of improvement: online propaganda; the promotion of “patriotic” clergy; a crackdown on the underground Catholic Church and on South Korean religious sites, and on the prevention of evangelization in schools and universities. *BW* reported that in officials’ meetings, the strict confidentiality of the inspection campaign was emphasized so as to avoid unfavorable public opinion and international reporting. From January 2019 onward, according to an internal CCP document referred to by *BW*, the central inspection authorities have been called upon to implement the necessary actions of rectification based on the results of this year’s inspection (more details and photos of parts of an official document in *BW*’s message at <https://bitterwinter.org/ccp-secretly-conduct-s-religious-inspection-across-china/>).

Religious Study

October 19, 2018:

Conference for the tenth edition of the journal *Renwen zongjiao yanjiu* 人文宗教研究 (*Journal of Humanistic Religion*) discusses religious studies with Chinese characteristics

The conference was held at Beijing University, since editor-in-chief of *Renwen zongjiao yanjiu*, Li Si-long 李四龙, is also vice rector of the faculty of humanities (*renwenxue* 人文学) at this university. The conference involved discussions on how to build a “theory system for religious studies with Chinese characteristics.” The conference assigned an important role to the term *renwen* 人文 (English: “humanistic”). The term refers to the “humanities” in general, but apparently is also used to characterize a specific Chinese, human-centered religious tradition that differs from that of the West. For example, at the conference, Prof. Lou Yulie 楼宇烈 postulated that the term *renwen zongjiao* 人文宗教 (translated as “humanistic religion” in the official English title of the acclaimed journal) exemplifies “the most fundamental characteristic of religious belief in Chinese culture”; according to Lou, Chinese religion is most in tune with the spirit of the times, because “there, there is no Savior of the world of any kind at all, [one has] to redeem oneself based on oneself, that is the fundamental characteristic of the Chinese religion.” The journal currently concerns itself mainly with Buddhism. In future, there will also be articles on other religions and popular beliefs (see the official conference report on iwr.cass.cn of Oct. 22). – Thanks to colleagues for reference to the term *renwen*. (kwt)

October 20, 2018:

Forum to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the publication of the “Blue Book of Religions”

The first “Blue Book of Religions” (the actual title is *Zhongguo zongjiao baogao* 中国宗教报告 *Annual Report on Religions in China*) was published in 2008 by Jin Ze 金泽 and Qiu Yonghui 邱永辉, both researchers at the Institute for World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The first volumes of the annual report in particular, which contained surveys and field studies on the different religions, met with much international response. Qiu Yonghui, who has been the sole editor of the “Blue Book of Religions” since the reporting year 2014, presented the forum with a kind of summing up of the past and wished every success to Chen Jinguo 陈进国 – an IWR staff member who has excelled in researching popular beliefs in particular and who now takes over at the helm of the “Blue Book.”

Regarding the future of the “Blue Book,” the forum participants, according to the report, “unanimously” said that 1.) The authors must base their research on “traditional humanistic (*renwen*) research,” take the Marxist view of religion as a guide and combine the methods of religious anthropology, the sociology of religion and the psychology of religion; 2.) Only then can the Blue Book’s “think tank” function be fulfilled if they look at the problems from the point of view of the long-term benefits to both the state and nation; and 3.) The authors must strive to overcome bottlenecks in obtaining data, combine qualitative and quantitative research, and use more graphs and tables of objective, comprehensive data. The forthcoming *Annual Report on Religions in China (2019)*, edited by Chen Jianguo, is scheduled for publication in May of 2019 (iwr.cass.cn Oct. 22).

Religion in General

November 5–7, 2018:

Singapore: Second Christian-Daoist Colloquium

“Christian and Daoist Ethics in Dialogue” was the motto of the Second Christian-Daoist Colloquium in Singapore, attended by 70 experts and both practicing Christians and Daoists from Singapore, China, France, South Korea, Malaysia, Switzerland, Taiwan and the Vatican. The colloquium was organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Singapore and the Daoist Federation of Singapore. The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences and the World Council of Churches were also represented. The first Christian-Daoist Colloquium took place in 2014 in Taiwan (*Eglises d’Asie* Nov. 12; *Vatican News* Nov. 7; *Zenit* Nov. 8; www.vaticannews.va/de/vatikan/news/2018-11/singapur-zweites-treffen-taoisten-vatikanvertreter.html; see also *China heute* 2017, No. 2, p. 72 [in German]).

Buddhism

October 11, 2018:

The two rival incarnations of the Karmapa issue a “Joint Statement” expressing the wish to overcome the split in the Karma Kagyu lineage

The Karmapa Lama is the head of Karma Kagyu, one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. For the current 17th Karmapa Lama, a different boy has been confirmed as the reincarnation by various high-ranking lamas of the lineage. The Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje, born in 1983, came to India as a child and was trained there. The Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, born in 1985, is also recognized by the Dalai Lama (who is the head of another school of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelugpa) as well as by the Chinese government. He was trained in the People's Republic of China under government oversight and fled to India at the end of December 1999.

At the beginning of their Joint Statement it was announced that the two Karmapas had met for several days at a rural location in France with the goal of getting to know each other personally. There, for the first time, they were able to speak freely with each other, thus laying the foundation for something which both expect to “develop into a strong connection,” the statement said. According to the statement, the two Karmapas also talked about the unfortunate split in the Karma Kagyu lineage. They declared that, “We view it as our duty and responsibility to do whatever we can to bring the lineage together.” The statement was published on their official websites in both English and Tibetan, accompanied by a Chinese translation.

According to *Buddhistdoor Global*, a majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize Ogyen Trinley Dorje as the 17th Karmapa, while an influential minority recognize Trinley Thaye Dorje. In turn, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, who has spent the past year in the US, complained in a video message in March 2018 about the burden of expectations which have been placed on him and the suspicions of the Indian government that he was a Chinese spy (see *RCTC* 2018, No. 2, pp. 8-9). According to *AsiaNews*, he has since acquired a passport from the Caribbean island state of Dominica because of the travel restrictions imposed on him by the Indian government. In mid-September, *Buddhistdoor Global* reported that there were indications that India would ease its stance on Ogyen Trinley Dorje. It quotes the advisor on Tibetan affairs in the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs as saying, “India doesn't doubt ... [that the Karmapa] is the future face of Tibetan Buddhism” (*AsiaNews* Nov. 2; *buddhistdoor.net* Sept. 12; Joint Statement of October 11 on the websites of the two Karmapas: www.karmapa.org/joint-statement-of-his-holiness-trinley-thaye-dorje-and-his-holiness-ogyen-trinley-dorje/ and <https://kagyuoffice.org/joint-statement-of-his-holiness-ogyen-trinley-dorje-and-his-holiness-trinley-thaye-dorje/>).

October 25-30, 2018:

The *Global Times* and Human Rights Watch report that the Chinese authorities are sending specially trained Tibetan monks and nuns into the monasteries to propagate government policies

Teams of “prestigious monks, legal professionals and officials” have been sent to the temples in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) to teach monks about the legislation and its enforcement, the semi-official Chinese *Global Times* (*GT*) said on October 25. Earlier, the *GT* had reported that Buddhist monks and nuns “tasked with spreading government policies” in the TAR had been trained in Lhasa from May 31 to June 2, 2018, in order “to strengthen their political beliefs.” According to Human Rights Watch, it

is unlikely that the monks selected for such training would have been able to refuse to participate. The *GT* quoted Xiong Kunxin of Minzu University of China as saying that it was more effective to spread government policy by using Buddhist “facilitators” among the monks and nuns, since they “have a better understanding of the thoughts and habits of their own group.” The *GT* also said that after the 19th Party Congress in 2017, “more than 20,000 party cadres in Tibet were sent to local villages, 7,000 to temples to preach the spirit” of the Party Congress.

Human Rights Watch further reported that the authorities have recently stopped allowing Tibetan monks who have acquired the rank of Geshe in Indian exile monasteries from functioning as teachers in monasteries in Tibet. The rank of Geshe is Tibetan Buddhism’s highest academic qualification. The reason given is that for some time now a national program had been initiated by the Chinese Buddhist Association for the formation of Geshe (globaltimes.cn June 4; Oct. 25; hrw.org Oct. 30).

October 28–30, 2018:

5th World Buddhist Forum meets in Putian

According to Chinese state media, more than a thousand participants from 55 nations, including both Buddhists and researchers into Buddhism, came to take part in the event in the coastal province of Fujian. Like the previous four World Buddhist Forums (2006, 2009, 2012, 2015), this year’s event was organized by the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) and the China Religious Culture Communication Association. The theme was “Exchange with Mutual Learning: Middle Way for Perfect Harmony.” A main forum and seven sub-forums covered topics such as “Buddhism and the 21st-century maritime Silk Road,” “Buddhism and environment protection” and also “Buddhism and charity.” At the end, a declaration was issued. Wang Zuo’an – deputy minister of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party and head of the National Religious Affairs Administration – gave a speech in his role as head of one of the co-organizers, the China Religious Culture Communication Association. In it, he said his association, along with the CBA and the Buddhist organizations of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, will continue to hold the World Buddhist Forums and intends to make them “the most influential multilateral dialogue mechanism of world Buddhism” (german.china.org.cn Oct. 30; globaltimes.cn Oct. 29; xinhuanet.com Oct. 30).

On the website of the CBA, there is a link to a sub-page on the 5th World Buddhist Forum: www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=660&id=40217. For the 4th World Buddhist Forum of 2015 see *RCTC* 2016, No. 1, p. 8.

Islam

October 20–21, 2018:

Conference in Xi’an on “Researching Islam in the New Age”

This was the Fourth National Conference on Islamic Studies. Three panels discussed twelve different themes revolving around “Islam in the New Age” and its indigenous characteristics; the Silk Road Initiative; the common destiny of humanity; new perspectives in Islamic research; Sino-Arab strategic partnership; Islam and Confucianism and resistance to the discourse hegemony of the West. Organizers were the Islam Research Unit of the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Institute of Western China and Border Regions of Shaanxi Normal University. The third co-organizer was the Expert Committee on Islam of the Chinese Association for Religious Studies, founded in August 2018. According to the conference report, the purpose of this new Expert Committee, in following the course “Let a hundred flowers bloom, let one hundred schools compete”

(sic!), is to coordinate the research of domestic and foreign scholars on Islamic topics in an interdisciplinary and multi-faceted way, taking Chinese Islamic Studies to a new level in a new age. According to the conference report, Chinese Islamic research is at a crucial stage: The fragmented system of scientific disciplines does not meet the needs of the time, which call for the deployment of “big research.” Chinese Islamic studies need to bring together experts in ethnic and religious matters, in international relations, in language and culture, regions and states, security and anti-terrorism in order to serve the state’s development strategy – explains the conference report (iwr.cass.cn Nov. 2).

Xinjiang / Islam

October 9, 2018:

Revision of the Regulations on De-Extremification of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region “legalizes” re-education centers

In the revised version of the “Regulations on De-Extremification of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” 新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例, the use of so-called “vocational education and training centers” (职业技能教育培训中心) was adopted as one possible measure. Article 17 of the revised text states that people’s governments at and above the county level can set up “institutions and management authorities for transformation through education, such as vocational education and training centers, to educate and transform those who are under the influence of extremism.” Article 14 mentions as the content of the transformation by education “a combination of education in rule of law with activities that support this education,” ideological education, psychological support, behavioral corrections, the study of the common language and writing of the country [i.e., standard Chinese]. Article 21 mentions “authorities for the management of transformation through education” (教育转化管理部门), whose task it is to coordinate the various institutions and bodies involved. The revision, adopted by the Standing Committee of the Xinjiang People’s Congress on October 9, came into effect that same day (text at www.guancha.cn/politics/2018_10_10_474949.shtml). For the content of the Regulations on De-Extremification of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region adopted on 29 March 2017, see *RCTC* 2017, No 2, pp. 7-8.

Commentators saw the revision of the regulations as a belated “legalization” of the re-education camps in Xinjiang, where hundreds of thousands and perhaps even up to 1 million people are being held. Eva Pils of King’s College London told the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) that the revised text “completely fails to acknowledge that there are internment camps where people are held coercively against their will.” She further pointed out that the document did not contain any options for lodging an appeal or give details as to how long someone could be interned. Pils also expressed concern that Xinjiang could serve as “trial ground” for future nation-wide legislation. According to the SCMP, Li Lifan, an expert on Central Asia at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that the revision represents a timely legal backing for countering terrorism. She pointed out the threat posed by Chinese citizens who had fought for the Islamic State in Syria.

Chinese media did not at first report within China on the re-education centers in Xinjiang, however, beginning in mid-October, a number of reports appeared in the Chinese media that painted a positive image of these institutions. Shohrat Zakir, head of the Xinjiang government, said in an interview given to *Xinhua* that the vocational education and training centers are “people-centered,” and that many trainees who were previously affected by extremist thought would now realize “that life can be so colorful.” He stressed that public security in Xinjiang has improved significantly (*BBC Monitoring* Oct. 24; *South China Morning Post* Oct. 13; *The Washington Post* Oct. 16; *Xinhua* Oct. 16).

November 6, 2018:

China defends its education centers in Xinjiang before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva

In its report for the Universal Periodic Review, China had stated that it was making nationwide progress in both education and health care. Representatives from North American and European countries called on China to end the internment of Uyghurs and other members of minority groups and to respect freedom of religion, expression and association. According to the *New York Times*, China's deputy foreign minister Le Yucheng, who led the Chinese delegation, dismissed these accusations, calling the education centers a preventive measure to deter people from terrorism and enable them to fit into society. The *New York Times* also reported that criticism of the re-education camps came almost exclusively from western nations, while representatives from Africa or the Middle East praised China's economic progress. James Leibold of La Trobe University in Australia told the *New York Times* that it would be far more damaging for China if Muslim countries would begin to consider such detentions unacceptable (*New York Times* Nov. 6).

November 15, 2018:

Reuters tells of a joint letter by diplomats of 15 Western countries on the situation in Xinjiang

According to *Reuters*, 15 ambassadors stationed in Beijing called for a conversation with Xinjiang party leader Chen Quanguo. The news agency reported that it had obtained a draft of the letter addressed to Chen but that it was unclear whether the letter had actually been sent. The letter bears the names of 15 ambassadors from Western countries, namely Canada, Britain, France, Switzerland, the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia, as well as Ireland, Sweden, Belgium, Norway, Estonia, Finland and Denmark, the agency said. *Reuters* described the letter as an "unusually broad and coordinated action by a group of countries over a human rights issue in China." According to *Reuters*, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that she had not seen the letter and that ambassadors were welcome to Xinjiang, but diplomats should not interfere in the internal affairs of the country where they are stationed (*Global Times* Nov. 16; *Reuters* Nov. 15).

November 26, 2018:

In a joint statement, 278 "concerned scholars" from 26 countries are calling on China to end the mass internment of members of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang

The scholars, who – according to the statement – study China, the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Central Asia and other related world regions, want to express their concern about the current mass human rights abuses and deliberate attacks on indigenous cultures in Xinjiang. They are calling upon the international community to take action on this issue. They describe the mass detention without trial of about 1 million members of Muslim Turkic peoples and the severe limitations of personal freedoms by state surveillance systems for 10 million members of these peoples in Xinjiang. As regards timing, they see a connection between these measures with China's Belt and Road Initiative and the expansion of state "social management" with the social credit system. They are concerned that such extreme measures could be applied to other parts of the Chinese population in the future. They warn

that China could export such methods and technologies and that other authoritarian states could copy them if the international community does not address the situation in Xinjiang now. The statement urges states and institutions to call on China to immediately abolish the “transformation through education” detention system and asks them to impose sanctions on Chinese authorities and companies involved. They urge them to stop deporting members of the affected groups to China and to speed up asylum procedures. Academic institutions with formal partnerships in China are expected to express their concern and should even consider suspending their partnerships.

Signatories include leading Western experts on Islam in China, such as Dru Gladney and Michael Dillon. As of December 9, 2018, 601 scientists from 39 countries had already signed the statement. The text and list of signatories can be found at <https://concernedscholars.home.blog/>

Christianity

November 16, 2018:

AsiaNews: More and more churches are being forced to fly Chinese flags and even put up portraits of Mao and Xi Jinping



The sanctuary of a Protestant church, decorated with the portraits of Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong left and right of the cross and the national flag. Photo: *AsiaNews* / Internet.

of an apparently Protestant church with the national flag on the side and the portraits of Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong on the left and right of the central cross. On the second, above the sideboard of a presumably Catholic household, a large Xi poster hangs next to a smaller image of Christ.

Ever since the official organizations of the five religions published a joint appeal on July 31, 2018 to hoist the national flag at all religious sites (see *RCTC* 2018, No. 4, pp. 6-7), growing numbers of reports from all over China indicate that more and more municipal authorities are demanding that flagpoles be erected in front of the churches and that the flags should be hoisted. The same thing is happening to temples and mosques. In some cases, churches and Christians are even forced to hang flags and portraits of Mao and Xi Jinping in the sanctuary or in their homes. *AsiaNews* released two photos on November 16, one showing the sanctuary

Protestantism

November 27-29, 2018:

New Church Constitution for Chinese Protestant Church – New leadership of Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council

On November 27, the working committee of the combined council of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council discussed and approved a revised version of the Church Consti-

tution for the Chinese Protestant Church 中国基督教教会规章. The current version dates from the year 2008.

At their National Assembly on November 29, the representatives of Chinese Protestantism elected a new leadership for the two official Protestant governing bodies. The new chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement is Pastor Xu Xiaohong 徐晓鸿. The Rev. Kan Baoping 阚保平 remains in an important capacity as one of its nine vice-chairmen. The post of secretary general has been given to Pastor Gu Mengfei 顾梦飞.

The new president of the National Christian Council is Pastor Wu Wei 吴巍. The director-general and also one of nine vice-presidents is Pastor Shan Weixiang 单渭祥. He is well known as editor of the church magazine *Tianfeng*.

Pastor Dr. Gao Feng 高峰 has been appointed director of a new body which will operate at both the national and provincial levels. The Chinese name of this new department is: 监事会 (*jianshi hui*). In English it will be known as a “Supervisory Board.” His deputy is Wu Jianrong who will also serve as the head of the national Chinese YMCA.

For further details see the article in *China heute* 2018, No. 4, pp. 208-209 (in German).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

September 29–30, 2018:

Bishop Han Zhihai of Lanzhou becomes Chairman of the local Patriotic Association

At a meeting of the Patriotic Association in Lanzhou on September 29 and 30, representatives elected Bishop Han Zhihai as their Chairman. The then “underground” Bishop Han, secretly ordained bishop of Lanzhou in 2003, was officially installed on 10 November 2017 as the local Ordinary of the Diocese of Lanzhou. As reported by *AsiaNews* at the time, religious officials had previously described the installation to the priests and religious sisters of Lanzhou as the result of negotiations with the Vatican. Bishop Han is said to have worked for a long time in order to achieve recognition by the Chinese government. Speaking immediately after his recent election as Chairman of the local Patriotic Association, Bishop Han emphasized that the Catholic Church of Lanzhou must “adhere to the principles of independence and autonomy,” “love the homeland and [...] love the Church,” *AsiaNews* said, “knowingly accepting the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party” and “carrying out religious activities according to the law” (*AsiaNews* Oct. 17; *RCTC* 2018, No. 1, pp. 15-16).

October 11, 2018:

Hebei Province: Four underground priests in police detention – Unsuccessful attempts by the State to convince them to accept official registration

Four diocesan priests from the dioceses of Xiwanzi and Xuanhua in Northern Hebei Province were arrested by the police in October. Two of them, Fathers Zhang Guilin and Wang Zhong, belong to the Diocese of Xiwanzi. Fathers Su Guipeng and Zhao He are from the Diocese of Xuanhua. Following their detention on October 11, Zhang and Wang were taken to several places to be, according to *Asia News*, “indoctrinated on the religious policy of the Chinese government” because they rejected membership in the Patriotic Association. According to *UCAN*, they were forced to meet with bishops from

the official Church who “tried to persuade them to accept the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration of the church, to apply for priest certification and to switch the official church.” Only then would they be considered legitimate clerics by the government. Father Su was placed under house arrest on October 13, and Father Zhao was taken to a hotel on October 24.

In a campaign, actually intensified after the Sino-Vatican Agreement, the government has been attempting in forced “study courses” to persuade underground priests under intense pressure to join the Patriotic Association. According to *AsiaNews*, many are ready to accept registration with the government but do not want to join the Patriotic Association (*AsiaNews* Nov. 5, 14; *UCAN* Nov. 2, 21). Still remaining in custody or disappeared from sight are Baoding’s 86-year-old underground Bishop Su Zhimin and 47-year-old underground priest Fr. Liu Honggeng, also from Baoding. Fr. Liu was abducted three years ago by the authorities, and Bishop Su was arrested in 1997 (*UCAN* Oct. 5).

October 18, 2018:

Symposium in Beijing to mark the 50th anniversary of the “Sigao (思高) Bible”

Forty people attended the symposium organized by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference on the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Chinese Studium Biblicum Bible Version (“Sigao Bible”). It is the edition of the Bible most commonly used by Chinese Catholics. The Sigao Bible was translated by Blessed Gabriele Allegra, OFM, with his team from Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, first in Beijing and then in Hong Kong. It was the first complete Catholic translation of the Bible into Chinese. Bishop Guo Jincai of Chengde, Secretary General of the Bishops’ Conference and officially recognized by Pope Francis as bishop in September of 2018, mentioned in his opening address that since 1993, 4.5 million copies of various editions of the Studium Biblicum version have been printed in mainland China. At the symposium, members expressed, among other things, the desire to establish a Bible Society on the mainland as well as the desire for greater use of social media. Bishop Shen Bin, Vice-President of the Patriotic Association and of the official Bishops’ Conference, said in his concluding address he hoped that the proposals made at the symposium would be implemented in the future and that he was interested in hearing feedback from the more than 40 Chinese priests and sisters who have pursued Scriptural Studies abroad. Among those taking part in the symposium in Beijing were representatives of China’s eight official major seminaries as well as the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies and Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan’an. Studium Biblicum did not send any representatives to the symposium. On its Facebook page, the Institute announced that it would not be organizing a celebration on its own nor would it attend the events in Beijing, Hong Kong and Taiwan (*UCAN* Oct. 31; see also *China heute* 2007, No. 6, pp. 205-206 [in German]).

October 26, 2018:

***AsiaNews*: A priest of the official Church from Henan has been temporarily detained and his priesthood suspended, presumably for his work with young people.**

Father Liu Jiangdong from Zhengzhou Diocese in Henan Province was arrested in early September and held for one week, allegedly for having “unordered financial accounts” and having “used public money for private purposes,” according to *AsiaNews*. He was accused of “having violated religious politics and regulations on religious activities.” On the last Sunday of September, government officials announced

in the church that Fr. Liu would be suspended from the priesthood. In addition, local authorities dismantled the cross from atop the central tower of his parish church.

Fr. Liu was ordained in 2005 and was pastor of Sacred Heart Church of Zhengzhou. He was very active in youth work, organizing prayer meetings, catechism courses, young people's meetings to discuss vocations, and encouraging youth to do charitable work, despite recent bans on religious education for children and adolescents under the age of 18 in Henan Province. To *AsiaNews*, another priest from Henan confirmed that Fr. Liu had been removed from his position because "he did too much: he founded so many communities of young people and old people. And since he does not follow the regulations, the government is angry" (*AsiaNews* Oct. 26).

October 28, 2018:

"First Summit of Catholic Entrepreneurs" in Beijing



Young Catholics at the job fair held on October 28. Photo: chinacatholic.org.

Two hundred Catholic entrepreneurs from 11 Chinese provinces and municipalities who have established their own businesses in Beijing met in the Niufang Church in Daxing District, Beijing. Their Sunday Mass together was followed by a job fair, at which those entrepreneurs present introduced their companies. Many young Catholics took the opportunity to learn about the companies and to apply for possible future employment in them. In the afternoon, ten Catholic entrepreneurs gave talks about their experiences with business and their faith and a panel discussion followed.

The summit meeting was initiated by Fr. Liu Zhe, pastor of the Niufang Church (five other priests from

Beijing and Hebei were present). Among the organizers of the summit were two dedicated Catholic business women: Huang Xiuhong and Li Wenxiang. The purpose of the meeting was – as the report on *Xinde's* website suggests – that in the conduct of their business Catholic entrepreneurs should always put their faith first, share common values and support each other. At the end of the event, the "Niufang Parish Beijing Diocese Entrepreneur Association" was founded.

When interviewed by a journalist from *Xinde*, some of the participating entrepreneurs praised the idea of the job fair. They said that mutual interest among Catholic employees or employers is great, because "people who believe keep a (moral) bottom line in their actions." One has to integrate the faith into the business process to be light and salt, according to one manager. Everyone agreed that such meetings should be continued (chinacatholic.org Oct. 30).

November 23-24, 2018:

Underground Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin and Fr. Lu Danhua have been released from detention

Bishop Shao of the Diocese of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province was taken away by government officials of Yueqing's Religious Affairs Bureau on November 9, 2018, and held for 14 days. He was probably detained for having celebrated a Mass at the grave of Bishop Lin Xili, which is located in Yueqing. Bishop Lin Xili was the first bishop of Wenzhou. Bishop Shao had celebrated Mass for 500 faithful gathered at Bishop Xili's gravesite. On November 23, the 55-year-old bishop returned home. It was the eighth time,

according to *UCAN*, that Shao had been arrested or taken away since his ordination to the priesthood in 1999, with the reason for his detention partly given as “study or tourism trips.” The last time that Bishop Shao first disappeared and then was under house arrest outside of his diocese was from May 18, 2017 to January 3, 2018. In June of 2017, both the German Ambassador in Beijing and the Holy See had called for Bishop Shao’s release in public statements. Among the reasons for his detention were attempts made in vain to exert pressure on him to join the Patriotic Association.

Diocesan priest Lu Danhua had already been taken away from his parish in Qingtian by religious officials on December 29, 2017, and brought to an unknown location. According to a source available to *UCAN*, he was allegedly housed in a luxury hotel near the church for the whole time until his release on November 24. The hotel was usually used to monitor the behavior of government officials accused of violating the rules of the Communist Party. Sources claimed that Fr. Lu had been arrested for celebrating Mass illegally. Fr. Lu, who had been ordained by Bishop Shao in 2016, is the only priest of the neighboring Diocese of Lishui, which is co-administered by the Bishop of Wenzhou (*AsiaNews* Nov. 13; *UCAN* Nov. 13, 30).

Sino-Vatican Relations

October 2018:

Pope Francis and East Asia – two invitations, one travel plan

The Office of the President of South Korea made the announcement on October 9 that at the inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in September of the same year, South Korean President Moon Jae-in had proposed to North Korean President Kim Jong-un to meet Pope Francis. According to an *UCAN* report, Moon had told Kim that Pope Francis is very interested in peace on the Korean peninsula. Kim Jong Un is reported to have answered that he would “ardently welcome the Pope if he visits Pyongyang.” During the summit, Kim also spoke with South Korean Archbishop Kim Hee-joong, chairman of the Korean Episcopal Conference. According to an article in the *South China Morning Post*, President Moon said after his audience with Pope Francis on October 18 that the Pope had agreed to accept if he received a formal invitation.

Taiwan’s Vice-President, Chen Chien-jen, who attended the canonization of Pope Paul VI on October 14th, used the occasion to once again invite Pope Francis to Taiwan. However, on October 18, Vatican spokesman Greg Burke said that no such visit by the Holy Father was being planned.

According to *Vatican News*, on September 9, 2018, Pope Francis told representatives of a Japanese association that he would like to visit Japan next year (press.vatican.va Oct. 18; *South China Morning Post* Oct. 19; *UCAN* Oct. 10; vaticannews.va Sept. 12.).

For the invitation to the People’s Republic of China by Bishop Guo Jincai see the entry of October 15, 2018 in this section.

October / November 2018:

Following the Sino-Vatican Agreement, *AsiaNews* and *UCAN* publish comments from within the Chinese Church – Feelings of “confusion and loss” are being reported among many in the underground

Father John, an underground priest, told *UCAN* that before and after the signing of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops [on September 22, 2018], underground priests in his area held several private meetings to discuss the

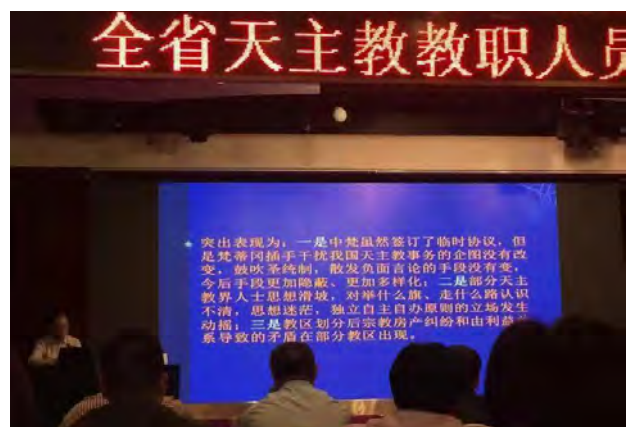
situation. They unanimously decided that “if we are to become official, we will act together; in other words, if the Pope wants us to be open, we will be open together; otherwise, we will together keep in the state of being underground.” But now, John said, “we are confused.” He said that they would agree with the Pope that the agreement was concluded out of pastoral necessity, but they do not understand how the Pope could recognize those eight illegitimate bishops. Does his acceptance mean “there is no problem with the independent election and ordination of those bishops?”, Father John asked. Without religious freedom, they would not see any advantages in being “official” over continuing to evangelize in the underground Church. According to Fr. John, the agreement might actually increase the division in the Church. He told *UCAN* that since the agreement, some priests are inclined to join the Patriotic Association because they think the Pope is not against it. On the other hand, Fr. John said, some Catholics from the official Church regard underground priests who become open as being too close to the government. “With the authorities asking the church to raise the national flag and sing the national anthem, they feel the church is no longer like a church, so they choose to go underground,” Fr. John said. Several Catholic sources told *UCAN* that some underground priests had been threatened that action would be taken against their parents, or that they had been abducted and “brainwashed,” or that their parish churches had been forcibly taken away from them by the authorities. *AsiaNews* quotes underground priest Fr. Peter as saying that in particular, the Holy Father should care for those bishops who are still imprisoned. One priest from the official Church who employs the pseudonym “Zaoxu” stated that further negotiations after the agreement are extremely important. “Given that the clandestine bishops are not allowed to participate, the Conference of Chinese bishops has existed only in a nominal and instrumental way, devoid of content. Only when all the bishops, without exclusion, participate will it exist in an appropriate sense,” Zaoxu wrote in his comment which was published by *AsiaNews*. Another priest, Fr. Paul Xie, wrote that, from a human point of view, Pope Francis has taken a risky step, but “fortunately the Church is the Church of God. [...] The Church in China needs to learn from the faith of Abraham” (*AsiaNews* Sept. 10, Nov. 19, 28; *UCAN* Nov. 7, 30).

October 8–11, 2018:

Political training for Catholic clergy in Hubei: Representative of the provincial religious affairs authority warns against attempts by the Vatican to meddle and by Catholics who do not know “which flag to hold up”

According to *UCAN*, 80 priests, sisters and lay people participated in the government’s political education seminar for Catholic personnel throughout Hubei province. During the seminar, Xiong Xiaqi, deputy director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Hubei Province, gave a lecture. A photo of the seminar session depicting a screen with one of the slides of Xiong’s PowerPoint presentation, showing readable text, has somehow found its way onto the internet. In this slide, Xiong raises three points:

“First, although China and the Vatican have signed the provisional agreement, the attempts of the Vatican to interfere in and



Political Training for Catholic clergy in Hubei: The photo shows one PowerPoint (PPT) slide of the lecture given by Xiong Xiaqi, deputy director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Hubei Province. For a translation of the slide contents, see left. Photo: *AsiaNews* / Internet.

to disturb the affairs of our country's Catholicism remain unchanged. Their methods of propagating Church hierarchy and disseminating negative opinions are unchanged. In the future, these methods will be even more hidden and even more diverse. Secondly, the thinking of a part of the people in the Catholic circles is slipping. They are not clearly aware of which flag they should be holding up or which way they should go. Their thinking is confused, their standpoint on the principles of independence, autonomy and self-government is shaken. Thirdly, after the division of dioceses, disputes over religious property and interests have led to contradictions in some of the dioceses" (*UCAN* Oct. 17; the photo with the PPT slide screen was published by *AsiaNews* Oct. 11).

October 14–16, 2018:

Three Chinese bishops take part in the “Bridges of Peace” in Bologna

Representatives of different religions and cultures came together for the meeting “Bridges of Peace: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue,” organized by the Community of Sant’Egidio in cooperation with the Archdiocese of Bologna. As reported on the website of the Sant’Egidio Community, it was the “32nd meeting in the Spirit of Assisi, started by St. John Paul II in 1986 and continued by the Community of Sant’Egidio.” Three Chinese bishops from the People’s Republic of China were also invited to the meeting: Bishop Anthony Dang Mingyan from Xi’an (Shaanxi), Bishop Joseph Shen Bin from Haimen (Jiangsu) and Bishop Joseph Yang Yongqiang from Zhoucun (Shandong); the three were accompanied by a priest, Fr. Zhang Qiulin. Bishop Shen spoke publicly twice, once from the podium, speaking on the subject of “Solidarity between generations,” and a second time before a large audience assembled for the closing ceremony in Bologna’s Piazza Maggiore. The delegation arrived in Rome a few days earlier, just before Bishop Yang Xiaoting and Bishop Guo Jincai, who took part in the first 12 days of the Youth Synod, returned to China on October 15 (*AsiaNews* Oct. 21; santegidio.org Sept. 23; see also entry of October 15 in this column). The speeches of Bishop Shen are available at: <https://preghieraperlapace.santegidio.org/pageID/30660/langID/en/text/2804/Speech-of-Joseph-Shen-Bin.html> (Bishop Shen’s presentation to the plenary on Oct. 15); <https://preghieraperlapace.santegidio.org/pageID/30660/langID/en/text/3000/Speech-of-Joseph-Shen-Bin.html> (Bishop Shen’s speech in Piazza Maggiore on Oct. 16); <https://preghieraperlapace.santegidio.org/pageID/30660/langID/en/video/77276/Video-della-Cerimonia-Finale.html> (Video of the entire closing ceremony).

October 15, 2018:

Chinese bishops return home after the Synod on Youth. They invited the Holy Father to visit China

After having attended 12 days of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the topic “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” (from October 3–28), Bishop Guo Jincai of Chengde and Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan’an returned to China on October 15 before the conclusion of the Synod. According to the October 16 issue of *Avvenire*, the newspaper of the Italian Bishops’ Conference, October 15 was the date that had been set in advance for their return. Bishop Guo is one of the seven bishops whose situation was regularized by the Pope on September 22 and is currently serving as Secretary General of the official Bishops’ Conference. Bishop Yang Xiaoting was consecrated in 2010 with both papal and state approval. He is one of the Vice-Chairmen of the Bishops’ Conference and head of the commission for theological research. The two were the first Chinese bishops ever to attend a synod in Rome.

In an interview with *Avvenire*, Bishop Guo said that when Pope Francis greeted them at the beginning of the Synod it was as if 70 years of suffering had disappeared in a moment. He said that they stayed at Santa Marta guesthouse where they could live together in daily life with the Pope. “He said that he loves us, loves our country and always prays a lot for the Christians in China. ... During those days we have invited Pope Francis to come to China. We are waiting for him. Only the Lord knows when that will happen. But we pray for it, we pray the rosary, so that this moment might come soon, just as our presence here once seemed impossible but has now become possible.” Bishop Guo said that the Church is one big family, with one baptism and one faith. “We are witnesses of one Church united in diversity,” he continued. The youth and related questions, including political problems, were not touched upon in the interview.

In Rome the two bishops also celebrated Mass with Chinese Catholics. The Mass was celebrated in the Church of St. Bernardino of Siena (*South China Morning Post* Oct. 16; *Vatican Insider* Oct. 16; www.avvenire.it/chiesa/pagine/i-vescovi-cinesi-al-sinodo-esserci-stato-un-miracolo Oct. 16; see also *RCTC* 2018, No. 4, pp. 26-27).

October 29, 2018:

The semi-official Chinese *Global Times* takes a look at the future of Catholic underground bishops in the wake of the “Provisional Agreement”

On September 22, 2018, the day the “Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops” was signed by the foreign ministers of China and the Vatican, seven in the Church’s view illegitimate bishops were recognized by Pope Francis – however, as the *Global Times* (*GT*) rightly notes, “what will happen to the over 30 underground bishops in China is still unclear.” Francesco Sisci, a senior researcher at China’s Renmin University, told the *GT* that the problem was “what kind of recognition” was acceptable to both the government and the bishops; he said that “This is what Beijing and Rome are working on now.” Wang Meixiu, an expert on Catholicism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the negotiations on the underground bishops would be complicated and time consuming, since changes having to do with Church property and [the division of] dioceses will likely be involved. According to Wang, underground bishops of some dioceses could be demoted, transferred to other dioceses or asked to retire. One priest from Mindong, Fr. Luo Wen, is quoted by the *GT* as saying that the underground community of the Diocese of Mindong is prepared for the possibility that Bishop Guo Xijin will be demoted from his current rank of “ordinary of the diocese” to that of an “auxiliary bishop” (globaltimes.cn Oct. 29).

Bishop Guo, who is not recognized by the government, has been the ordinary bishop of Mindong, to which office he had been appointed by the Pope. In the eyes of the government, however, Bishop Zhan Silu, who had been consecrated without papal approval but on September 22 has been recognized by Pope Francis, is the legitimate local bishop (ordinary) of Mindong. There can be only one “local bishop” in any diocese. [Update: According to reports, the transfer of the position of local bishop from Msgr. Guo to Msgr. Zhan in Mindong Diocese has been realized in mid-December, 2018, when Archbishop Celli visited Beijing and brought the relevant nomination documents from the Vatican to the bishops involved; see *UCAN* Dec. 19.]

Regarding the increasing pressure being placed on the Catholic communities in the “Underground” see the entries of October 11, 2018, and November 23–24, 2018, in the section “Catholic Church.”

Hong Kong

November 19, 2018:

Hong Kong: Opening of trial against leaders of the 2014 “Umbrella Movement”

Accused of conspiracy and disturbance of public order by organizing blockades and sit-ins in various parts of the city, nine leading members of the 2014 pro-democracy demonstration movement are on trial in Hong Kong. Among them are the leaders of the protest movement known as “Occupy Central,” founded by them in 2011. They include law professor Benny Tai, sociologist Chan Kin-man and Baptist pastor Chu Yiu-ming. Two of the other six defendants are Tanya Chan and Shiu Ka-chun, both members of the Hong Kong parliament. All of the defendants might face long prison sentences. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, including many high school and university students, literally paralyzed the city for 79 days in the fall of 2014. Among the underlying causes for the protests were calls for more democracy and free elections in Hong Kong.

According to *Der Tagesspiegel* on November 19, Benny Tai told the *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*: “I have confidence that the courts in Hong Kong are still independent and just. But I am preparing for the worst.” When they proposed civil disobedience at that time, they were prepared to go to court, according to *Der Tagesspiegel*. Tai has been pessimistic about developments in Hong Kong, which is becoming increasingly “authoritarian.” At the start of the trial, all nine pleaded “Not guilty!” to the charges (*AsiaNews* Nov. 19; *Der Tagesspiegel* Nov. 19; *South China Morning Post* Nov. 20; see also *China heute* 2014, No. 3, pp. 145-149 [in German]).

Taiwan

October 14–18, 2018:

First interreligious meeting of Christian and Buddhist nuns

“Contemplative Action and Active Contemplation: Buddhist and Christian Nuns in Dialogue” was the theme of the first joint international conference of nuns of both religions, which took place at Foguangshan near Kaohsiung, Taiwan. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the Association of Major Superiors of Religious Women in Taiwan, Foguangshan Buddhist Monastery as well as Dialogue Interreligieux/Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIM MID) were the organizers of the conference. Seventy Buddhist and Catholic nuns from Taiwan in particular, but also other countries such as from South Korea, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Cambodia, the Philippines, Brazil, Italy, Germany, Norway and the USA took part in the dialogue. Also present was a delegation from the World Council of Churches in Geneva. The conference ended with a final statement which, among other things, called for the continuation of interreligious dialogue (*AsiaNews* Oct. 24; *Vatican Insider* Oct. 17).

October 24, 2018:

Civil groups protest against the draft of a law on religion

On October 24, 2018, about 50 civilian groups demanded the recall of the bill for a new “Basic Law on Religion” (宗教基本法), which in their opinion would have given religions a status above Taiwan’s

constitution. A short time before that, the Legislative Yuan had canceled a reading of the draft due to public indignation.

According to Wang Kuo-yan (翁國彥), chairman of the Taiwan Association of Human Rights, the draft is based on a misinterpretation of the constitution. Wang said that article 490 guarantees the protection of religious freedom, namely the right to choose religious denominations or religions, but it does not place religious freedom above other human rights or grant privileges to religious groups that other organizations do not have. The bill provides for “religious autonomy” (宗教自主權), which would exclude religious organizations from government oversight in many areas, such as land use, education, human resources and financial management, according to the *Taipei Times*. Many people are worried that this could lead to corruption, environmental damage, religious discrimination and other human rights violations in the name of religion, the newspaper said. Since the draft exempts religious organizations from the ban on professional discrimination, they may refuse to employ people who do not conform to their teachings, such as gays and lesbians, or women who have aborted, said the manager of the Gender Equality Education Platform, Chang Ming-hsu (張明旭). Another critic claimed that the bill could even encourage illegal land use by granting religious communities the legal use of public land that they had previously seized illegally and had held for five years. “This draft bill is ridiculous,” since it undermines or ignores many other laws, mocked DPP deputy Yu Mei-nu (尤美女).

The draft was originally introduced by three KMT members and one DPP member of the Legislative Yuan. It was supported by more than 30 other legislators. Due to the growing popular anger, however, 17 legislators of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party DPP withdrew their support on 24 October. Whether the draft will be introduced again is currently up in the air (*Taipei Times* Oct. 25).

Willi Boehi

November 24, 2018:

In a referendum, the Taiwanese vote against same-sex marriage

In a referendum, held alongside local elections, the Taiwanese voted on several proposals from various activist groups. The Taiwanese Constitutional Court ruled in May of 2017 that the current legal arrangement of marriage, i.e., that marriage can only be between one man and one woman, violates the constitutional principle of equality. It gave the government two years to redraft the law, with the two options of opening up marriage for all or creating the possibility for registered partnerships. If the legislature does not comply with this, “the court still declares marriages between same-sex partners valid,” according to the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on May 25, 2017.

According to the official referendum results, 67.26% voted against opening up marriage to homosexual couples, while 72.48% voted to limit the definition of marriage to one man and one woman. Voters also voted against introducing the topic of LGBT relationships into the school curricula. Though the result of the referendum is not binding, it nonetheless forces the government to take action. – In early November, Archbishop John Hung Shan-chuan of Taipei spoke out against any discrimination against same-sex persons, but at the same time he expressed his unequivocal opposition to same-sex marriage. The referendum also came under pressure from other opponents of same-sex marriage, among them Christians and Buddhists (*CNA Deutsch* Nov. 28; *EDA* Nov. 26; *Frankfurter Rundschau* May 25, 2017; *SRF* Nov. 24; *UCAN* Nov. 22).

Including one contribution each by Willi Boehi and Isabel Friemann

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