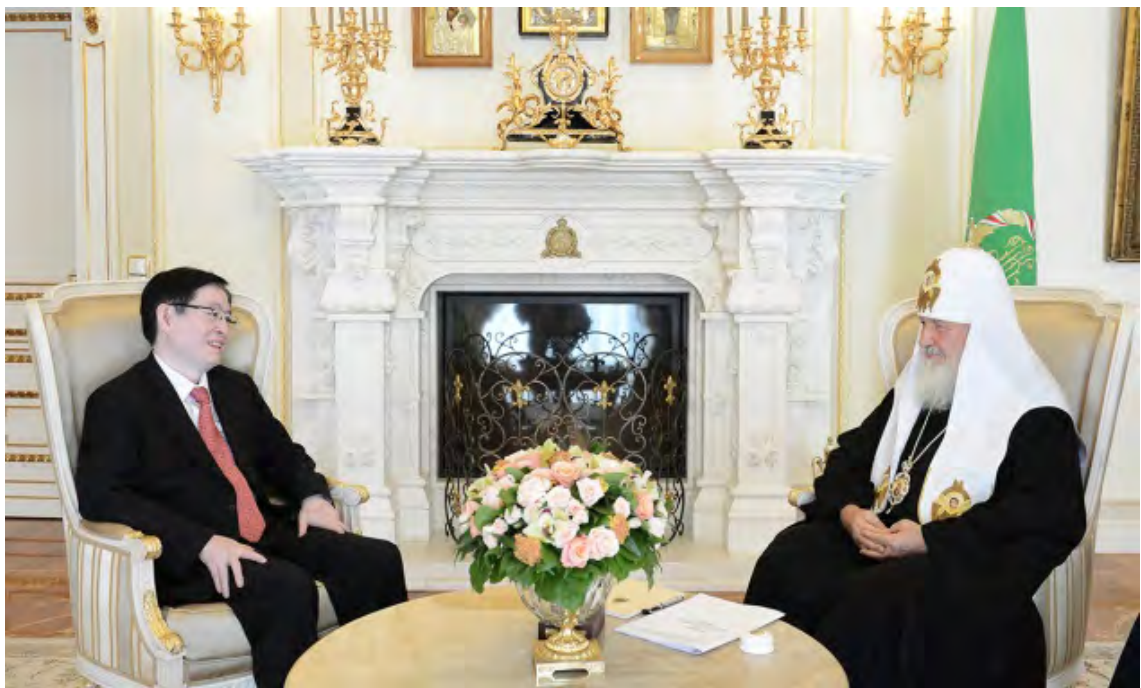


Orthodox Priests for China: First Ordination

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Lately the Orthodox Church in China celebrated the first priestly ordination in their recent history. The Russian Orthodox Church has long been pointing to the need for new Orthodox priests from China to accompany the parishes of the around 15,000 Chinese Orthodox Christians. The Chinese government hesitated to give its approval, even though a number of Chinese students have completed their theology studies in Russia over the past ten years. Now the first Chinese priest has been ordained for Hong Kong and the Orthodox Church hopes, after lengthy discussion with the Chinese government, that it will soon be possible to have priestly ordinations on the Mainland as well.



Wang Zu'an, Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, visits Patriarch Cyril in Moscow.
Photo: mospat.ru.

The breakthrough came after the visit of Moscow Patriarch Cyril to China in May 2013 (see *China heute* 2013, No. 2, pp. 73-75 [in German]). The decisive discussions took place in July 2014, when an official delegation of the State Administration [Bureau] for Religious Affairs of PR China, headed by Director Wang Zu'an, went to Russia at the invitation of Moscow Patriarch Cyril. Already during the visit to St. Petersburg and the meeting with

the Metropolitan bishop of that City on July 13, 2014, Wang thanked the Russian Orthodox Church and the City government for their support and accompaniment of the Chinese seminarian Aleksander Yu Shi, who absolved his theology studies in St. Petersburg (another Chinese seminarian sent to Moscow at the same time had to break off his studies for personal reasons). As Wang said, in future “naturally not just one but several Chinese seminarians” are to be sent to Russia for their studies. Wang expressed hopes for further collaboration with the Russian spiritual seminaries for the training and he stated officially that in the following days in Moscow the ordination of the Chinese seminarian as a deacon would be discussed. A day later, on July 14, during a meeting with the Governor of St. Petersburg, he added that in Moscow he would be discussing the preparation of more priests for the revived Orthodox Church.

The actual discussions with the Metropolitan Bishop Hilarion and his co-workers from the department for external relations of the Moscow patriarchate took place in Moscow on July 16, one day after Wang Zuo’an had met with the Moscow Patriarch Cyril, whose visit to China and meeting (as the first religious leader) with President Xi Jinping he described as “a very significant event, not only in the history of Russian-Chinese collaboration in the religious sphere, but altogether in the history of Russian-Chinese relations, in which the Russian Orthodox Church plays an important part.”

Two months later – on September 27, Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, during the Liturgy in the University Church of St. John the Apostle in St. Petersburg – Aleksander Yu Shi was ordained deacon, the first Chinese since the Cultural Revolution to be ordained. Before the actual Liturgy, he also received the minor orders of lector and sub-diaconate according to the Orthodox tradition. The ceremony was carried out by the rector of the Theological Academy, Archbishop Ambrosius of Peterhof, accompanied by other priests of the Russian and Finnish Church.



Aleksander Yu Shi (center) is ordained deacon in St. Petersburg. Photo: spda.ru.

Two choirs, directed by Fr. Matfej Sharov and Sr. Ksenija Kanshina, provided the musical setting. During the Liturgy prayers were offered for persecuted Christians throughout the world and especially for the suffering people in Donetsk and Lugansk. Finally the newly ordained deacon was blessed by the Archbishop and he received the Gospels and deacon's orarion (vestment). A few days later the new deacon already travelled to Harbin where, on October 14, Feast of the Protection and Intercession of Mary (Pokrov), he conducted devotions to the Mother of God. Two days previously, with the permission of the authorities, Fr. Dmitrij Fedorin of Vladivostok celebrated the Orthodox Liturgy with more than 50 of the faithful and prayed in the Orthodox section of the Huangshan cemetery for the Russian and Chinese Orthodox Christians buried there. Exactly 30 years have passed since the first Orthodox Liturgy in China after the Cultural Revolution was celebrated in Harbin by Fr. Gregor Zhu Shipu, who then continued the pastoral work until his death in the year 2000. In the last fourteen years the Orthodox faithful were left on their own.



Orthodox Christians in Harbin celebrating devotions to the Mother of God with the newly ordained deacon Aleksander Yu Shi. Photo: mospat.ru.

Apart from the new deacon from the Mainland there are, or rather were, two more seminarians from Hong Kong, Ambrosius Lin and Anatolij Kung, on their way to the priesthood. Both belong to the parish of Sts. Peter and Paul of the Russian Orthodox Church in Hong Kong and are taking a correspondence course as part of the program for foreign students of the Spiritual Seminary in Habarovsk, that provides especially seminarians from South East Asia with an introduction to the Russian language and Orthodox culture. On October 6, 2014, in the chapel of St. Innocent of Moscow, in Habarovsk, Ambrosius and Anatolij received the minor order of lector from the Vice Rector of the seminary, Bishop Efrem Prosjanok.



Seminarian Ambrosius Lin receiving the order of lector. Photo: pravostok.ru.

Already on December 5 one of the two – Anatolij Kung Cheung Ming (Gong Chang-ming 龔長明) – was ordained deacon and four days later on December 9 as a priest by Metropolitan Bishop Ignatius of Habarovsk. Born in 1969 in the Province of Jiangsu, the businessman lived in Moscow from 1999–2012 and was baptized in Hong Kong in 2013.



The first newly ordained Orthodox priest of China since the Cultural Revolution, Anatolij Kung Cheung Ming. Photo: pravostok.ru.

For the first time ever a Chinese citizen of Hong Kong was ordained a priest, which means a great step forward for the development of the local Church in Hong Kong and provides the people there with a possibility to hear the Word of God in their mother tongues Cantonese and Mandarin.

The new Chinese Orthodox priests expected on the Mainland would bring a new quality to the Orthodox presence in China and would somewhat lessen the problem of pastoral ministry to the Chinese faithful.

Sources: orthodox.cn (Sept. 27; Oct. 7); pravostok.ru (Oct. 7; Dec. 4 and 9); spbda.ru (Sept. 27); mitropolia.spb.ru (July 13); www.patriarchia.ru (July 14); mospat.ru (July 15; Oct. 14).