

## News Update on Religion and Church in China March 23 – June 28, 2016

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Translated by David Streit*

*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. 2, pp. 3-19) covered the period November 10, 2015 – March 24, 2016.*

**March 23, 2016:**

### **90 year old bishop of Wenzhou steps back from active leadership, but may not resign**

Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang, who belongs to the official part of the Diocese of Wenzhou, has declared to his priests that he is stepping back from front line leadership due to his advanced age, and has instead named Fr. Ma Xianshi administrator of the diocese. As *UCAN* has explained, Bishop Zhu cannot resign outright from his post as bishop, since his coadjutor bishop with the right of succession, Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin, who heads the “underground” section of the Diocese of Wenzhou (around two-thirds of the 120,000 faithful), is not recognized by the government. *UCAN* reports that the government, before officially recognizing any bishop of the underground Church, demands that they first concelebrate a Mass with an illicit bishop who was ordained without papal mandate and also join the Catholic Patriotic Association (*UCAN* April 11).

**March 26, 2016:**

### **Catholic baptisms during 2016 Easter liturgies: 3,200 newly baptized in Hong Kong – 19,615 newly baptized in Mainland China**

*UCAN* has reported that at this year’s Easter Vigil 3,200 adults were to be baptized in Hong Kong, several hundred less than in the previous two years. Interesting to know, despite the fact that temperatures in the lower 50s° F (11–14° C) were predicted for subtropical Hong Kong, many of the catechumens chose to be baptized by immersion. Regarding baptism reasons *UCAN* was told that there are also many who “join the church for pragmatic reasons such as for a child’s schooling.” In Hong Kong enrollment in primary school runs on “a point system, and an applicant receives five points if their religion is the same as the school’s sponsoring body,” explained *UCAN*.



Baptism by immersion at the St. John the Baptist Mass Centre in Hong Kong.

Photo: John the Baptist Mass Centre/UCAN.

For the 9th time now, the Catholic weekly newspaper *Xinde* has published the statistics of the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies on the numbers of newly baptized Catholics in the different dioceses of China at Easter of this year. The statistics, created in cooperation with the Chinese Catholic Research Centre, are incomplete, since some dioceses have not provided complete figures. According to these statistics a total of 19,615 persons were baptized this past Easter. This number represents a slight increase in the number of newly baptized Catholics from the number reported at Easter of 2015. The majority of the newly baptized this past Easter are still from Hebei Province (4,063 persons). This Easter there were 2,514 newly baptized in the direct-controlled municipalities. *Xinde* gave special emphasis to the fact that there were five times as many people baptized in Jilin in 2016 as in the previous year (775 newly baptized).

UCAN also reported that in order to cope with the great numbers of those wishing to take part in the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday Masses at the South Church in Beijing, large screens were set up in front of the church for the benefit of those who could not manage to find a place in the church. Beginning at 6:30 a.m., the three successive Easter Sunday Masses were also transmitted on the outdoor screens. In Beijing's East Church in the Wangfujing Street, up to 700 persons attended each of the six Easter Sunday Masses. (UCAN March 24, 28; *Xinde* April 21).

*Eveline Warode*

**March 31, 2016:**

## **Zhejiang: Former chairman of the Christian Council, Gu Yuese, released**

Gu Yuese, pastor of the Chongyi Church in Hangzhou and chairman of the Zhejiang Province Christian Council, was relieved of his offices in January of 2016 and officially arrested on charges of embezzlement on February 6, 2016. But Christians in Zhejiang suspect that the action against Gu was actually due to his opposition to the government campaign to remove crosses from church buildings. China Aid said that on March 31 Gu was released on bail and placed under "residential surveillance" at his home. The lawyer Zhang Kai, who had provided legal advice to Christian communities in Zhejiang during the cross removal campaign, was arrested on August 25, 2015, and charged with, among other things, the leaking of state secrets. On March 23, 2016, he was released and sent back to his home in Inner Mongolia. According to China Aid president Bob Fu, the release of both men occurred in connection with President Xi's trip to the United States for the nuclear security summit. He thanked all those who had spoken out on behalf of the two men (www.chinaaid.org April 1, 7; UCAN April 6, 8).

April 2, 2016:

## Death of Bishop Thomas Zeng Jingmu of Yujiang (Jiangxi Province)

Mons. Thomas Zeng Jingmu, bishop emeritus of the “underground” Diocese of Yujiang, was born in 1920 in Zengjiacun in Jiangxi Province and ordained a priest in March 1949. He spent 30 years in prison, partly because of his refusal to join the Catholic Patriotic Association. He was secretly ordained as bishop of Yujiang in 1990 and joined the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) in 2000. In 2014, Bishop John Peng Weizhao succeeded him as bishop of Yujiang (*AsiaNews* April 4; *Fides* April 22; *UCAN* April 6). – See the article on Bishop Zeng in *China heute* 2016, No. 2, pp. 74-75 (in German).

*Katharina Feith*

April 2 and 15, 2016:

## Five “underground” priests taken away in two dioceses of Hebei Province

Citing local sources, *UCAN* reported that Fr. Yang Jianwei (Diocese of Baoding) disappeared on April 15 from a facility for driving tests in Dingxing County, where he and 6 other Catholics were taking driving tests. Fr. Yang Jianwei is the parish priest of Anzhuang, the largest parish of Baoding Diocese with 3,000 faithful. The diocese has nearly 1 million Catholics according to *UCAN*, many of whom belong to the underground Church.

On April 2, four priests of the Xuanhua Diocese were “taken away” by the authorities. Shortly thereafter, two of them, Frs. Joseph Hu and Paul Yu, were set free again. The two others, Frs. Simon Zhang and Joseph Wang were still unaccounted for as of April 18. According to *UCAN*, both Hu and Wang had earlier rejected the demands of the authorities that they concelebrate with priests of the official Church and had also refused to sign the six conditions for the registration of clerics with the government, among which conditions are the principle of independent and autonomous Church management, the rejection of Vatican “interference” in the appointments of bishops and the willingness to join the Catholic Patriotic Association (*china.ucanews.com* April 18; *UCAN* April 18).

April 6, 2016:

## Dui Hua: Fewer court proceedings for “endangering state security” in 2015, more for “cults” and “terrorism”

The San Francisco-based organization Dui Hua has analyzed the data published in the Chinese Supreme Court’s 2015 annual work report. They conclude that there was a 50% decrease in the number of trials concluded by Chinese courts involving charges of endangering state security, down from 1,000 cases in the year 2014 to 500 in the year 2015; and in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region the decrease was from 300 to 100. However, the figures in the “cult” and “terrorism” categories rose by 35.5% and 25% respectively during the same period. Dui Hua expressed the assumption that many of the 2015 “cult” and “terrorism” cases would have been classified earlier as falling under the category of “endangering state security” (*duihuahrjournal.org* April 6).

April 7, 2016:

## Taiwan honors departing Vatican Chargé d'affaires in Taipei with “Order of the Brilliant Star”

Foreign Minister David Lin presented outgoing Chargé d'affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature in Taipei, Mons. Paul Russell, with one of Taiwan's highest civilian honors, the Order of the Brilliant Star with Grand Cordon. In his address, Minister Lin highlighted the numerous merits of the Vatican diplomat since 2008 in the field of education, culture and humanitarian help and in consolidating relations between the two states. Of particular note was an agreement between Taiwan and the Vatican, which permits the Faculty of Theology and the Catholic Fu-Jen University in Hsinchuang, New Taipei City, to provide for the formation of clergy from Mainland China. Russell had also made the arrangements for President Ma Ying-jeou to be present at the Mass of installation of Pope Francis in Rome in 2013. Archbishop designate Russell will in future represent the interests of the Holy See as Apostolic Nuncio in Turkey. Mons. Sladan Cosic, who comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina, has already taken up the position of Vatican Chargé d'affaires in Taipei.

*Willi Boehi*

April 18, 2016:

## *Global Times*: Regulations governing *halal* food have been stricken from list of legislation proposed for 2016



On March 23, the *Global Times*, a Chinese newspaper with close ties to the Party, reported that the Legal Affairs Office of the State Council would be re-examining the draft of a law on standards governing *halal* foods after the State Council had directed the Commission for Ethnic Affairs of the National People's Congress to come up with a proposal for such a bill in 2002. On April 18, however, the newspaper wrote that the bill had not been included in the official list of legislation proposed for 2016. It said that many scientists, including Xi Wuyi, Marxism researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, opposed the bill on the grounds that such a law would be contrary to the principle of the separation of State and religion. Wei

Dedong of Renmin University suggested in *Global Times* that it should be the religious authorities and not the secular government to come up with uniform standards for dealing with this uniquely Islamic question. Conversely, according to *UCAN*, Li Haiyang, who supported the law and is himself a Muslim from Henan, argued that the government is actually discriminating against Muslims due to its lack of appropriate legislation in this field.

Again and again, there have been reports of protests by Muslims over violations of the Islamic food laws. Lack of compliance with Islamic *halal* regulations also creates an obstacle to China's efforts to export food to Islamic countries, even though provincial and local authorities in China have already introduced some laws regarding *halal* foods (*Bloomberg View* May 19; *Global Times* March 23; April 18; June 1; *UCAN* March 23).

April 22–23, 2016:

## Xi Jinping delivers keynote speech at National Conference on Religious Work

At the long-awaited conference on religious work of the central leadership of China – the first in 15 years – President Xi Jinping presented his detailed perspective on the question of religion for the first time. State-run media sources published a summary of his address (see a German translation in *China heute* 2016, No. 2, pp. 83-86). Xi stressed the great political importance of the question of religion and insisted that the leadership of the party must maintain its autonomy of action with regard to religion. He confirmed previous guidelines of the party's policy on religion – in particular the policy of freedom of religious belief, management of religions according to the law, the principle of autonomy and self-administration of the religions and their adaptation to socialist society (a term coined by Jiang Zemin), as well as adhering to the Marxist view of religion. Xi confirmed the roles of the political actors in the religious policy, with the United Front Department of the party in a position of leadership, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) in the management of religions and the role of religious organizations as a “bridge” between the party-state and religious adherents. He reaffirmed the concept of the “Sinicization” of religions, introduced by him as a principle of religious policy at a party meeting on United Front work on May 20, 2015, connecting it with the principle of the adaptation of religions to socialist society so that both appear as two sides of one coin. Xi applied these concepts explicitly also to the teachings of the religions as he stated: “We need to make demands on religious rules and doctrines, which correspond to the progress of the development of contemporary China, and interpret those rules and doctrines according to the excellent traditional culture of China.” He reiterated that party members “may by no means rely on religion for their values and beliefs.” Other current catch-words in his speech are the “defense against foreign infiltration through use of religion” and “the problem of religion on the Internet.”

The “spirit” of Xi's speech has since then been carefully studied by religious officials and by religious leaders at all levels; see the entry of May/June 2016.

April 28, 2016:

## Adoption of a law regulating foreign NGOs' activities in China

The “Law on the Management of Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations' Activities within Mainland China” (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jingwai feizhengfu zuzhi jingnei huodong guanli fa* 中华人民共和国境外非政府组织境内活动管理法) was adopted at the 20th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress. Foreign not-for-profit organizations with activities in China, including many charities, will be affected by this law when it takes effect on January 1, 2017.

In particular, the law will have a major impact on those domestic NGOs that have thus far depended heavily in their work on financial support from foreign partners, since in future domestic NGOs will no longer be permitted to accept funding, to carry out foreign NGOs' activities in mainland China, from foreign NGOs which are not legally registered in China (Art. 32). The necessary registration process and the numerous related new bureaucratic requirements in applying for and implementing projects, will greatly complicate the work of foreign social charities in China. The text of the law with English translation can be found at: <http://chinalawtranslate.com/bilingual-fngo-law/?lang=en>; see also: *RCTC* 2015, Nos. 3-4, p. 20, and *China heute* No. 3, pp. 170-174 (in German).

Jan Kwee

April 28, 2016:

## ***The Times of Israel* prints report of reprisals against the Jewish community in Kaifeng**

Last April, reports emerged from Kaifeng of government reprisals against the Jewish community there: the Jewish center was shuttered, the educational program of the Sino-Judaic Institute was suspended, foreign Jewish tour groups have been denied admission to the city, while members of Kaifeng's Jewish community are being closely monitored by security forces. As Anson Laytner of the Sino-Judaic Institute wrote in *The Times of Israel*, even signs commemorating the presence of the historic Jewish community are said to have been removed. The following were cited as possible reasons for this crackdown by the authorities: the naturalization of five young women from Kaifeng in Israel in March of this year, an event which received a great deal of media attention, and the related fears of the State authorities in China that this example could strengthen the Jewish identity of Jews in Kaifeng. In addition, there was also the application for political asylum, on grounds of religious persecution, filed by a Kaifeng Jewish woman in an American court. This last event in particular might have prompted the authorities in China to replace their tolerance towards Jewish life in Kaifeng, which was often in evidence since the 1980s, with a new, hard line (*The Times of Israel* April 28). See also Laytner's article: "The Changing Status of the Kaifeng Jews" in *Points East* 29 (2014) 3, pp. 1, 4-10; German translation in *China heute* 2015, No. 2, pp. 107-116.

*Barbara Hoster*

End of April 2016:

## **New round of talks between China and the Vatican**

Since mid-2014 talks between Beijing and the Vatican have been resumed, bringing together representatives of both sides to three rounds of negotiations: on June 27–28, 2014, October 11–16, 2015, and January 25–26, 2016. A new round of talks at a lower level took place in Beijing at the end of April 2016, according to *UCAN*. A Church source told *UCAN* that the Vatican did not wish to be pressured into reaching an agreement and instead proposed the formation of a working group to discuss the issues at stake. One of the pending questions, according to the source, is whether the Vatican could pardon some of the eight illicit bishops first. An unnamed Chinese researcher anticipated that the Vatican might more likely want to pardon Bishops Ma Yinglin and Guo Jincai, since these two hold leading positions in the official Bishops' Conference, *UCAN* wrote (*America Magazine* May 23–30; *UCAN* May 13).

May/June 2016:

## **State Administration for Religious Affairs invites religions to attend study sessions on the spirit of the National Conference on Religious Work**

As is often the case following statements by the party and State leadership regarded as important, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) has invited representatives of the national religious organizations and other leaders of the five recognized religions (with 110–160 participants each) to attend a series of study sessions in Beijing. The Muslims attended a session from May 9–16; the Daoists and Buddhists had a joint session from May 23–27; the Protestants' study session was held from May 31 to June 6; and the Catholics' session from June 19–24.

According to reports on the SARA website, at each session the participants expressed their willingness to promote the objectives formulated at the National Conference on Religious Work. The conference demonstrates that the Communist Party has attained a new pinnacle in its understanding of the religion question, Daoist and Buddhist participants said in their feedback. The chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA), Xuecheng, expressed the expectation that the Sinicization of Buddhism will reach a new level. The Living Buddha Zhukang, chairman of the Tibet branch of the CBA, promised a reinforcement of the management of the monasteries, as well as a preservation of harmony and stability in Tibetan Buddhism. Topics discussed at the study session for the Muslims included holding fast to the Sinicization of Islam as well as to the fight against extremism.

The study session for the Catholics was the only one co-organized by the United Front Department of the Communist Party of China, which in the field of religious policy has a position of ideological leadership. According to SARA, five participants came from every province, including 30 bishops, directors of diocesan offices as well as “bishop candidates.” Holders of management positions in the patriotic associations were also present. The keynote speakers were Guo Wei, who is the SARA official responsible for Catholic affairs, and Wang Zhigang from the United Front Department. According to *UCAN*, Bishop Ma Yinglin (not recognized by Rome), chairman of the official Bishops’ Conference, said in his speech that for the Catholic Church in China, “inculturation” and “Sinicization” mean the same. He said the Church [leadership] in Beijing will vigorously promote “Sinicization” and lead the Church across the country to cultivate a deeper theological understanding of it ([www.sara.gov.cn](http://www.sara.gov.cn) May 17, 18; June 7, 28; *UCAN* June 21; July 1).

**May 1, 2016:**

### **First Chinese Orthodox priest ordained in 60 years celebrates the “Divine Liturgy” at Easter in Harbin**

This past Easter, the Priest Alexander Yu Shi conducted the Divine Liturgy in the Church of the Protection of the Mother of God in Harbin, which has been without a priest for the last 15 years. He celebrated the liturgy in both Old Church Slavonic and Mandarin. Yu, a former bank clerk, became acquainted with the Orthodox faith during study periods in Moscow and later studied theology in St. Petersburg. Following government approval, he was ordained a priest in 2015, being the first Orthodox Chinese priest to be ordained in 60 years. The Orthodox Church is only recognized locally in some places in China and numbers about 15,000 believers (*AFP/The China Post* May 2; *Global Times* July 1, 2015).

On the situation of Orthodox Christianity in China, see the article of Dmitry I. Petrovsky in *RCTC* 2016, No. 1, pp. 34-46.

**May 2, 2016:**

### **Tallest Catholic church in Mainland China inaugurated in the Diocese of Suzhou (Jiangsu Province)**

The church, located in Xiaohengtang in Kunshan City, was consecrated by the local ordinary Bishop Joseph Xu Honggen. The modern building, which can hold 2,000 people, has the shape of a ship with three spires, symbolizing the Trinity; the highest spire is 75 m (246 ft) high, making it the tallest Catholic worship venue in China. “The boat-shaped design represents the church sailing in this world to spread the Gospel of Christ. We have to do better at being witnesses,” Bishop Xu told the news agency *UCAN*. The church honors Our Lady Help of Christians as its patron (Feast day – May 24).



Lower part of the altarpiece of the church in Xiaohengtang: to the left of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pope St. John Paul II. (canonized in 2014); among the saints, several Chinese martyrs and St. Andrew Kim (with hat) can be seen. The photo was taken during the consecration Mass. Photo: Blog.

The very large altarpiece (25 x 15 m; 82 ft x 49 ft) by the artist Zhang Qikai, of the S. Luca Art Studio (Beijing), depicts the Heavenly Banquet on a gold background, flanked by a traditional Chinese landscape:



Altarpiece in Xiaohengtang, detail. Photo: Blog.

above, there is Christ, and in the middle part of the painting the 12 Apostles are depicted; below, there is an interesting mix of saints. Next to well-known European saints there is a row of Chinese Martyrs (Anna Wang, Lucia Wang, Peter Wu Guosheng, Philipp Zhang Zhihe, among others) as well as the Korean Martyr St. Andrew Kim. The most astonishing part of the composition is in the center, where Pope St. John Paul II and St. John the Baptist stand to the left and right of the Blessed Virgin Mary and point upwards to Christ with similar gestures. This is possibly the first church in Mainland China, where Pope St. John Paul II, who was declared a saint in 2014, and who in turn had canonized 120 Chinese martyrs in 2000 in the face of sharp protests by the Chinese Government – appears on an altarpiece. ([www.china.ucanews.com](http://www.china.ucanews.com) May 5; *UCAN* May 5; [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_c40200090102woa4.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_c40200090102woa4.html) [Blog of the S. Luca Art Studio]).

**May 4, 2016:**

## Provincial education authorities in Gansu reaffirm prohibition of religion in educational institutions after debate over kindergarten child reciting Koranic verses

As the state-run *Global Times* has reported, a video clip showing a five year old girl wearing a headscarf while reciting Koranic verses at a kindergarten in the Autonomous District of Linxia of the Hui (Gansu Province) has triggered numerous critical comments among Chinese users. The video clip, which went

viral, had been posted on Sina Weibo on April 30. According to the *Global Times*, on May 4 the education bureau of Gansu Province issued a statement denouncing such activities as detrimental to the well-being of China's youth. The statement went on to stress that religious activities and religious education are forbidden in all schools (with the exception of State-approved institutes for religious education) and must be stopped by the local education authorities. The education bureau also stressed that no religious groups may be formed in schools, that no textbooks with religious content may be used, and that teachers, especially foreigners, are not allowed to evangelize – reported the *Global Times*.

A comment on the US-based website ChinaChange.org asked why the video, which was originally posted on YouTube in 2014, re-appeared so suddenly in the social media networks. ChinaChange.org quoted a Hui blogger from Shandong, who wrote of increasing sentiment against Hui Muslims in the social networks. According to *UCAN*, Catholics in China are concerned that the statement by the education bureau of Gansu Province could be an indication that in future the government wants to more strictly enforce its long-standing ban on religious activities in educational institutions.

On June 1, the *Global Times* reported that a textbook, published in 2006 and used in 40% of all Beijing middle schools, has triggered public outrage for spreading Western, non-secular content because it includes – in addition to traditional Chinese myths – excerpts from the book of Genesis (*ChinaChange.org* May 13; *Global Times* May 6; June 1; *UCAN* May 11).

**May 8, 2016:**

## Death of Bishop Zhang Huaixin of Anyang

Bishop Thomas Zhang Huaixin of Anyang (Henan Province) was 90 years old. He had accepted recognition on the part of the government on the sole condition that he not be required to join the Catholic Patriotic Association. His 45 year old coadjutor bishop, Joseph Zhang Yinlin, automatically succeeds him. Bishop Zhang Yinlin was consecrated coadjutor in 2015 with the consent of both the Vatican and the Chinese government. Bishop Zhang Huaixin was born on May 23, 1925 and was ordained a priest in 1950. He spent many years in prison. The year following his “rehabilitation,” in 1980, he was ordained secretly as bishop of Anyang. It was only in 2004 that he was officially installed as bishop. On May 14 his remains were buried in the Cathedral of Anyang. Today, the Diocese of Anyang numbers 30 priests, 129 sisters and 50,000 Catholics (*UCAN* May 9, 2016; see also *RCTC* 2015, Nos. 3-4, p. 34).

*Katharina Feith*

**May 8–11, 2016:**

## German-Chinese interreligious consultation in Hamburg and Berlin

A 21-member delegation from the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) which also included Chinese Protestant, Catholic and Muslim representatives, came to a German-Chinese interreligious consultation in Germany titled “The peaceful coexistence of religions and their common contribution to civil society.” The consultation was conducted by the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW, Hamburg) and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD, Hannover), in cooperation with the Protestant organizations Mission One World (Neuendettelsau), China Infodesk (Hamburg), Zentrum für Mission und Ökumene – Nordkirche weltweit (Hamburg), as well as the Catholic China Center (Sankt Augustin). The Chinese delegation included SARA Vice-Director Jiang Jianyong and 5 other SARA representatives. The Protestants were represented by a five-member group which included the secretary general of the National Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Pastor Xu

Xiaohong, as well as the secretary general of the Amity Foundation, Qiu Zhonghui. The three-member Catholic group was made up of Bishop Guo Jincai (not recognized by Rome), secretary general of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference, and two priests. The 5-member Islamic delegation was headed by Guo Chengzhen, secretary general of the Chinese Islamic Association. Two scholars for religious studies, Zhuo Xinping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Xu Yihua of Fudan University, were also part of the Chinese delegation. In addition to German church representatives, the Chinese guests also met Ayatollah Reza Ramezani of the Islamic Centre of Hamburg, as well as representatives of the Hamburg Senate, of the German Ministry of the Interior, the heads of the Protestant and the Catholic liaison offices to the Federal Government as well as members of the German Bundestag.

Following the consultation, Jiang Jianyong traveled on to Austria (May 11–14), where he, assisted by representatives of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Chinese scholars and Daoist masters, engaged in a dialogue with Austrian politicians and scholars on various political-philosophical aspects of the *Daodejing*, Daoism's central text (bmeia.gv.at; emw-d.de May 17; sara.gov.cn May 13, among others).

May 16, 2016:

## 50 years ago today: Beginning of the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”



1966 – Red Guards destroy sacred objects and Bibles in front of Xikai Cathedral in Tianjin. In the foreground, smoldering piles of ash and debris, which a young man is stirring with a hoe. Mao's portraits hang over the central portal. The hanging banners carry slogans such as: “Beat the old ideas, fire on the black teaching.”

Photo: Anthony E. Clark Private Collection, Whitworth University.

On May 16, 1966 the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party issued a circular letter, in which it declared war on the “representatives of the bourgeoisie.” That document is considered the ideological basis and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, which Mao Zedong unleashed and which only ended with his death in 1976. According to the *South China Morning Post*, at least 1.72 million people lost their lives in the upheaval. At first, the Cultural Revolution targeted universities and schools. During

August of 1966, Red Guards began to attack the “Four Olds” (old customs, old habits, old culture and old thinking). Their attacks were also directed against the religions: religious clergy, monks and nuns were subjected to show trials, paraded for public shaming and thrown in jail or labor camps, where many were killed. Temples, churches, mosques were seized and some were completely destroyed; religious objects and books were burned. It was only with the policy of opening and reform that public religious life was gradually restored during the 1980s.

Only the next day, on May 17, 2016, the party newspaper *Renmin ribao* and the *Global Times* (which is under the auspices of *Renmin ribao*) finally published comments on the anniversary. Both stressed that there will never be another Cultural Revolution. The party had already authoritatively evaluated it with its “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (1981), *Renmin ribao* wrote. “Disturbances from the ‘left’ and the right” over the topic must be met with determined opposition, the paper said (*AsiaNews* May 16, 17; *Global Times* May 17; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* June 25; *Renmin ribao* May 17; *South China Morning Post* May 16; *UCAN* May 20; June 18).

**May 18, 2016:**

## **China Aid releases its “2015 Annual Report of Religious and Human Rights Persecution in China”**

The US-based organization China Aid, which pays particular attention to the situation of Protestant house churches, has noted a further deterioration of the situation in 2015.

According to their report, by the close of 2015 the authorities had forcibly dismantled about 1,300 church crosses in Zhejiang Province, demolished more than 20 churches, more than 500 Christians had been taken into police custody (at least temporarily), more than 130 Christians physically injured, more than 60 Christians administratively or criminally detained and at least 28 pastors and believers brought before the courts on criminal charges.

According to China Aid the authorities proceeded massively against non-registered urban house churches, which are continuing to spread in China’s major cities. In Guangdong Province alone, according to the report, during 2015 at least 60 Protestant house churches were closed, including the Guangfu House Church in Guangzhou on May 22, 2015. China Aid reports that the authorities struck out also against house churches in rural areas, partly with accusations of cult involvement. Of the incidents described in the report, six occurred in Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Taken all together, during 2015 China Aid counted 634 cases of persecution with 19,426 persons affected, 3,178 people arrested or summoned for questioning, 232 sentenced to prison, 463 verbally, mentally or physically abused and 85 churches either destroyed or closed (see the China Aid report at: [www.chinaaid.org/2016/05/china-aid-releases-2015-annual-report.html](http://www.chinaaid.org/2016/05/china-aid-releases-2015-annual-report.html)).

**May 18–22, 2016:**

## **Yoga Conference in Kunming – enthusiasm for yoga is growing in China**

The Chinese news agency *Xinhua* reported that on May 18, more than 1,000 Chinese Yogis came together for a Yoga demonstration on the occasion of the opening of the “China – India Yoga Conference,” which was sponsored by the Kunming municipal government. Among the organizers of the conference were the Office of Foreign Affairs and the Office for the Affairs of Overseas Chinese both under the municipal government, as well as the China-India Yoga College which had been designated

in November of 2015 as China's first "Yoga College," affiliated with Yunnan Nationalities University in Kunming, Southwest China. The founding of the college had been agreed during the state visit to China of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May of 2015 ([www.en.people.cn](http://www.en.people.cn) November 15, 2015; *Xinhua* May 18).

*Eveline Warode*

**May 20, 2016:**

## **Taiwan's first woman President sworn in**

President Tsai Ing-wen, whose Democratic Progressive Party advocates an independent Taiwan, and her independent Vice-President, Chen Chien-jen, a Catholic, have now taken the oath of office. The ceremony was attended by guests from all over the world – including Archbishop Savio Hon, secretary general of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, as well as six Taiwanese bishops and the Vatican's new Chargé d'affaires in Taiwan, Mons. Sladan Cosic. The Vatican is the only state in Europe with which the Republic of China on Taiwan maintains diplomatic relations. Tensions between Beijing and Taipei have increased since Tsai took office. Beijing demands that Taiwan recognize the so-called "1992 consensus," i.e. the formula which states that there is only one China, while leaving each side to interpret for itself exactly what that formula means (*CNA* May 20; *UCAN* May 20).

**May 22 / 24, 2016:**

## **Pope Francis reminds Catholics of the global day of prayer for the Church in China, emphasizes mercy and reconciliation**

After the Angelus prayer on May 22 in Saint Peter's square, the Pope said: "On Tuesday, May 24, we shall spiritually join the faithful of China, who on this day celebrate with particular devotion the memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, who is venerated at the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. Let us ask Mary to give to her sons and daughters in China the capacity to discern in every situation the signs of the loving presence of God, who always welcomes and always forgives. In this Holy Year of Mercy, may Chinese Catholics, together with those who follow other noble religious traditions, become concrete signs of charity and reconciliation. In this way, they will promote an authentic culture of encounter and the harmony of the whole of society. This harmony that the Chinese spirit so loves." Pope Francis ended his remarks with a special greeting for Rome's Chinese Catholic community ([w2.vatican.va](http://w2.vatican.va) May 22).

**May 24, 2016:**

## **Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming, who is not recognized by Rome, ordains nine priests**

The nine newly ordained priests belong to the dioceses of Dali and Kunming (Yunnan Province). One is ethnic Tibetan, five belong to the Miao people, two belong to the Yi, and one is of Jingpo nationality. Bishop Ma Yinglin is the chairman of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference, which like him is not recognized by Rome (*AsiaNews* May 25; *UCAN* May 27).

May 27 to June 6, 2016:

## Desecration of a tabernacle in Handan – police blocks diocesan “day of repentance”

UCAN reported that after Catholics in the village of Xiaodiba (Diocese of Handan, Hebei Province, China) discovered on May 27, that the tabernacle from their church containing the consecrated hosts had been thrown onto the ground outside the church walls, on June 2, the diocese called on its 160,000 faithful to begin a prayer novena in each parish and to join a special day of repentance at the Catholic Church in the village of Xiaodiba on June 6. The religious affairs authorities of the City of Handan declared the scheduled prayer gathering at Xiaodiba illegal and issued a ban against any inter-district religious activities. The authorities temporarily took three priests into custody for interrogation, including the parish priest of Xiaodiba, and on June 5, the day before it was to take place, forced Handan’s Bishop Yang Xiangtai to cancel the day of repentance. According to one Church source, 3,500 police officers were deployed to surround a number of Catholic parishes in the diocese in order to prevent the gathering. On various social network sites, photos were posted of Catholics praying as they knelt in the middle of roads blocked by police. A few days after the desecration of the tabernacle, police had arrested a 19 year-old as the perpetrator and spoke of theft; the motives behind his action, according to UCAN, remain unclear (*AsiaNews* June 6; *UCAN* June 7).

June 2016:

## Zhejiang: Reports on hoisting of national flag at religious venues – demands made that cadres be stationed and Church donations be handed over



“To realize the spirit of the Conference on Religious Work” and to strengthen the patriotic education of the religious circles, the United Front Department of the City of Lanxi (Zhejiang) ordered that by June 13, 2016, the Chinese national flag was to be hoisted at each of the 69 religious sites in the city’s area. The June 15 report on this action on the website of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission Zhejiang Province also notes that in future, on major holidays, at each site there is to be a flag raising ceremony, accompanied by the singing of the Chinese national anthem.

UCAN learned from the “underground” part of Wenzhou Diocese that in mid-June the parish of Rui’an and the sub-parishes of Meitou and Anyang had received letters from

After the United Front Department’s action in Lanxi (Zhejiang): temples fly the Chinese flag; a Protestant Church with the flag in the chancel. Photos: [zjsmzw.gov.cn](http://zjsmzw.gov.cn) (website of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission Zhejiang Province).

local authorities with the demand to register, to set up notice boards for the dissemination of government information, to hoist the national flag and to accept the deployment of cadres in each church. Also in the Diocese of Ningbo, parishes have been informed that they must install flags and notice boards. China Aid also reported on July 1 that the government in Zhejiang has established office spaces within churches and assigned officials to closely oversee the congregations. In addition, according to China Aid, in the County of Pingyang (Wenzhou) regulations have been published to the effect that each church must surrender any donations made to it and that the authorities must give prior approval for any but small expenditures.

There have been earlier reports of the national flag being flown at religious buildings in other regions. For example, all 30 religious sites in the City of Huangshi (Hubei) hoisted the national flag on May 1, 2015, as reported by the religious authority of the province. According to a 2012 report on the local party website, the County of Uqturpan (Chinese: Wushi) in Aksu Prefecture in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region even issued provisions for the raising of flags on religious buildings; in September of that year, 22% of the 422 mosques of the county had hoisted flags. In April 2015, the party chief of the Autonomous Region of Tibet, Chen Quanguo, declared that all temples in Tibet should display the Chinese national flag (aks.xjkunlun.cn September 29, 2012; chinaaid.org July 1; china.ucanews.com June 17; *Global Times* April 9, 2015; sara.gov.cn May 8, 2015; *UCAN* June 17; zjsmzw.gov.cn June 15).

June 2, 2016:

## Information Office of State Council publishes White Paper on freedom of religious belief in Xinjiang

Based on the multi-religious history of the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, where Buddhism dominated during the 1st millennium A.D. alongside Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Nestorianism and where, from the 10th century onwards, there came the spread of Islam (Chapter 1), the White Paper notes that there were many religious conflicts and wars in Xinjiang before 1949, in which people lost their freedom of choice in matters of religion. Today, there is greater freedom of religious belief in Xinjiang than ever before in history, the White Paper states. Chapter 2 describes how the law protects “normal religious activities” such as religious services, fasts, veneration of the Buddha and extreme unction (!). According to the White Paper, the government provides organizational support for pilgrimages to Mecca and makes sure that religious activities during the month of Ramadan are properly run. During Ramadan, “whether to close or open *halal* (Muslim food) restaurants is completely determined by the owners themselves without interference.” The document says that there is no discrimination on grounds of religious belief.

According to Chapter 3, the needs of the Muslim faithful in Xinjiang are being met at 24,400 mosques with religious staff of 29,000. There are 59 Buddhist temples (staff of 280), one Daoist temple (staff of 1), 227 Protestant churches and meeting places (staff of 26), 26 Catholic churches or meeting places (staff of 27), 3 Orthodox churches or meeting places (staff of 1). Chapter 4 of the White Paper describes the mechanisms for the State administration of religion and stresses that “no Xinjiang citizen has been punished because of his or her rightful religious belief.” Chapter 6 depicts the struggle against “religious extremism,” which “is not religion, but tries to make use of religion” and which is an ideological foundation for terrorism and “the common enemy of all humanity.” The White Paper blames international influences for religious extremism in Xinjiang and describes the policy of “de-extremization” in Xinjiang. Nevertheless, according to the White Paper, Xinjiang “as the core region of the Silk Road Economic Belt,” will continue to promote international exchange.

The text of the White Paper “Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang” can be found at: <http://english.cri.cn/12394/2016/06/02/4161s929681.htm>. On the topic of Tibetans and Uighurs in China see also the article by Björn Alpermann in *China heute* 2016, No. 2, pp. 87-97 (in German).

June 4, 2016:

## Hong Kong: student associations boycott candle-light vigil for victims of Tian'anmen Square massacre

According to the organizers, some 125,000 people participated in the traditional annual vigil in Hong Kong's Victoria Park for the victims of the events of June 4, 1989; police estimated the number of participants at 21,800.

Prior to the anniversary, leaders of student associations had criticized the vigil as being too formalistic and they had demanded that it be abolished. Some 2,500 people participated in alternative events, organized by 11 student associations at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and at Hong Kong University. According to the *South China Morning Post* there is a growing sentiment of detachment from politics on the Mainland among Hong Kong's young people. Instead, they advocate "localism" and the protection of Hong Kong's identity. Among those who called on the students to participate in the candle vigil was Hong Kong's retired Catholic bishop, Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, SDB. He and Hong Kong's Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing, OFM, conducted two memorial services.

The victims of the 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement were also commemorated in Taiwan. In Mainland China, several dissidents were temporarily put under house arrest (*AP* June 3; *Ming Bao* May 30 according to *BBC*; *Radio Free Asia* June 1; *South China Morning Post* May 30; June 5; *UCAN* May 25; June 6).

June 6, 2016:

## Beginning of Ramadan

On June 6, the official *Xinhua* News Agency reported the beginning of Ramadan among China's Muslims. However, the Hong Kong *Oriental Daily* spoke of a tense security situation in Xinjiang at the beginning of Ramadan; it reported that at least 17 people, who had been calling on Muslims to fast, were arrested. The police were checking the identity documents of visitors to the mosques. Some local authorities in Xinjiang, such as in the City of Korla, gave orders on their websites that party members, civil servants, students and minors were forbidden to fast and that restaurants were to remain open during Ramadan, according to the *South China Morning Post*. The newspaper also reported that in the Autonomous Prefecture of Yili (Xinjiang), shortly before the start of Ramadan, it was announced that local citizens, when applying for passports and travel permits to Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, would be required to submit three-dimensional pictures and DNA samples in addition to fingerprints and voice prints (*Oriental Daily* June 6 according to *BBC*; *South China Morning Post* June 7; *UCAN* June 27; *Xinhua* June 6).

June 6, 2016:

## Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) criticizes State Administration for Religious Affairs for lack of supervision of national religious organizations

According to a report published on June 8 on its website, the CCDI, the highest anti-corruption watchdog of the Chinese Communist Party, carried out an inspection of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) from February 27 to April 27 and delivered the results of its investigation to SARA officials at a meeting on June 6. Inspection team leader Hu Xinyuan said that SARA's principal

problems were a lack of core leadership on the part of the party leadership group [within SARA], insufficient implementation of the party's religious policies and the fact that too little attention was being paid to the country's national religious organizations. Also, according to Hu, the inspection team uncovered irregular use of funds and nepotism in the hiring of staff; the inspection team also found problems with certain SARA leaders and they have reported those cases to the competent authorities. According to the report on the CCDI website, Hu Xinyuan made 5 "proposals" for correcting the problems. Proposal 2 was: "Effectively strengthen the monitoring and management of the national religious organizations; support religious organizations in their self-construction and in the training of personnel; build up and perfect a mechanism for the selection, use, and management of cadres which corresponds to the special characteristics of the respective religious organizations."

Commentators were of the opinion that the real focus of the CCDI report was not about corruption as such, but rather on developing more effective control over the religions through the national, government-sanctioned religious mass organizations. In the 1950s, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, a "mass organization" was founded for each of the five officially recognized religions. They were created to serve the State-led institutionalization of the five religions (ccdi.gov.cn June 8; *UCAN* June 10, 20).

June 8, 2016:

### ***Xinhua*: 746,000 unregistered persons receive a *hukou***

According to a report by *Xinhua*, the Ministry of Public Security has announced that from January to May of this year, 746,000 unregistered persons have received a *hukou* (household registration certificate) from the Chinese police. Once in possession of a *hukou*, these persons will have access to social services such as health services and basic education. The Ministry also reported that during the same period more than 1.09 million out of an estimated total 13 million non-registered persons have been confirmed. According to *Xinhua*, among those who must request a *hukou* are orphans, children illegally born (after the one child allowed) and the homeless, as well as anyone who has for some reason to apply for a *hukou*. "The ministry also revealed that police across the country have confiscated three million duplicated *hukou* and more than 1.7 million IDs that have duplicated numbers," *Xinhua* reported (*Xinhua* June 8; see: *RCTC* 2016, No. 2, pp. 6-8).

*Eveline Warode*

June 12, 2016:

### **Mons. Thaddeus Ma Daqin, the Shanghai bishop under house arrest, openly expresses remorse about his departure from the Patriotic Association**

On his personal blog, which he has been able to continue despite being under house arrest since 2012, Bishop Ma published five articles to mark the 100th birthday of the late Shanghai Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, who died in 2013. In the fifth of the articles, he recommended Bishop Jin's "Love the country and the Church" as a model for the younger generation to follow and extensively praised the indispensable role of the Catholic Patriotic Association for the Church in Shanghai. Then he wrote: "For a period of time, I was also tricked by outside elements and made errors of words and deeds against the Patriotic Association. On reflection, I find this was an extremely unwise move, and my conscience was not at peace because I had hurt those who had so long and so selflessly looked after me and helped me, and because I had destroyed the good development of the Catholic Church in Shanghai, which Bishop

Jin had spent so long building up. Such errors should not have happened in the Catholic Church in Shanghai with its long tradition of love for the country and the Church. [...] I hope that I can make up for these mistakes through concrete actions.”

This astonishing about-face by Bishop Ma triggered “shockwaves” in the Catholic Church throughout China, *UCAN* reported. *AsiaNews* cited different reactions: Some doubted that the text really is from the hand of Bishop Ma. Others, who had seen Bishop Ma’s attitude since 2012 as a courageous witness to the Church’s principles, were dismayed. It was even suggested by some that the Vatican could have pressed Bishop Ma to make such a statement, something which the official Vatican spokesman, Fr. Federico Lombardi, denied on June 23 (see below). According to *UCAN*, many Catholics see Bishop Ma’s statement as his attempt to appease the authorities so that they would free him from house arrest and allow him to assume the leadership of the Diocese of Shanghai.

Bishop Ma had publicly announced his departure from the Patriotic Association at the end of the Mass during which he had been consecrated a bishop in July of 2012. Following that declaration, he was placed under house arrest, which was eventually somewhat relaxed, and stripped of his status as a bishop. Since then, the life of the Church in the Diocese of Shanghai has been most severely affected (*AsiaNews* June 17; *UCAN* May 3; June 14; July 1; Bishop Ma’s blog article can be found at: [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_5392f6070102w3x1.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5392f6070102w3x1.html); an English translation can be found at: [www.asianews.it/news-en/Mgr-Ma-Daquin:-the-text-of-his-“confession”-37799.html](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Mgr-Ma-Daquin:-the-text-of-his-“confession”-37799.html)).

June 22, 2016:

## Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) announces inspection of the Communist Party’s United Front Work Department

A total of 32 party and government authorities are to be scrutinized in a new round of inspections by the CCDI. These include, according to *UCAN*, the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party, which is responsible on the part of the party for religious work, as well as the “610 Office,” which had been inaugurated in 1999 to coordinate action against the Falungong (*UCAN* June 29).

June 23, 2016:

## Statement by Vatican spokesman, Fr. Federico Lombardi, SJ, about the “confession” of Shanghai’s Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin

“In response to requests for information from various journalists, I am able to say the following: 1) With regard to the recent declarations attributed to Msgr. Taddeo Ma Daqin, auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, these have come to the attention of the Holy See through his blog and via press agencies. No direct information is currently available. 2) Any speculation with regard to a presumed role of the Holy See is inappropriate. 3) The personal and ecclesial life of Msgr. Ma Daqin, like that of all Chinese Catholics, is followed with particular care and concern by the Holy Father, who remembers them daily in prayer” (*Vatican Information Service* June 23).

June 28, 2016:

## Conference in Shanghai remembers Bishop Jin Luxian, who died in 2013 – Bishop Ma Daqin appears in video-clip



Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin of Shanghai speaks in a video interview shot at the Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai. The video was presented at the seminar to commemorate the 100th birthday of late Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian.

Photo supplied to *UCAN*.

The one-day conference, originally scheduled to be held on June 20, Bishop Jin's 100th birthday, was organized by the Diocese of Shanghai in cooperation with the Shanghai Patriotic Association, the Shanghai Commission for Church Affairs and the Shanghai Catholic Intelligentsia Association. According to *UCAN*, there were ten bishops present among the more than 300 participants. Shanghai's Bishop Ma Daqin did not participate (something about which there had been speculation in advance). According to an eyewitness quoted by *UCAN*, he did appear however in a 10-second video interview, in which he connected Bishop Jin's contribution to educating seminarians with his love for country and Church; in the subtitles, Ma was identified as "Ma Daqin" of the "Catholic Diocese of Shanghai" with no reference to his title as bishop. The video-clip of his "appearance" seems to have been part of a film about Bishop Jin's life, titled "A loyal heart: love for the country and for the Church," which, according to a detailed conference report on the website of Shanghai Diocese, was screened during the conference.

According to this report, the secretary general of the diocese, Shen Baozhi, opened the one-day meeting. Wang Zhigang of the Central United Front Department of the Communist Party called Bishop Jin a "close friend of the Communist Party." Guo Wei of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) also offered a word of greeting. There were also a number of Church-related speakers, among whom were Bishop Fang Xingyao, chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, Bishop Shen Bin of Haimen and Bishop Xu Hong of Suzhou who spoke on Bishop Jin's contribution to the inculturation of the Church. Additional speakers were Fr. Chen Ruiqi, director of Shanghai's Guangqi Press, Fr. Zhang Shijiang, of the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (Shijiazhuang), Fr. Gao Chaopeng, director of the diocesan Social Service Center, and Qu Meizhen, chairwoman of the Shanghai Patriotic Association. Ms. Ren Hua, head of the Commission for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Shanghai City, said that Bishop Jin represents the correct direction of development of the Catholic Church, and that "to study Bishop Jin's spirit" is a concrete implementation of the "spirit of the National Conference on Religious Work" ([catholicsh.org](http://catholicsh.org) July 8; *UCAN* July 1).

*With contributions by Willi Boehi, Katharina Feith, Barbara Hoster, Jan Kwee and Eveline Warode*

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