

## News Update on Religion and Church in China November 10, 2015 – March 24, 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. 1, pp. 3-17) covered the period September 18 – November 30, 2015.*

**November 10, 2015:**

### **Deputy Director of State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) announces national conference on religious works**

Chen Zongrong, one of the deputy directors of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, said at a meeting of religious department officials from all the provinces of China, held in the city of Dali, that the central authorities [of both Party and state] are laying plans for a national conference on religious work to be held this year [i.e. 2015]. He said that at present, [the SARA] is in the process of revising the current “Regulations on Religious Affairs.” During 2016, the principal task in the field of religious policy will be to make the country aware of the spirit of the national conference on religious work and of the text of the revised “Regulations,” Chen remarked ([www.sara.gov.cn](http://www.sara.gov.cn) Nov. 11, 2015).

Such national conferences on religion serve to provide readjustment on matters of religious policy, but as of the end of March 2016, the announced conference had still not taken place. [It finally was held on April 22-23, 2016.].

**December 8, 2015:**

### **Pope Francis opens Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica to begin the “Year of Mercy” – Enthusiastic participation in China**

In Mainland China’s Catholic Church, the response to the Holy Year proclaimed by Pope Francis has been very great – both in the communities of the “underground” Church as well as in those of the state-approved official Church. In many dioceses the bishops have written pastoral letters for the occasion and Holy Doors have been solemnly opened in numerous designated churches. Parishioners throughout the country have been studying the Papal Bull “*Misericordiae vultus*” (with which Pope Francis announced the extraordinary Holy Year in April 2015) and are planning further activities during the course of the year.



In the Diocese of Zhengding (Hebei Province), Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo, who is not recognized by the government, presided the opening of the Holy Door of the Cathedral in Wuqiu Village on December 15, 2015. 10.000 Catholics from various underground dioceses took part in the celebration. Police was present but did not interfere. News and Photo: *AsiaNews* Dec. 15, 2015.



Solemn opening of the "Door of Mercy" in Tianjin on January 5, 2016. Photo: [chinacatholic.org](http://chinacatholic.org).

December 23, 2015:

## Leadership of the Chinese Islamic Association holds meeting – SARA requires that they “Hold fast to Sinicization”

Among the speakers at the 3rd session of the 9th (extended) Standing Committee of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) – official umbrella organization for all Muslims in China – was Jiang Jianyong, Vice Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs. He said that since the 2nd session of the 9th Standing Committee, the CIA, following the general situation of the Party and the state, has deepened exegesis of the Qur'an, fought against religious extremism, further improved the organization of the Hajj, did a good job in social welfare and actively developed friendly exchange with foreign countries, thus serving the foreign relations of the state. Jiang called on the Muslims leaders to adhere to the principal of Sinicization and to prepare well for the 10th National Assembly of the representatives of Islam in China (www.chinaislam.net.cn Dec. 23, 2015).

December 27, 2015:

## National People's Congress passes China's first Anti-Terrorism Law

According to An Weixing, an official of the Ministry of Public Security who addressed the press conference held to mark the occasion, China is subject to a constantly growing terrorist threat. In an article published in *The Diplomat*, Zhou Zunyou of the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law, noted that “most parts of the law involve granting enormous discretionary powers to a government that already has broad, intrusive competences. These new powers will inevitably affect fundamental human rights.”

“Religion” is explicitly mentioned in some articles of the Anti-Terrorism Law (反恐怖主义法). In article 4, which outlines the strategy for combating terrorism, the law states among other things: “The State combats all forms of extremism, such as the incitement to hatred and discrimination and the promotion of violence by distorting religious teachings and other methods in order to deprive terrorism of its ideological basis” (*The Diplomat* Jan. 23, 2016; *Reuters* Dec. 28, 2015; *Xinhua* Dec. 27, 2015; the Chinese text of the law and an unofficial English translation can be found at: www.chinalawtranslate.com).

December 28, 2015:

## Former vice-governor of Ningxia Province expelled from the Party for, among other things, “superstitious activities”. New rules on disciplinary punishments

The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China has announced on its website that Bai Xueshan has been expelled from the Party because of “serious breaches of discipline.” Among other things, the Commission accused the former vice governor “of having practiced superstitious activities over a long period of time.” According to the *South China Morning Post*, which quoted *The Beijing News*, Bai was disciplined due to his “obsession with *fengshui*” – that is, with the geomantic principles that play a major role in traditional folk religiosity. He reportedly used his position as party secretary of Wuzhong City to improve the *fengshui* of the city by extending its boundaries

closer to the Yellow River and by installing fountains in various parts of the city as well as a giant bronze tripod.

On January 1, 2016, the revised “Regulations for disciplinary punishments of the Chinese Communist Party” took effect. For the first time, these regulations include punishments for Party members who organize superstitious activities or take part in them (article 58). Penalties are also provided for organizing or using religious activities to oppose the policies and decisions of the Party (article 55) as well as for organizing or attending religious secret societies or heretical organizations (article 50) (*AsiaNews* Jan. 4, 2016; [www.ccdi.gov.cn](http://www.ccdi.gov.cn) Dec. 28, 2015; *South China Morning Post* Dec. 29, 2015; *Xinhua* Dec. 28, 2015; the Chinese text of the new regulations can be found at: [www.ccdi.gov.cn/special/ljzl/tl\\_ljzl/201510/t20151022\\_63873.html](http://www.ccdi.gov.cn/special/ljzl/tl_ljzl/201510/t20151022_63873.html)).

From January 2016:

## New wave of cross dismantling by authorities in Zhejiang



The cross of the Protestant church in Dajing (Zhejiang) removed on March 10, 2016.  
Photo: [chinaaid.org](http://chinaaid.org).

Following the decline since September 2015 in the number of crosses forcibly removed from the roofs and steeples of Christian churches by public authorities in the Province of Zhejiang, January of 2016 has once again ushered in a renewed wave of cross demolitions. According to the US-based organization China Aid, during the two months between January 7 and March 3 alone, crosses were removed from 49 churches in Zhejiang, including two Catholic churches. In some cases, members of the congregation attempted to resist the authorities by blocking access to the church property. China Aid reported that the authorities countered by sending in teams of 20 to 100 persons to effect the demolition of the

crosses. According to the organization, in the context of the province-wide campaign “Three Remodelings, One Demolition” which involves both civil and religious structures, since the beginning of 2014 the crosses of approximately 2,000 Protestant and Catholic churches have been torn down in Zhejiang Province – and this despite the fact that most of the churches affected are legally registered with the government ([www.chinaaid.org](http://www.chinaaid.org) March 2, 5, 8, 15, 29, 2016; *UCAN* Feb. 2, 25, 2016). – Regarding the demolition of crosses, see also the entries of January 28 and March 23, 2016, as well as the reports and documentation in earlier editions of *China heute* and *RCTC* “News Updates.”

January 1, 2016:

## Two-child-policy officially takes effect

On January 1, 2016, the decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party adopted on October 29, 2015, to allow all couples in China to bring a second child into the world, officially took effect with a corresponding change in the law passed by the National People’s Congress. The government found itself forced to take this step, faced as it was by a rapidly aging society as well as by a labor shortage. The one-child policy, introduced in the late 1970s, had already been eased in recent years due to a disproportionate number of male births, the result of decades of selective abortions of unwanted

female children. The one-child-policy was accompanied by a whole system of heavy fines and resulted in many illegal existences caused by the failure of parents to register the births of subsequent children. – The new policy has been heralded with fanfare in much of the media, but it was also met by a number of warning voices. Reggie Littlejohn, for example, President of Women’s Rights Without Frontiers (quoted here from the *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner*), explained that at the core of the policy is not the number of children permitted, but the fact that the government is setting a limit on children and enforcing this limit coercively. “That will not change under a two-child policy,” she pointed out (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Jan. 9, 2016; *South China Morning Post* Dec. 28, 2015; Feb. 26, 2016). – See also the entry of Jan.14, 2016 as well as *RCTC* 2016, No. 1, p. 9.

January 5, 2016:

## Taiwanese university awards honorary doctorate to the Daoist deity Shennong



In the temple: Rector Wu holds the statue of the deity Shennong, clothed in doctoral robes and mortarboard. Photo: *Taipei Times*.

In Chiayi, 210 km south west of Taipei, the National Chung Cheng University bestowed an honorary doctorate upon the Daoist deity for agriculture, Shennong, as an expression of gratitude. The honor was bestowed because the university was built in 1989 on 131 hectares of arable land belonging to the Gufeng Temple, in which Shennong is venerated. Sixty of those hectares were donated to the university by the temple. University President Wu Jyh-Yang told the media that this

marks the first time in Taiwan and most probably in the whole world for a deity to receive a doctorate. President Wu decided that since universities have bestowed honorary doctorates on so many deserving personalities, it was high time for National Chung Cheng University to bestow its highest possible honor on the deity Shennong. For the conferment ceremony, the deity’s idol was clothed in a custom-tailored academic robe and its head was adorned with the traditional academic mortarboard (*Taipei Times* Jan. 6, 2016).

*Willi Boehi*

January 8, 2016:

## *Renmin ribao*: In the countryside of Henan Province, a 37-meter high statue of Mao has been demolished

As reported in the Party newspaper, local business people and residents of Zhushigang Village in the County of Tongxun, Henan Province, had originally raised the nearly 3 million yuan needed to pay for the erection of the statue, which was made of reinforced concrete and painted with gold-colored lacquer. The newspaper wrote that the statue had attracted the attention of Chinese society. According

to the local government, the statue had never been approved nor was it registered, the newspaper said. It reported that the statue has been torn down by a team sent by the local government, adding that the reasons for demolishing it remained unclear (*BBC* Jan. 5, 2016; [www.people.com.cn](http://www.people.com.cn) Jan. 8, 2016).

January 14, 2016:

## State Council publishes suggestions for resolving the problem of the registration of people without *hukou*

According to the regime-friendly *Global Times*, in China there are approximately 13 million people who are living without access to any social welfare or legal identity, since they are not in possession of a *hukou*, or household registration document. About 60 percent of those who find themselves in this predicament were born in violation of the one-child policy. If the parents of these second- and third-born children were unable to pay the heavy monetary penalties at the time of birth, the government refused to register their children. For them, any access to public education and health systems was systematically denied. With a special notice of the State Council these “illegals” or *heihu* (persons without household registration) are now to be accorded the right to legal registration. The letter from the State Council points out that there are eight types of people without *hukou* who can register without pre-conditions, as long as they can produce the necessary papers for it. This decree comes shortly after the introduction of the two-child-policy, which is in effect from January 1, 2016. *Global Times*, however, regards the whole process skeptically; most local governments, who are in charge of granting *hukou*, are biding their time and waiting for the central government to lay out more precise regulations before making a move, thus the *Global Times*. It is not yet clear – according to the paper – whether some kind of fines will still be expected when parents come to register their so-called “black children” (*General-Anzeiger* Dec. 12, 13, 2015; *Global Times* Jan. 27, 2016; the text of the document: “Suggestions for resolving the problem of registering a *hukou* for persons without a *hukou*” 关于解决无户口人员登记户口问题的意见 can be found at: [www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-01/14/content\\_10595.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-01/14/content_10595.htm)). – See also the entry of Jan. 1, 2016.

January 15–16, 2016:

## Directors of all province-level government departments for religious affairs meet in Beijing

At the meeting, the State Administration for Religious Affairs presented the results of its work in 2015 and set out its proposed goals for 2016. For 2015 the following achievements were reported:

The administration of sites for religious activities was further standardized, including the reporting for the record of the senior clergy of each site; the establishment of bank accounts and application for Certificates of Organization Code (组织机构代码证) by the sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education, as well as the further development of a database for religious work.

In the area of “supporting religious organizations in building their thinking,” among other things, the idea was drilled into the adherents of religions that the law of the state takes precedence over religious regulations; Catholics studied the “democratic administration of the Church” and Protestants reflected on the “Sinicization of Christianity.” Last year’s highlights in the area of international exchange were, among others, the Fourth Buddhist World Forum and a conference titled: “‘One Belt, One Road’ and International Religious Exchange.”

The report does not reveal any specific plans for 2016. According to state-owned CCTV, however, the SARA plans that the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association together with the [official] Chinese Catho-

lic Bishops' Conference and the Chinese Daoist Association shall issue identity cards for religious personnel by year's end to all Catholic and Daoist clergy respectively, as a follow-up on the 2015 campaign to issue I.D. cards to Buddhist religious personnel (www.sara.gov.cn Jan. 15, 2016; according to CCTV on www.china.ucanews.com Jan. 22, 2016). – On the issue of I.D. cards for religious personnel, see also *China heute* 2016, No. 1, pp. 4-6 (in German).

January 16, 2016:

## Elections in Taiwan: Opposition DPP party wins – Independent Catholic candidate elected Vice-President

In Taiwan's recent elections for president and Legislative Council, the opposition Democratic Progress Party (DPP) won a significant victory. In May of 2016, the DPP candidate Tsai Ing-wen, an ethnic Hakka, takes over from the Kuomintang Party's Ma Ying-jeou as President of the Republic of China on Taiwan. She is the first woman to take over the leadership of the country. Also for the first time, the DPP has managed to win a majority in the Legislative Council, Taiwan's parliament. According to comments of Taiwanese Catholics quoted by *UCAN*, change of ruling party has become normal in Taiwan; no matter who is at the helm of the country, "they have to listen to the people." Media in China close to Party and state called on Tsai Ing-wen to give up the "hallucination" of Taiwan's independence. Also elected alongside Tsai Ing-wen was Chen Chien-jen, a political independent, a committed Catholic and a Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher. Politically independent, Chen will become Taiwan's first Catholic vice-president (*The Guardian / UK Reuters* Jan. 17, 2016; *UCAN* Jan. 18, 20, 2016).

January 18, 2016:

## Government website launches online reference site for the Living Buddhas of Tibetan Buddhism

On the website *Zhongguo Xizang wang (China Tibet Online China)*, it is now possible to retrieve information on the "Living Buddhas" of Tibetan Buddhism (Chinese: *huofo* 活佛, Tibetan: *tulku*, i.e. Buddhist masters identified as reincarnations of their predecessors) who have been officially recognized by the Chinese government. The site address is: <http://hf.tibet.cn>. On January 18, a first data packet containing material on 870 "Living Buddhas" was put online. Users must first register using their cell-phone number. According to official Chinese sources, there are 1,700 state recognized "Living Buddhas" in the People's Republic of China, 358 of whom are in the Tibet Autonomous Region. – For the discussion on „false Living Buddhas“, see *China heute* 2016, No. 1, pp. 4-6 (in German).

January 18, 2016:

## Human Rights Watch (HRW): Monitoring program of "village-based work teams" in Tibet to be extended

According to the New York based human rights organization, a program to prevent a recurrence of unrest in Tibet, begun by the central government in 2011 under the name of "Benefit the Masses" and originally introduced for a period of three years, is now to be extended indefinitely. Under the program, 21,000 cadres were sent from urban areas to live in groups of four or more people in all 5,000 villages in the Tibet Autonomous Region. According to HRW each team is to have at least one ethnic Tibetan;



Surveillance booth in the inner courtyard of an apartment building in the old city of Lhasa. Photo: Human Rights Watch.

the cadres are supposed to be replaced after one year. According to Chinese media reports, the “village-based work teams” (*zhucun gongzuo dui* 驻村工作队) have “five duties”: namely, the building up of Party and other organizations in the village; maintaining stability; establishing an educational program called “Feel the Party’s kindness”; promoting economic development and practical support. According to Human Rights Watch, the teams are to monitor the behavior of the population, collect information on individuals and put pressure on the villagers to speak up publicly against the Dalai Lama. HRW reports further that the program gobbles up more than 25% of the income of the Autonomous Region of Tibet (Human Rights Watch Jan. 8, 2016).

January 21, 2016:

## Confucian scholar issues renewed call for a ban on church construction in the city of Confucius’ birth

In a post on the Confucian website [www.rujiazg.com](http://www.rujiazg.com), Zeng Zhenyu, professor of Confucianism at the Shandong University and member of the Political Consultative Conference of Shandong Province, has called for a ban on the construction of Christian churches in Qufu. Zeng wrote that Qufu is supposed to be the holy city of the Chinese nation and that it is necessary to ban churches in Qufu in order to avoid “intense controversy” in Chinese society. Specifically, he is opposed to the planned erection of a permanent church building on the site of a provisional Protestant church in Qufu. According to various sources, Zeng’s call unleashed a lively debate across China’s social networking sites. Some of those posting comments were in agreement with Zeng. According to *UCAN*, one Weibo user wrote, Qufu should only allow the building of a church when the Vatican agrees to build a mosque. Others were of the opinion that the Christians living in Qufu have a right to practice their religion there. According to the local Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (quoted in the *Global Times*), in 2011 the City of

Qufu was home to anywhere from 7,000 to 8,000 “registered” Christians and an estimated total of more than 10,000 “unregistered” Christians.

Toward the end of 2010, a group of Confucians had already protested successfully against the planned construction of a 41 m high neo-Gothic style Protestant church in Qufu. A Confucian by the name of Chen Ming who was involved in the protest at that time told *Time* magazine that this time the situation would be different, since the local pastor had promised that the church would be built in the local style and would not stand out from the other buildings (*Global Times* Jan. 26, 2016; *Huanqiu shibao* Jan. 28, 2016; *Time* Jan. 28, 2016; *UCAN* Jan. 27, 2016; see: *China heute* 2011, No. 1, p. 17 [in German]).

January 23, 2016:

## Stephen Lee Bun-sang is new Bishop of Macau



Macau's new Bishop, Stephen Lee Bun-sang. Photo: *UCAN*.

On January 23, 440th anniversary of the erection of the Diocese of Macau, Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sang, former Auxiliary Bishop of Hong Kong, was installed as Bishop of Macau in the city's cathedral. He succeeds Bishop José Lai Hung-seng, who had asked Pope Francis relieve him of his office for reasons of health. Bishop Lai, 70 years old, had been appointed Coadjutor Bishop in 2001 and in 2003 took over from Bishop Domingos Lam as Ordinary of the diocese. In 2014, Bishop Lee, 59 years old and a native of Hong Kong, was consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of Hong Kong, together with Bishops Michael Yeung and Joseph Ha. Prior to that, he was Opus Dei's Regional Vicar for East Asia. The Diocese of Hong Kong said in a statement that although the local Church will miss

Bishop Lee, his new appointment will pave the way for closer cooperation between the two dioceses of Hong Kong and Macau. – Also many faithful from both Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland were present for the Mass of consecration in Macau's cathedral. Macau's emeritus Bishop Lai, Auxiliary Bishop Ha, three papal representatives from Hong Kong and Taipei and more than 50 priests from Macau and Hong Kong concelebrated. Bishop Lai expressed his hopes that Bishop Lee will maintain both of the centuries old missions of the Diocese of Macau, namely the proclamation of the Gospel and acting as a bridge of cultural exchange between East and West. – The day before the consecration, Bishops Lai and Lee were received by Chief Executive Fernando Chui Sai-on, who emphasized the respect for religious freedom guaranteed by Macau's Basic Law and expressed his government's expectations in terms of further co-operation with the Catholic Church in the areas of education, social welfare and humanitarian work. In a conversation with journalists, the new Bishop emphasized that family, education and the formation in the faith of young people were among the focal points of his ministry. – The Diocese of Macau has approximately 29,000 Catholics, of whom (according to statistics from 2013) 60% are Chinese and the rest are Macanese (Portuguese born in Macau) or other nationalities (*AsiaNews* Jan. 25, 2016; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Jan. 23, 30, 2016; *UCAN* Jan. 18, 2016; *Zenit* Jan. 20, 2016). For more on Bishop Stephen Lee, see also *China heute* 2014, No. 3, p. 150f. (in German).

January 25–26, 2016:

## Third round of negotiations in Rome between China and the Holy See

After official talks in June of 2014 and in October of 2015, Vatican representatives met for the third time with a Chinese delegation. An unconfirmed January 31 report in the Italian newspaper *Corriere*

*della Sera* said that at the recent negotiations an agreement had been reached on the appointment of bishops, namely, that Beijing would present a short list of acceptable names and that the Pope would then select one of them from the list and appoint him. The newspaper also wrote that the Pope, “for the first time since the severance of diplomatic relations,” will appoint [supposedly, “will publicly appoint” is meant] bishops (“probably three”) for vacant dioceses in China. According to *UCAN*, the three candidates referred to in the report probably are Fathers Ding Linbin (Changzhi, Shanxi), Ji Chengyi (Zhumadian, Henan) and Tang Yuange (Chengdu, Sichuan). Neither the Vatican nor the Chinese side would comment on the outcome of the discussions.

On December 11, 2015 (that is, before the 3rd round of talks) Bernardo Cervellera wrote in *AsiaNews* that according to information from China, “it would seem that the Beijing’s proposal is limited to complete recognition by the Holy See for all official bishops (even illegitimate and excommunicated bishops), without any mention of the underground bishops and those in prison; Vatican approval of the government recognized Council of Bishops, which excludes underground bishops; approval of the competency of this Council (and not the Pope) in the appointment of new candidates to the episcopacy who will be ‘democratically’ elected [...]. The Holy See must approve the appointments of the Bishops’ Conference and has only the possibility of a weak veto in ‘severe’ cases, which must be justified if used. If the Holy See’s justifications are considered ‘insufficient,’ the Bishops’ Conference may decide to proceed anyway.”

It is not clear what proposals Beijing laid on the table during the third round of discussions. Comments in the Party-affiliated Chinese *Global Times* (particularly a longer article of February 25) suggest, however, that an agreement on the appointment of bishops has not yet been reached. Plus, no further consecration of bishops has taken place yet.

As Fr. “Gan Baolu” mentioned on his blog on February 3, the reactions of Catholics in Mainland China to the report of *Corriere della Sera* were mixed. He wrote that many were glad but there were also opinions expressed on the internet that in the negotiations the Church was being “betrayed.” Gianni Valente, however, in a January 28 article in *Vatican Insider* quotes six Chinese “underground” clerics, who voiced their hope for an agreement between China and the Vatican. Among them is Bishop Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar, in whose diocese the Catholics pray three “Hail Marys” at every Mass in hopes of an agreement between both sides (*AsiaNews* Dec. 11, 2015; [www.chinacath.com](http://www.chinacath.com) Feb. 3, 2016; *Corriere della Sera* Jan. 30-31, 2016; *UCAN* Dec. 24, 2015; Feb. 3, 2016; *Vatican Insider* Jan. 28, 2016). – See also the entries of January 28 and of February 3, 2016.

January 28, 2016:

## Christian Council Chairman of Zhejiang Province arrested – Connection with removal of crosses thought likely

In January there were new arrests in connection with resistance to government dismantling of crosses from church buildings. The case of Gu Yuese caused quite a sensation since he was the pastor of Chongyi Church in Hangzhou, China’s largest officially approved “megachurch,” and also chairman of the Christian Council of Zhejiang Province. Gu was detained on January 28, after having been removed ten days earlier from his position as senior pastor of the Chongyi Church. On February 6 he was formally arrested on charges of having “misappropriated 10 million yuan.” According to China Aid, however, many Christians believe that the arrest was connected with Pastor Gu’s standing opposition to government removal of the crosses. For example, the provincial Christian Council, which was headed by Pastor Gu at that time, in an open letter to the religious authorities of the province on July 10, 2015, had called for a stop to the tearing down of the crosses. According to Bob Fu, China Aid’s director, Gu is the “highest ranking national church leader to be arrested since the Cultural Revolution.” On April 1, Gu was released, but he remains subject to “residential surveillance” ([www.chinaaid.org](http://www.chinaaid.org) Feb. 6, 23;

April 1, 2016; [www.chinachange.org](http://www.chinachange.org) Jan. 30, 2016; [www.hangzhouchurch.com](http://www.hangzhouchurch.com) Jan. 29, 2016; *South China Morning Post* Jan. 31, 2016; *UCAN* Feb. 2, 2016).

January 28, 2016:

## Papal interview in *Asia Times* for Chinese New Year expresses appreciation for the Chinese culture and stresses the need for dialogue

It was the first interview which Pope Francis dedicated exclusively to China. In it, the Pope once again expressed his admiration for China and its culture. When asked about the challenges created by an emerging China, he said that fear is not a good counselor. He stressed that there is no other way than through dialogue, explaining that “dialogue means: look, we have got to this point, I may or may not agree, but let us walk together [...]” Every people must be reconciled with itself and with its own history, thus the Pope. Reality has to be accepted as it is, he said. “The second step is to work to improve reality and to change its direction.” Pope Francis concluded the interview with New Year’s greetings to President Xi and to the Chinese people.

Francesco Sisci, the journalist who conducted the interview and who is a senior researcher at Renmin University in Beijing, wrote in a preliminary note that he did not want to ask the Pope about religious or political issues “of which other Popes, at other times had spoken” but that he wanted to ask him about issues that are in the minds of all Chinese so that the Pope could convey to the Chinese people “his enormous human empathy” (see the text of the interview at <http://atimes.com/2016/02/at-exclusive-pope-francis-urges-world-not-to-fear-chinas-rise/>).

Following February 3, 2016:

## Reaction to the Pope’s interview

Lu Kang, spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, declared on February 3: “We have taken note of the related reports” (i.e., of the interview). He added that China is sincerely trying to improve relations and would continue in a constructive dialogue based on the relevant principles. “We also hope the Vatican side takes a flexible, pragmatic attitude so as to create the conditions for an improvement of relations between the two sides.”

In its coverage of the interview on February 4, the party-affiliated *Global Times* quoted Liu Guopeng of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as saying that China might possibly call for a greater say in the appointment of bishops than that agreed upon between Vatican and Vietnam. Liu also said that leaders of the two countries, sharing similarly strong political charisma and promoting bold and resolute reforms, may lead to surprising and promising results.

Websites of the Catholic Church in China carried reports of the interview (although Lucia Cheung described it on March 15 in *UCAN* as a “missed opportunity” that the complete text of the interview had not been published in Chinese). A blog post by “Gan Baolu” underlined that the call for reconciliation with one’s own history should also apply to the Chinese Church. The opinions of Catholics polled by *AsiaNews* and *UCAN* ranged from enthusiasm to skepticism. One Shanghai Catholic said: “Through the interview we feel that we are united with the Holy Father.” According to this Catholic, the Pope’s great demonstration of friendship was very wise. A priest in Xi’an remarked that propitiatory and flattering words have absolutely no effect on the government, and one Catholic from Wenzhou, in light of the ongoing campaign of dismantling crosses, said it was “definitely not” the right time for Sino-Vatican discussions.

Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx CICM (Verbiest Institute, Leuven) in a *UCAN* comment expressed his hunch that Pope Francis might make a gesture of mercy in the course of 2016 by legitimizing the eight illegal bishops in China. According to Heyndrickx, “that seems to be quite possible in the logic of this Holy Year of Mercy. Many in China hope for it and if it happens, that would be a real breakthrough.” Catholics – both inside and outside China – are confronted once again with an old challenge, Fr. Heyndrickx writes and wonders: “Will they be united in following Pope Francis?” (*AsiaNews* Feb. 5, 2016; [www.chinacath.com](http://www.chinacath.com) Feb. 3, 2016; *Global Times* Feb. 4, 2016; *UCAN* Feb. 4, 5; March 15, 2016; [http://news.china.com.cn/world/2016-02/03/content\\_37730150.htm](http://news.china.com.cn/world/2016-02/03/content_37730150.htm)).

February 5, 2016:

## New document prohibits even retired Party cadres from believing in a religion

The document titled: “Views on Further Strengthening and Improving the Work Regarding Retired Cadres” (关于进一步加强和改进离退休干部工作的意见) has been adopted by the Party’s Central Committee and the State Council. The Party newspaper *Renmin ribao* announced the document on February 5 in the form of a summary followed by a question and answer text. To the question: What does the document require with regard to the education of retired party cadres? the last part of the answer runs: “It is clearly established that retired Party cadres may not believe in a religion and may not be allowed to participate in religious activities, resolutely combatting heretical organizations, taking care to dissociate their participation in ethnic activities and folk customs from religious belief” ([http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2016-02/05/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20160205\\_2-03.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2016-02/05/nw.D110000renmrb_20160205_2-03.htm)).

The “Regulations on the United Front Work of the Communist Party of China (For Trial Implementation)” released in 2015 had already expressly confirmed that members of the Communist Party are not allowed to believe in a religion (cf. *RCTC* 2015, No. 3-4, p. 42; for a German translation of the relevant chapter see *China heute* 2015, No. 3, p. 156). The fact that the Party sees the need for such a rule should be an indication that religious faith among party members is not uncommon. In the past there also have been occasional reports that, while distancing themselves from religion during their careers, some Party members have had the intention to resume their practice of religion after retirement.

February 6, 2016:

## Severe earthquake in southern Taiwan – Pope sends his condolences and donates \$50,000

During an earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale, 117 people lost their lives in Tainan City, 115 of whom were residents of a single high-rise building which collapsed. Numerous religious buildings were also damaged, including Daoist temples and at least two Catholic churches.

On February 7, Vatican Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, acting on behalf of the Holy Father, sent a telegram to Taiwan, assuring the injured and those left behind as well as the helpers and the authorities of the Pope’s sympathy and prayers and recommending the dead to the mercy of God. Later, the Pope sent the Bishops’ Conference of Taiwan \$50,000 through the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* for the needs of the injured survivors and those left behind (*AsiaNews* Feb. 23, 2016; *UCAN* Feb. 8, 2016).

February 25, 2016:

## Meeting of Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the official Bishops' Conference – Agenda for 2016 includes the election of bishops, and also the Year of Mercy

At the joint meeting of the leaders of the two bodies in Beijing, high-level officials in charge of the United Front of the Communist Party and of the State Administration for Religious Affairs also took part. Bishop Ma Yinglin, Chairman of the official Bishops' Conference (and not recognized by Rome), presented the schedule of activities of the leadership of the two Church bodies for 2016.

Their plans include, among other things, reinforcing the building up of the patriotic organizations and promoting ideological education; pushing ahead actively in the election and ordination of bishops, in the democratic management and governance of the Church as well as in promoting research on inculturated theology. On that last point, there are plans to organize a 4th conference on inculturated theology. In addition, the plans call for a good reception of the "Holy Year of Mercy". For 2016 they further include continued efforts toward the standardization of teaching and administration of the theological seminaries; toward social welfare; toward the improvement of the official website and of the journal of the two Church bodies, as well as toward an improved accreditation and reporting to the records of the religious personnel. The last two points on the agenda were: "the further development of contacts with foreign countries" as well as preparations for the 9th National Assembly of the representatives of the Catholic Church in China – the highest "democratic" body of the official Church structures in China ([www.chinacatholic.cn](http://www.chinacatholic.cn) Feb. 26)

The plans, presented one month after the conclusion of the most recent Sino-Vatican negotiations, meet the requirements of China's religious policy and include several points on the structure and nature of the Church which are considered problematic from the perspective of Rome. Interestingly, the religious and political buzzword "self" (as in "independent self-government" of the Church) does not appear in the document.

Beginning of March 2016:

## Chinese lawyer issues a public call to stop the practice of transmitting defendants' confessions on television

Zhu Zhengfu, vice chairman of the All China Lawyers Association and a delegate of the Political Consultative Conference, criticized in Mainland China's media the transmission of the taped confessions of defendants on state television before their trials have even begun. The number of televised confessions has been growing in recent times. According to *Caixin* (and reported here by *South China Morning Post*), Zhu said that such televised confessions are not legally binding and cannot be considered an indication that someone is guilty. A staged confession does not help protect either the rights of the suspect or the justice system itself, Zhu argued.

The organization China Human Rights Defenders listed a number of persons who have made "TV confessions" in politically sensitive cases since 2013. They are, for the most part, journalists, bloggers, human rights advocates and lawyers. Recently, Chinese state television showed the video "confessions" of Gui Minhai, co-owner of a bookshop in Hong Kong specializing in books banned in the Mainland that focus on the personal lives of high-ranking Chinese leaders (January 17); of the Swede Peter Dahlin, founder of an NGO in China which supports human rights advocates (January 19); and also of the lawyer Zhang Kai, who had offered legal counsel to Christian congregations in Zhejiang on their response to the provincial government's campaign of removing crosses from church buildings (Febru-

ary 24) ([www.chrdnet.com](http://www.chrdnet.com) March 11, 2016; *Global Times* March 20, 2016; *South China Morning Post* March 2, 2016).

March 2, 2016:

### **Macau Daily Times: Mainland Chinese not allowed to study at the Catholic University in Macau**

The new bishop of Macau, Stephen Lee, was concerned and disgusted by the refusal of the Beijing central government to allow a group of mainland students to study at the Catholic University of Saint Joseph in Macau. The university had asked for at least 60 mainland students as part of its plans to increase its current student body of 1,300. It is foreseen that the students will move next year to the new Ilha Verde Campus. The only reason he could fathom for such a refusal was fear, “fear that we educate some Catholics and clash with the government,” thus the *Macau Daily Times*. Bishop Lee said that he was saddened by the refusal, since the Church’s relationship with mainland authorities had generally been improving.

As reported in the *Macau Daily Times*, following the appointment of Lee, there was some speculation that the Hong Kong born bishop might bring a dose of political activism along with him to Macau. His outspoken comments were in stark contrast with the more cautious standpoint of his predecessor Bishop Lai, thus the paper (*Macau Daily Times* March 2, 2016; *UCAN* March 9, 2016).

March 5, 2016:

### **Zhu Weiqun announces more detailed “Regulations on Religious Affairs”**

According to a report by *China Daily* quoting Zhu Weiqun, head of the Commission on Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the Political Consultative Conference, the first draft of the revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs” has been completed, and now opinions about the text are being solicited. The new version of the “Regulations,” the revision of which began in 2015, is more detailed than the previous, and takes into account some new developments of recent years, Zhu said. According to *China Daily*, the vice-chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association, Huang Xinyang, has stated that the regulations could be enacted in the coming nine months; he expects that they will serve to thwart attempts at fraud in the name of religion. Other official religious representatives are quoted as saying that they expect the revised regulations to be a help for the religions in their efforts to adapt to China’s socialist society and in curbing religious extremism. *China Daily* reports that experts are pleading for sites for religious activities to be accorded the status of a legal person under the law; this, they say, is key to protecting property rights. The newspaper, however, also points out the view of Liu Peng [Pu Shi Institute for Social Sciences in Beijing], who is of the opinion that a new law on religion would be more appropriate than a set of administrative regulations issued by the State Administration of Religious Affairs [*sic*] (*China Daily* March 9, 2106).

The “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” released by the State Council in 2004, are the first comprehensive legislative provision on religious affairs ever enacted by the People’s Republic of China. An English translation can be found at [www.sara.gov.cn/zcfg/xzfg/507.htm](http://www.sara.gov.cn/zcfg/xzfg/507.htm).

March 6, 2016:

## Taiwan: Praise for the good relations between the Vatican and the Republic of China (Taiwan)

According to Taiwan's Foreign Ministry, relations between the two sides are growing continually stronger, a report published on the governmental website *Taiwan Today* said. During the course of a Mass in the Cathedral of Taipei marking the 3rd anniversary of the Holy Father's election, Taiwan's Deputy Foreign Minister, Lee Chen-jan, said that both sides will continue their cooperation and their commitment to world peace. Among other things, Lee made mention of an ongoing exhibit at the National Palace Museum in Taipei of objects from the sacristy of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, among which are liturgical objects used by various Popes over the course of the centuries. The exhibit includes a chasuble (Mass vestment) worn by Pope Benedict XVI. Taiwan's [then] Vice-President-elect, Chen Chien-jen, a Catholic, expressed the hope that Taiwan's new government will continue to promote relations with the Holy See. Monsignor Paul Russell, the Holy See's Chargé d'Affaires in Taiwan, spoke of common convictions concerning democracy, freedom, human rights and détente between peoples and nations.

In January, Taiwan's President, Ma Ying-Jeou, sent a letter to Pope Francis in response to the pontiff's January 1 message on the occasion of the World Day of Peace (*The China Post* Jan. 27, 2016; *Taiwan Today* March 8, 2016). – See also the entry of January 16, 2016.

March 16, 2016:

## China's National People's Congress adopts new Charity Law

In its final session, the 4th annual gathering of the 12th National People's Congress has adopted the first Chinese Charity Law (慈善法). The law had been more than ten years in the making. Experts from many academic, juridical, social and charitable domains as well as representatives from various charitable organizations were involved in the process. The law will take effect on September 1, 2016.

Quite a few foreign experts have already welcomed and praised the new law because it explicitly encourages the creation of charitable not-for-profit organizations in the form of foundations, social organizations or institutions for social services, and even encourages television, magazines and other media to plan coverage of such organizations and to provide positive information about their projects. Clear rules have been laid out for the establishment and registration of charities, giving them the right to fundraising campaigns. As for donations in kind which they receive from abroad, the import duties and sales tax will either be reduced or remitted. Conversely, transparent financial management is called for by the new law. Rights and obligations are formulated, including the obligation to issue receipts for donations. Timely reports will be required and there will be standard warnings and penalties for misconduct.

Critics both in China and abroad, however, note that individuals will not be allowed to conduct donation campaigns or fundraising activities without first registering (with the competent authorities for civil affairs); they fear that the government might use this law to engage in ever stricter monitoring of charitable organizations and their activities (*Radio Free Asia*, among others). The law, however, does contain a provision (article 26), according to which unregistered organizations may be able to collect donations for charitable purposes by working through organizations that are duly registered. Critics also see an excessive entanglement of government agencies and welfare organizations, something which will make it significantly more difficult to carry out projects which are unpopular with the government. Furthermore, many critics are bothered by article 15 (and article 104 regarding the leaking of state secrets), according to which charitable organizations may not be involved in or finance activi-

ties which endanger national security or public interest. Furthermore, no donations may be accepted, which are linked to conditions that violate governmental norms or violate social morals. International NGOs are not explicitly mentioned in the new Charity Law. Their administration will be regulated in a further measure “Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations Management Law” (境外非政府组织管理法), which is already being strongly criticized internationally [this law was passed on April 28, 2016] (MERICS Blog March 18, 2016; *Radio Free Asia* April 1, 2016). – The text of the law and an unofficial English translation can be found at <http://chinalawtranslate.com/2016charitylaw>. For the draft of the law on foreign NGOs, see *RCTC* 2015, No. 3-4, p. 20, and *China heute* 2015, No. 3, pp. 173-174 (in German).

*Martin Welling*

**March 16, 2016:**

### ***China Daily*: Churches in China suffer from lack of clergy – Numbers**

Citing members of the state-sanctioned church governing bodies, the official *China Daily* has published the following figures: According to the [official] Catholic Bishops’ Conference, there are only 3,316 priests and 5,622 religious sisters to serve more than 6 million Chinese Catholics. And according to Li Yuanlong, vice-president of the Patriotic Association, there are currently less than 800 candidates for the priesthood studying in the 10 approved seminaries. *China Daily* further reports that “the churches under the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, which had more than 30 million [*sic*] registered followers as of last year” are also suffering from a lack of young clergy. According to Gao Feng, chairman of the China Christian Council, there are approximately 5,000 Protestant pastors, 6,000 elders and 190,000 “leaders of voluntary groups.” China’s approved Protestant seminaries produce about 800 graduates a year, but at the same time at least 400,000–500,000 people are being baptized annually into China’s Protestant churches (*China Daily* March 16, 2016).

**March 23, 2016:**

### **Arrested for providing legal advice to churches in Zhejiang Province, detained lawyer Zhang Kai is being released – Further releases and arrests**

The lawyer Zhang Kai founded the group “Lawyers for the protection of the Cross” in July of 2015, and had provided legal advice to more than 100 church congregations in Zhejiang Province who wanted to protect their crosses. On August 25, 2015, he was arrested on a number of charges, including that of leaking state secrets to foreign organizations. After 6 months of “residential surveillance in a designated location” (a kind of pre-trial detention), and during which time he was not allowed to meet either lawyers or family members, on February 25, 2016, a video was aired on state television in which he “confessed” that by his actions he had compromised national security, and in which he called on Chinese lawyers not to accept money from abroad.

Pastor Huang Yizi, leader of the Fengwo Church (Pingyang County, Wenzhou City), was released on February 5, 2016. He had been arrested on September 12, 2015, for opposing the government’s campaign to dismantle crosses and had also been subjected to “residential surveillance in a designated location” ([www.chinaaid.org](http://www.chinaaid.org) Feb. 5; March 23, 2016; [www.chrdnet.com](http://www.chrdnet.com) March 11, 2016). – On this topic, see also the entry for the beginning of March 2016.

March 24, 2016:

## German President meets with Bishop of Xi'an

The last stop of German President Joachim Gauck's first state visit in the People's Republic of China was the city of Xi'an where, in addition to the official ceremonies, the President also had time for a nearly one-hour conversation with the Bishop of Xi'an, Dang Mingyan. Bishop Dang initially showed his guests the historic 300-year-old cathedral and then, in an interview, introduced them to the work of the Catholic Church in Shaanxi Province and especially in the Diocese of Xi'an. During the interview, he focused especially on the social work of the diocese. Speaking later with *UCAN*, Bishop Dang said that President Gauck had appreciated the achievements of the diocese in the social sector and had invited Bishop Dang to visit Germany. Fr. Stephen Chen, the priest in charge of the Diocesan Social Service Center, described the President's visit as of "great significance in promoting the church's charitable work in China," thus *UCAN*. That same morning President Gauck had also visited the Shaanxi-Huiling Disabled Project, which has benefited from support provided by German-based Misereor for many years now.

The state visit to China, together with lifetime partner Daniela Schadt, which Germany's President undertook at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, took place from March 19 to 24. During the visit, stops were scheduled in Beijing, Shanghai and Xi'an. The President held political talks with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and other high-ranking representatives of the Chinese leadership, as well as with artists, students, representatives of religious communities and human rights lawyers. Gauck also gave a talk to students at Tongji University in Shanghai, during the course of which he addressed many critical issues. In the delegation accompanying the President were, among others, the Prelates Jüsten (head of the Catholic Liaison Office of the German Bishops' Conference in Berlin) and Dutzmann (Representative of the Protestant Church of Germany to the Federal Republic of Germany and to the European Union). In Xi'an, Gauck also attended a Protestant church service and spoke at the Great Mosque with the local Imam ([www.domradio.de](http://www.domradio.de) March 24, 2016; [www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de](http://www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de) March 21, 2016; *UCAN* April 1, 2016; [www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Berichte/DE/Joachim-Gauck/2016/03/160319-Reisechina.html](http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Berichte/DE/Joachim-Gauck/2016/03/160319-Reisechina.html)).



German President Gauck signs a guest book of the Diocese of Xi'an: "May God bless the Christians and the churches of this land! Joachim Gauck." To his right is Bishop Dang as well as Fr. Stephen Chen and Fr. Franz Li Jingxi (Rector of the seminary). Photo and text: Diocese of Xi'an.

With entries by Willi Boehi and Martin Welling

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