

## News Update on Religion and Church in China July, 1 – October 2, 2016

*Compiled by Katharina Feith and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber  
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. 3, pp. 3-20) covered the period March 23 – June 28, 2016.*

Summer / Fall 2016:

### Reports of expulsions and the demolition of dwellings at the Buddhist Institute of Larung Gar

According to Western media, the Larung Gar Institute, founded in 1980 by Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, is one of the world’s largest teaching institutions of Tibetan Buddhism. Prior to the events described below, there reportedly were some 10,000 Buddhists studying and living there. Among them were many Han Chinese as well as a number of foreigners. The institute is located in the Sertar County of the Kardze Autonomous Tibetan Prefecture in Sichuan Province.

On June 9, 2016, the New York based organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a partial translation of a government document (obviously meant for internal use only) outlining measures of “correction and rectification” to be applied with regard to Larung Gar. The document contains orders for the population of the monastery and institute to be reduced to 5,000 by September 30, 2017, with no



View of the Buddhist Larung  
Gar Institute – Summer 2014.  
Foto: [www.flickr.com/  
photos/99261377@  
N05/14660043083](http://www.flickr.com/photos/99261377@N05/14660043083).

more than 1,000 to be accepted from other provinces. It also orders the razing of dwellings corresponding to the number of evicted people. In addition, the institute is to be separated from the monastery. According to the document, a first batch of 1,200 people was to be expelled from Larung Gar by October 20, 2016. According to HRW, since late July some 2,000 dwellings have already been pulled down, most of which provided housing for nuns attending the institute, followed by expulsions. At the end of July or in early August three nuns of Larung Gar were reported to have committed suicide, two of whom left notes referring to the demolitions or to government harassment, HRW said.

The *Global Times*, which is under the auspices of the Party newspaper *Renmin ribao*, ran an article entitled “Buddhist school renovated. Rights, exile groups criticize evictions, demolitions.” The article quotes an anonymous government official as saying that fire prevention was the reason for the measures taken and that leaders of the study center wanted to reduce the number of unregistered monks and nuns. The *Global Times* reports that in future as many as 8,000 residents will be allowed in Larung Gar, including foreigners, provided that they are duly registered.

HRW also reported that at Yachen Gar, another big monastic settlement in the Pelyul County of Kardze, up to 1,000 nuns have been forced to return to their home villages in the Tibetan Autonomous Region since April of 2016. There are said to be as many as 10,000 residents at Yachen Gar, most of whom are nuns (*Global Times* July 26; hrw.org June 9; Sept. 14; *New York Times* July 27; a translation of the document can be found at: [www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/09/serta-county-order-larung-gar-monastery](http://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/09/serta-county-order-larung-gar-monastery)).

July 1, 2016:

## Anniversary of the transfer of Hong Kong to China

According to the organizers, 110,000 people took part in an event held to mark the 19th anniversary of the transfer of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China. Police countered with the claim that scarcely 20,000 people took part.

As has become the custom, an ecumenical prayer service, attended by about 300 people, preceded the protest march. Cardinal Zen was unable to attend the event this year due to illness, but he sent a message which was read out to those present. According to a report in the *Sunday Examiner*, the atmosphere was overshadowed by an awareness of “increasing political suppression” (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* July 9).

July 10, 2016:

## Party newspaper *Renmin ribao* publishes comments on President Xi Jinping’s speech on religion

At the National Conference on Religious Work of China’s leaders on April 22–23, 2016, Party chief Xi Jinping gave a keynote speech, which has since then been cited in Chinese media and institutions and has been much discussed as providing guiding principles for the future. On July 10, *Renmin ribao* published the analyses of three influential experts on religion – Zhuo Xinping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Mou Zhongjian of the Minzu University of China and Ye Xiaowen, former director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs. Among other things, the authors highlighted the task of the Party and the state to “guide” the religions which Xi had emphasized, as well as the Sinicization of the religions. The latter was also the principal theme of Mou Zhongjian, who said that in order to achieve this goal, progress must first be made in the “construction of theological Sinicization” (*shenxue Zhongguohua jianshe* 神学中国化建设) of the respective religions and that the theological seminaries of all major religions must be guided to build a theoretical foundation for such Sinicization.

UCAN pointed out that the concept “foreign religions of the same origin” had appeared in the official propaganda for the first time. In the article which he wrote for *Renmin ribao*, Zhuo Xinping said that China’s religions have “to consciously resist control by foreign religions, including foreign religions of the same origin.” Anthony Lam of the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong saw Zhuo’s statement as directed specifically against the Catholic Church and criticized it as “extreme left” thinking (opinion.people.com.cn July 10; UCAN July 18).

July 14, 2016:

## Investigative article by *Reuters* reveals details about Sino-Vatican negotiations

Following a series of interviews with some two dozen Catholic officials and clergy in Hong Kong, Italy and mainland China, as well as with sources having ties to the leadership in Beijing, the news agency *Reuters* has revealed details of an agreement that, while still “fall[ing] short of full diplomatic ties,” would nevertheless “address key issues at the heart of the bitter divide between the Vatican and Beijing.” Possible solutions are being discussed by a special working group made up of members from both sides which was set up in April 2016. The group was modeled on the Joint Liaison Group that China and Great Britain had adopted to prepare the return of Hong Kong to China in 1977, *Reuters* wrote. The working group has the task of solving the problem of the eight illegitimate bishops who have not been recognized by the Pope. Three have been officially excommunicated and, according to *Reuters* (based on reports from Catholic sources), the issue is further complicated by the fact that two of the eight are reported to have children or girlfriends. According to Catholic Church officials, the Pope is prepared to pardon these eight bishops as a part of the ongoing “Year of Mercy,” *Reuters* said. If pardoned, they would then be readmitted to the Church; both sides are now discussing a compromise by which these bishops would retain their titles but would be given other assignments rather than leadership roles as ordinary of a diocese, according to *Reuters*. As of the end of June, however, two of them had still not submitted a clear request for forgiveness to the Holy Father, *Reuters* said. One other key matter that still needs to be agreed upon is that of finding a suitable mechanism for the election of new bishops. According to *Reuters*, a solution is currently under discussion by which the clergy in China would elect the bishops, with the Vatican having a “right to veto” those chosen. Should the Vatican exercise its “veto,” it would then have to provide evidence that the candidate in question is unqualified for the position (on December 11, 2015, Bernardo Cervellera had already reported in *AsiaNews* that such a suggestion was on the table for discussion).

According to *Reuters*, in China the Ministry of Foreign Affairs favors an agreement with Rome as a means to isolate Taiwan but the Party’s United Front Department is afraid of foreign religious infiltration and therefore is less enthusiastic. “Internally, there is division over whether the Pope can be trusted or not,” *Reuters* quotes one source with leadership ties. In the Vatican, on the other hand, the Secretary of State is considered to be the driving force for reaching an agreement, while the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples is more cautious, and there is still strong skepticism within the Catholic Church, especially in Hong Kong, *Reuters* wrote. Furthermore, the news agency revealed that Pope Francis had wanted to meet President Xi Jinping at Kennedy Airport in New York on September 26, 2015. Although this wish had been clearly communicated to China, according to *Reuters*, the two leaders just barely missed meeting one another because “Beijing could not make up its mind.”

July 14–15, 2016:

## Official Catholic governing bodies hold conference to improve the work of the seminaries, especially in the field of political teaching

The meeting in Chengdu dealt principally with the ideological and political teaching in seminaries, which was said to be inadequate – according to a report of the meeting on the website of the two official governing bodies, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the official Chinese Bishops' Conference. In particular there is a lack of faculty members to teach the textbook *Education Material on the Autonomous Self-Government of the Chinese Catholic Church*, the report said. A revision of this textbook will be prepared which will also address the “Sinicization of the Catholic Church” and the “Chinese Dream.” Other topics discussed at the meeting were methods for raising the quality of the seminarians, as well as the plan to introduce a master's program at the National Seminary. Representatives from eight different seminaries took part in the meeting. According to the report, proposals made by the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection for improving the work of the State Administration for Religious Affairs were the background for the meeting ([chinacatholic.org.cn](http://chinacatholic.org.cn) July 25; see *RCTC* 2016, No. 3, pp. 17-18).

July 18–19, 2016:

## Forum in Zhengzhou presents state-sponsored study on the dioceses in China

Liu Zhiqing, director of the Institute for the Study of Religious Culture of the Anyang Normal University (Henan Province), presented the study. There is little systematic research on the subject, Liu said, so the researchers' task was to do thorough research into Chinese history, analyze the current situation and plan for the future. The forum in Zhengzhou (Henan Province) was jointly organized by Liu's Institute together with the Center for the Study of Christianity at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The situation of the dioceses in Mainland China is very complicated since the Vatican and the underground Catholic Church continue to use the diocesan division established in 1946, while the official Church has partly changed diocesan structure and boundaries over the last decades (*UCAN* Aug. 10).

July 21–24, 2016:

## Panchen Lama installed by the Chinese government holds the Kalachakra ritual for the first time. Chinese media report 100,000 participants daily

According to Chinese media, the official Panchen Lama Gyaltzen Norbu has presided at the Kalachakra (Wheel of Time) initiation, an important teaching ritual of Tibetan Buddhism, at the request of the monks of the Tashi Lunpho Monastery, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lamas. The monastery organized the event together with the Buddhist Association of the City of Shigatse (Tibet Autonomous Region). Each day, around 100,000 faithful took part in the ritual, Chinese media reports said; in addition, approximately 100 “Living Buddhas” as well as 5,000 monks and nuns travelled from Tibet, Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai and Yunnan to attend the ritual. According to Chinese media, it was the first Kalachakra ritual to be held in Tibet for 60 years. However, according to a report of the Interna-



The official Panchen Lama Gyaltsen Norbu at his arrival in Shigatse. Photo: www.news.cn.

tional Campaign for Tibet (ICT), some senior Tibetan Lamas had held the ritual in recent years in Tibetan areas outside the Autonomous Region. The ICT also pointed out that the Chinese authorities have sought to prevent the participation of Tibetan faithful from the People's Republic at the Kalachakra rituals conducted in India (most recently in 2014) by the now 81 year old Dalai Lama.

The official Panchen Lama, now 25 years old, was installed by the regime and is being groomed by the government as future leader of Tibetan Buddhism. The whereabouts of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the child whom the Dalai Lama had recognized as the rebirth of the 10th Panchen Lama and who then disappeared in 1995, are still unknown. According to the ICT, most Tibetans are actually loyal to the Panchen Lama recognized by the Dalai Lama. Despite this, many Tibetans understand that the “Chinese” Panchen does not really have any choice with regard to his role, since he is closely supervised by the Chinese government, and they respect his teachers, ICT said (chinanews.com July 27; International Campaign for Tibet [savetibet.org] July 29; *Xinhua* July 21, 24).

July 26–31, 2016:

## Considerable numbers of young people from Mainland China take part in 2016 World Youth Day

Only a few young Chinese were allowed to travel from the mainland to South Korea for the Asian Youth Day in 2014 but this year a considerable number of young people from the PRC succeeded in making their way to the 2016 World Youth Day in Cracow, Poland. Some traveled by way of third countries.

At the same time there were also reports of harassment such as the example cited by *AsiaNews*, which reported on a group of 50 young pilgrims at the Beijing airport. The young people were in their seats ready for takeoff to Cracow when authorities made them deplane. They were interrogated for hours by immigration; finally, their passports were confiscated.

More than 500 young people from Hong Kong took part in World Youth Day. They were the third largest group of participants from Asia (after the Philippines and South Korea). Auxiliary Bishop Ha Chi-shing accompanied the group. About 140 young people came from Taiwan and another 100 were from Macao (*AsiaNews* July 19, 26; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* July 22; *UCAN* July 22).

July 28, 2016:

## Austrian newspaper *Der Standard* reports on sale and delivery of ready-made, pre-fab temples “made in Taiwan”

According to a July 28, 2016 report in the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*, in Taiwan there are several companies that offer ready-made, pre-fab temples for sale. Like pre-fab houses, these temples can be delivered and assembled in a matter of weeks. The article described a business in Pingdong County, where about 100 of the firm's employees are involved in the production of temples and statues. “Depending on the size, a pre-fab temple from Lin's company Chuanso costs between 1,000 and 56,000 Euros, as much as 40% less than one built using conventional construction methods.” Many of these temples are being exported to mainland China – thus *Der Standard* –, the most popular being the tem-

ples of the “Earth God” and of the “God of wealth.” At large temples built on location in the traditional way, construction will often go on for years with construction times for smaller private installations taking several months (*Der Standard* July 28).

July 29, 2016:

## Xinjiang Autonomous Region adopts implementation rules for the national Anti-Terrorism Law

Xinjiang has become the first province to adopt detailed rules for the implementation of the national Anti-Terrorism Law, which went into effect on January 1, 2016. The state-run *Global Times* reports that the provisions largely follow the national law but include an additional chapter on the “education and management” of terrorists. Among other things, the act contains a provision that leaders of terrorist organizations and those who instigate others to crimes while in jail or who oppose re-education programs are to be kept in solitary confinement. The *Global Times*, referring to European experiences, writes that this is being done in order to help prevent the spread of radical Islam in the prisons. There are also differences to be found in the definition of terrorism. While according to the national law the state combats religious extremism in order to deprive terrorism of its ideological basis (Article 4), from the outset the Xinjiang provisions are directed against both terrorism and religious extremism at the same time (Articles 1, 2). The spread of extremism via mobile phone, the internet, etc. is also defined as a terrorist act (Article 6.6). The “Measures of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of the Uighur for the Implementation of the ‘Anti-Terrorism Law of People’s Republic of China’” (新疆维吾尔自治区实施《中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法》办法) went into effect on August 1, 2016 (Chinese text: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2016-08/01/c\\_129195246.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2016-08/01/c_129195246.htm); English translation: <http://chinalawtranslate.com/xjcounter-terror/?lang=en>; *Global Times* Aug. 2).

July 29, 2016:

## The Atlantic reports on the rise of Scientology on Taiwan

While it is becoming increasingly difficult in many places for Scientology to recruit new members and the number of dropouts is steadily on the rise, Taiwan counts as one of the most Scientology-friendly countries in the world, according to a report by *The Atlantic* magazine in its July 29, 2016 issue. Taiwan serves as one of the main sources of income from donations and is an important field for recruiting new members for the Church of Scientology, thus the magazine. At the inauguration of a Scientology mega church in Kaohsiung in a converted hotel at the end of 2013, senior government officials were in attendance and honored it for the tenth year in a row with the national award as an “Excellent Religious Group.” According to the report, Scientology has 15 missions and churches in Taiwan and considers Taiwan as the “gateway to China,” so gaining a foothold there is “the abiding dream of all Scientologists.”

Scientology’s first mission in Taiwan opened in the late 1980s; in 2003 Scientology was recognized by the Taiwanese government as a religion. Due to the extremely high fees, which members must pay for courses, the first Taiwanese Scientologists came mainly from the middle class: doctors, lawyers, teachers and nurses. According to the article, such costs drove many to ruin. The science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard, who founded Scientology, repeatedly plugged himself as a “new Buddha.” He maintained that the Buddha was supposed to appear once again in the West – and with red hair – like Hubbard himself (*The Atlantic* July 29).

July 30, 2016:

## Death of Underground Bishop Huang Shoucheng of Mindong

Bishop Vincent Huang Shoucheng of the Diocese of Mindong (Fujian Province) has died at the age of 93. Bishop Huang was born on July 23, 1923, and was ordained a priest in 1949. He was arrested on three different occasions and altogether spent some 35 years in prison, in labor camps or under house arrest. He was consecrated bishop in 1985 and took over the office of bishop of Mindong in 2005. A man of prayer and gifted with farsightedness, he devoted himself intensely to the initial and on-going formation of his priests and to the great number of religious Sisters in his diocese. His successor as bishop of Mindong is Coadjutor Bishop Vincent Guo Xijin, born in 1958 and ordained coadjutor bishop in 2008 by Bishop Huang. Neither Bishop Huang nor Bishop Guo Xijin are recognized by the government.

According to *AsiaNews*, despite government restrictions 20,000 turned out for the funeral on August 2. Fujian Province, with its approximately 370,000 Catholics, counts as one of the strongholds of the underground Church in China. The majority of the estimated 80,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Mindong belong to the underground. The open Church community is led by Bishop Zhan Silu, who was irregularly consecrated bishop in 2000 without papal authority (*AsiaNews* July 30; Aug. 1, 2; *UCAN* Aug. 1).

July/August 2016:

## New Museum in Guangxi exalts the execution of a French missionary



Fr. Chapdelaine kneels before the magistrate during his trial: Scene from the new museum in Ding'an. Photo: *UCAN*.

In the City Ding'an in Xilin County of Guangxi Province, a new museum to promote patriotic education opened this past summer. One of its main exhibits features the 1856 conviction and execution of the Catholic missionary priest Fr. Auguste Chapdelaine, a member of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP). According to an August 11 report by Jiangnan Ke in *UCAN*, the museum's declared purpose is "to promote patriotism and condemn Western religions as being 'spiritual opium.'" Chapdelaine is one of the 120 Chinese martyrs canonized by Pope John Paul II in Rome on October 1, 2000. At the time, the canonization triggered fierce protests by the government of the People's Republic. According to the museum's representation of events, Chapdelaine was accused of collusion with corrupt local officials and of rape. Various historians outside of China claim that he had been confused with a bandit by the name of Ma Zinong. The museum glorifies instead the figure of Zhang Mingfeng, head magistrate of Xilin at the time, who had sentenced the priest to death. On February 29, 1856, after severe torture,

Chapdelaine came to death in a small cage suspended in the air. The region is a major tourist area and according to *AsiaNews*, the opening of the museum must also be seen as a part of China's attempts at the Sinicization of religion (*AsiaNews* July 11; *UCAN* July 13; Aug. 11).

August 1, 2016:

## Taiwan's President apologizes to the country's indigenous peoples

In a ceremony held at the Presidential Office Building in Taipei, Taiwan's President, Mrs. Tsai Ing-wen, has extended an official apology to the country's indigenous peoples for centuries of "pain and ill-treatment." Leaders representing the various communities of Taiwan's indigenous peoples took part in the ceremony. The President promised that she would undertake concrete steps toward redressing the country's history of injustice in their regard.

According to a report in the *New York Times*, there are 540,000 members of indigenous groups, who make up 2% of Taiwan's population of 23 million. 16 groups are officially recognized, whereby Amis, Atayal and Paiwan make up 70% of all indigenous people. The indigenous peoples of Taiwan suffer from high unemployment and low wages as well as insufficient access to education and other services (*The New York Times* Aug. 1).

August 2–5, 2016:

## Prison sentences for the founder of the law firm Fengrui and other rights activists in Tianjin

In the context of the massive crackdown against civil rights activists, a court in Tianjin has been hearing the trials on charges of "subverting state power" of four people arrested in July of 2015. Zhou Shifeng, founder of the Beijing law firm Fengrui, which found itself at the center of the crackdown, was sentenced to seven years in prison. The law firm had taken on a number of politically sensitive cases and represented persons such as: the victims of the 2008 baby milk powder scandal; the artist Ai Weiwei; the blind civil rights activist Chen Guangcheng; the lawyer Gao Zhisheng; the Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti as well as Zhang Miao, a female staffer of the German weekly magazine *Die Zeit*. Hu Shigen, an underground church leader and pro-democracy activist (with formerly already 16 years in prison for earlier political offenses), was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison, Gou Hongguo and Zhai Yanmin were given suspended sentences of three years each. According to the organization Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), Gou was accused of belonging to Hu's religious group, which had become involved with the activist Zhai on advocacy campaigns around politically sensitive cases, while Zhou used his law firm as a platform to launch these activities, thus the charge.

The Buddhist monk and activist Lin Bin (monastic name: Wang Yun), leader of a monastery in Ningde (Fujian), who, according to CHRD, had also first disappeared in July of 2015 and who was arrested in January of 2016 on charges of "incitement to subvert state power," disappeared once again following his release in September of 2016. He had been active in his support for civil rights lawyers.

According to the CHRD, during the crackdown in July of 2015, at least 300 lawyers and activists were interrogated, 13 of whom are still being detained (see CHRD Update with links to other sites: [www.nchr.org/2015/07/individuals-affected-by-july-10-crackdown-on-rights-lawyers/](http://www.nchr.org/2015/07/individuals-affected-by-july-10-crackdown-on-rights-lawyers/); *Radio Free Asia* Oct. 4; *South China Morning Post* Aug. 7; *UCAN* Aug. 3; *Xinhua* Aug. 3, 5).



August 5, 2016:

## Falun Dafa Information Center publishes list of Falun Gong adherents in detention since the 2008 Olympics

On the occasion of the launch of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the New York based information center of the Falun Gong movement, banned in China since 1999 as an “evil cult,” has reminded the world that in the run-up to the Olympic Games of 2008 in Beijing more than 8,000 Falun Gong adherents have been detained. The Falun Dafa Information Center has published a list of the names of 158 adherents of the movement who, according to the center’s data, in 2009 have been sentenced to prison for periods ranging from 7.5 to 18 years and who are, it is presumed, still being detained (see the list at: [http://media.faluninfo.net/media/doc/2016/08/FDIC-jan-dec-09-sentencing-for\\_2016.pdf](http://media.faluninfo.net/media/doc/2016/08/FDIC-jan-dec-09-sentencing-for_2016.pdf)).

August 7, 2016:

## Hong Kong’s Cardinal John Tong has published a statement on the goals and principles of the Sino-Vatican negotiations

As he explains in his statement, the Cardinal addresses the questions and concerns of many Chinese believers and priests with regard to the Sino-Vatican negotiations. He speaks of the Church’s duty to respect all civilisations. “The agreement between the Holy See and Beijing is an example of human dialogue, the beginning of the normalisation of a mutual relationship,” thus the Cardinal. Religious freedom and the communion between the Catholic Church in China with the universal Church are the principal goals of the dialogue. Cardinal Tong goes into great detail about the canonical regulations on the appointments of bishops and on the role that a future legitimate Bishops’ Conference of the Catholic Church in China might play in this regard. In doing so, he seeks to dispel concerns that any principles of the faith or the rights of the underground Church could be sacrificed for the sake of an agreement. The statement dated July 31 and entitled “Communion of the Church in China with the Universal Church” was published on August 7 in the Diocesan newspaper *Kung Kao Po*.

Following August 7, 2016:

## Reactions to Cardinal Tong’s statement

Reactions to Cardinal Tong’s statement have been very mixed, particularly in mainland China. Some commentators described it as “over-optimistic, balanced and inspiring,” others saw it as “plain unrealistic,” the *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* reported. Among the comments, especially noteworthy was the interview of Gianni Valente with the underground Bishop Wei Jingyi of Harbin. Bishop Wei said Cardinal Tong’s letter had been inspired from heaven and was convinced that the Pope would never sacrifice either the principles of the faith or any legitimate request of the clandestine communities. With regard to the dialogue, he said: “We hope that they will soon reach a concrete result.” On the day after the publication of the statement, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said that China is ready “to continue having constructive dialogue with the Vatican side, to meet each other halfway and jointly promote the continued forward development of the process of improving bilateral ties.”

A remarkably open article in the party-friendly *Global Times* also dedicated itself to the statement of Cardinal Tong. It quoted Tong as saying that the Chinese Government is now willing to reach an understanding with the Holy See on the issue of the appointment of bishops. In addition, it describes several problems still to be resolved and repeats the conviction of Elisa Giunipero (Catholic Univer-

sity of Milan) that the Holy See will not forget the difficulties of the underground Church. Finally he comes around to the point of the “control concerns” of the Chinese Government. Among other things, he mentions that the Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), Wang Zu’an, warned on August 7 of “hostile foreign forces” who want to alter China’s ideology and political system through the use of religion, and called for firm controls over the leadership of the Catholic Church in China. In its conclusion, the article cites the conviction expressed by Liu Peng (Pu Shi Institute for Social Sciences, Beijing) that the principles put forward by the Vatican are acceptable to Beijing and that an agreement would be in the best interests of all concerned (*Global Times* Aug. 18; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Aug. 20; Sept. 3; *Vatican Insider* Aug. 12).

August 11, 2016:

## Official Hajj of the Pilgrims from the People’s Republic of China to Mecca started

Between August 11-22, some 14,500 participants from all provinces (except Fujian), the autonomous regions and from direct-controlled municipalities departed for Saudi Arabia to take part in this year’s Hajj on 48 charter flights. This information was reported by the official governing body of Muslims, the Chinese Islamic Association on its website ([chinaislam.net.cn](http://chinaislam.net.cn) August 12). The number of pilgrims from the People’s Republic taking part in the Hajj has remained steady since 2014. Any Muslim wishing to go on the Hajj must sign up for the pilgrimage supervised by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). Saudi Arabia sets the quotas for the number of pilgrims from each country.

August 15, 2016:

## Radio Free Asia: School Children in Aksu and Hotan (Xinjiang) are being questioned about their families’ religious practices

According to *Radio Free Asia*, all middle and high school students in the prefectures of both Aksu and Hotan in the South West of Xinjiang are being required to fill out a questionnaire providing information about religious practice in their families: i.e., who in the family prays regularly, who wears a *hijab* (Islamic headscarf) or a beard. Local sources interviewed by *Radio Free Asia* informed them that the schools collect the filled out questionnaires, which have to be stamped by both police and government. Similar questionnaires have been issued before, one source said (*Radio Free Asia* Aug. 15).

August 17, 2016:

## China Aid reports: Central Hospital of Wenzhou prohibits religious activities



Sign forbidding religious activities in the central hospital. Photo: China Aid.

As reported by the US-based organization China Aid, relying on information obtained from Christians in Wenzhou, a public notice was posted recently in the Central Hospital of Wenzhou (Zhejiang Province), which prohibits the carrying out of religious activities in the hospital. An employee of the clinic confirmed the fact of the prohibition to *Radio Free Asia*.

According to the China Aid report, it has been customary for years now that Christians would go to the hospitals of Wenzhou and the surrounding area almost daily to pray with the sick or to evangelize. It is estimated that Christians make up about 15% of the population in Wenzhou. Prior to 1949, the Central Hospital of Wenzhou had been a Protestant hospital (chinaaid.net Aug. 17; *Radio Free Asia* Aug. 18).

August 18, 2016:

### **AsiaNews recalls the dilemma of underground priests regarding the government's requirement that they register**

According to the work plans of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), by the end of 2016 the process of issuing certificates to Daoist and Catholic clergy should be completed (see *China heute* 2016, No. 1, pp. 4-6 [in German]). *AsiaNews* says that this year they have received many appeals for help from Chinese underground priests. They find themselves in a serious dilemma, *AsiaNews* writes, because in order to be able to exercise their pastoral ministry, they would first have to make an application to be registered with the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, which has the principle of independent self-government enshrined in its statutes (*AsiaNews* Aug. 18).

August 18–19, 2016:

### **Conference on the “Sinicization of Islam” meets in Yinchuan (Ningxia)**

The talks during the conference, which was attended by even high-ranking politicians, were given by Chinese scholars of religious studies and ethnologists as well as by representatives of official Islam from all over China. Some speakers made a distinction between “Islam in the interior of the country” (*neidi yisilanjiao* 内地伊斯兰教) and “Islam in Xinjiang.” For example, Guo Chengzhen, Secretary-General of the Chinese Islamic Association, said that the indigenization (*bentuhua* 本土化) of the former had been reached, characterized by an active adaptation to Chinese society and culture, while the indigenization of Islam in Xinjiang was still developing as it absorbed elements of the traditional culture of the ethnic minorities. This shows the diversity present in the development of Islam in China, thus Guo. He pointed to the harmful aspects of “Dawa missionary groups and of international Salafism, which have come to our country, to ‘purify’ Islam.” An Islamization of their life would lead the Muslims in China to self-marginalization, it would constitute a departure from the policy of Sinicization and must be resisted, Guo said.

The conference was organized by the Ningxia Research Society of United Front Theory, the Ningxia Academy of Socialism, the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Chinese Association of Religious Studies. A more detailed report on the conference can be found at: [http://iwr.cass.cn/xw/201609/t20160906\\_21189.htm](http://iwr.cass.cn/xw/201609/t20160906_21189.htm) .

August 24, 2016:

### **Vatican Secretary of State to *Avvenire*: The aim of negotiations with Beijing is to make the lives of Catholic faithful in China simpler and foster reconciliation**

“For the Holy See, it is particularly important that Chinese Catholics be able to live their faith in a positive way, whilst also being good citizens,” said Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, top diplomat

of the Vatican, in an interview with the newspaper *Avvenire*. The claim that there are two different Churches in China [i.e. official and underground Church], is wrong, Parolin stressed. “There are in fact two communities that are both eager to live in full communion with the Successor of Peter.” It is the wish of the Holy See “to one day see these two communities reconciled, embracing one another, giving and receiving mercy in a joint proclamation of the Gospel that is truly credible” (according to *Vatican Insider* Aug. 24).

August 27, 2016:

## Vatican Secretary of State in Pordenone: Hopes for a new era in Sino-Vatican relations

In a speech at the diocesan seminary in Pordenone (Northern Italy) which was later published as an extract by Vatican Radio, Cardinal Parolin expressed his appreciation of Cardinal Celso Costantini (1876–1958), the first Apostolic Delegate to China, as a bridge builder between the Holy See and China. Parolin said that today, as ever, “many are the hopes and expectations for new developments and a new season of relations between the Apostolic See and China.” Good relations were not an end in themselves, but should be pursued “only in the measure in which they are ‘ordered’ toward the good of Chinese Catholics, to the good of the entire Chinese people” and in favor of world peace. He said that Pope Francis knows well “the baggage of suffering... which the Catholic community in China carries on its shoulders” (*America Magazine* Aug. 27; *Asia Times* Aug. 30; *Vatican Radio* Aug. 27).

August 29, 2016:

## Expert at the *Global Times* says: China is not keen on formal relations with the Vatican

The party-friendly newspaper *Global Times* reported Cardinal Parolin’s words of August 27 that there is much hope for new developments in Sino-Vatican relations. However, quoting the scholar Yan Kejia of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the newspaper said that China is not eager to establish formal ties with the Vatican, “because it is not an urgent issue.” The Vatican should cut off its political relations with Taiwan, thus Yan. The *Global Times* also mentioned that Taiwan’s Vice President was expected to travel to Rome for the canonization of Mother Teresa (see the entry of September 4, 2016). When queried on this topic, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said on August 25 that countries should be prudent when dealing with Taiwan-related issues (*Global Times* Aug. 29).

August 29, 2016:

## Appointment of Chen Quanguo as Party Secretary of Xinjiang announced

Since 2011, Chen Quanguo has been the Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region. His new appointment will make him the first politician in the People’s Republic of China to be named successively Party Secretary – i.e. highest political position – first of Tibet and then of Xinjiang. Wu Yingjie, a Han Chinese who grew up in Tibet, will succeed Chen as Party Secretary in Tibet. According to the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, Chen Quanguo’s predecessor as Party Secretary in Xinjiang was replaced as a result of his failure to curb the frequent extremist attacks in Xinjiang.

According to reports in the Hong Kong media, in Pishan County, Prefecture Hotan, Xinjiang, a deputy county police chief was killed during a raid against suspected extremists on September 10 and three other policemen were seriously injured. According to details supplied by Uyghurs in exile, in the incident mentioned there were more than ten dead and wounded, among others Uyghurs and police. Seventeen Uyghurs were arrested following the raid, they said (*Apple Daily*, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, *Ming Pao* Sept. 19; according to *BBC Global Monitoring*; *Radio Free Asia* Sept. 19; *Xinhua* Aug. 29, and others).

**September 1, 2016:**

## Charity Law goes into effect

China's Charity Law (*Cishan fa* 慈善法) which was adopted on March 13, 2016 took effect on September 1, 2016. It contains provisions for the establishment and registration of charitable organizations, extends the possibilities for fundraising and at the same time strengthens the regulatory monitoring (see *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* 2016, No. 2, pp. 17f.).

The authorities responsible for religious affairs at all levels organized numerous conferences in the past few months, in which representatives of the main religions have received training in matters regarding the Charity Law. At one such training session run by the State Administration for Religious Affairs from June 20-26 in Guiyang (Guizhou Province) with 160 representatives from all over China – governmental as well as representatives of the main religions – the religious circles were encouraged to make combating poverty a focus of their charitable activities in the future.

On March 22, in *Zhongguo minzubao* the Chinese priest Fr. John Baptist Zhang (Zhang Guanglai), founder of the Catholic Jinde Charities, called for the “desensitization” of religion and religious charities. He fears that religious charities will not be able to fairly unfold their real potential on behalf of those most in need if the authorities, despite the new law, with the excuse that religion is a “sensitive” topic refuse them access to public fundraising and if the media due to the same reason are hesitant to report on their activities (*mzb.com.cn* March 22; *sara.gov.cn* June 29; *Xinhua* Aug. 31; Sept. 5).

**September 4, 2016:**

## Taiwan's Vice President in Rome to see Mother Teresa declared a Saint

Chen Chien-jen, Taiwan's Vice President and a dedicated Catholic, took part in the celebrations marking the canonization of Mother Teresa in St. Peter's Square. The Vatican is one of the twenty-two states which maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Chen's visit was the first official visit of a representative of the government of Taiwan in three years. In 2013, then President Ma Ying-jeou travelled to Rome to represent Taiwan at the investiture of Pope Francis, a visit which led to official protests on the part of the government in Beijing (*South China Morning Post* Aug. 24).

**September 4, 2016:**

## First church in the People's Republic of China dedicated to Saint Teresa of Calcutta

In a festive ceremony, presided over by Bishop Joseph Li Liangui, a new church dedicated to “Saint Teresa of Calcutta” was consecrated in Jiaohokou, in the village of Haocun in the Diocese of Xianxian



Members of the Evangelic Association of Mother Teresa in a diocese in Hebei Province on pilgrimage before the Sheshan Basilica of Shanghai (2012). Photo: Martin Welling.

(Hebei) on September 4, the very day she was declared a Saint in Rome. There are already several other churches dedicated to “Mother Teresa” in other parts of China. The little village has a population of about 300 Catholics.

Mother Teresa had tried repeatedly to obtain a foothold for her Missionaries of Charity in mainland China. According to a statement in the *National Catholic Register* (U.S.A.) by Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, the postulator or promoter of the canonization process, opening a mission in mainland China was the “last and only unfulfilled wish” of the newly declared saint. Three visits led Mother Teresa towards China, but she was never granted permission to open a house of her congregation there. Already back in 1985 she visited Beijing at the invitation of Deng Pufang, the paraplegic son of Deng Xiaoping, who later became chairman of the Chinese Disabled Persons Federation. In 1993, her second trip brought her to Shanghai and then once again to Beijing. In Shanghai she met with Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian and spoke to Shanghai’s seminarians at Sheshan Basilica on the outskirts of Shanghai. From the time of that visit until her death, she always carried in a pocket of her sari a little statue of Our Lady of Sheshan, which Bishop Jin had given her as a memento of her visit. On Mother Teresa’s third attempt to open a house of her Sisters in China, this time on Hainan Island in 1994, it was shipwrecked at the last moment. Mother Teresa and her small group of Sisters were denied entry. Sr. Mary Prema Pierick, the current superior general of the Missionaries of Charity, said to the *Register* that her Sisters could start charitable work in China “in no time.”

Following her beatification in 2003, a lay organization, the Evangelic Association of Mother Teresa, was founded in Hebei Province. Today, the organization counts more than 10,000 members in three provinces (*America Magazine* Sept. 3; *Fides* Sept. 12; *National Catholic Register* Sept. 6).

September 5, 2016:

## China holds its first ever “Day of Charity”

On September 5, marked by various events, China celebrated its first ever Day of Charity. In future, the Day of Charity will be an annual celebration. The International Day of Charity initiated by the United Nations since 2013 has been held yearly on September 5, the anniversary of the death of Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) (*Xinhua* Sept. 5).

September 6, 2016:

### ***Fides* report: Prayer rooms installed in Chinese airports**

According to a report by *Fides*, a 30 square meter chapel has recently been opened at Shenzhen international airport. Bibles are readily available for the convenience of those who make use of the prayer room. According to an unspecified local newspaper report “the opening of the prayer hall is a sign of recognition of the Christian culture, of respect for international guests, facilitating their moral and spiritual needs. Being a city with a large influx of foreigners, the initiative also helps to understand the Christian culture and promote evangelization.” According to *Fides*, in recent years prayer rooms for Christians, Muslims and the faithful of other religions have been established in various Chinese international airports, including one in Beijing (with two rooms), Chengdu, Xi’an, Kunming and Ordos in Inner Mongolia (*Fides* Sept. 6).

September 7, 2016:

### **State Council publishes draft revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs”**

For some time now, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) has been working on a revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” which were adopted in 2004 and which took effect on March 1, 2005. These regulations make up the basic administrative legal norms for the State’s dealings with the religions. The revised text has been made public so that opinions may be collected and evaluated. The new version is considerably longer than the previous one. It has 9 chapters with 74 articles (previously: 7 chapters with 48 articles). The role of the (official) religious organizations and thus of the State Administration for Religious Affairs is strengthened in the draft of the revision. Many commentators outside China regard the main objective of the draft revision as stronger control of the religions. It is true that the draft revision brings hardly any real surprises, since many of the newly recorded topics have been discussed earlier or regulated by subsidiary legal norms. But it limits further the still existing leeway for religious activity. This concerns especially the non-registered, non-official religious groups but also the freedom to act of the registered, official groups, as well as contacts overseas.

The deadline for the public hearing ended on October 7. It remains to be seen whether the revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs” will be adopted in their current form or whether they will still be modified (for further details, see the article “The State Council publishes a draft revision of the ‘Regulations on Religious Affairs’” in this issue of *RCTC*).

September 7, 2016:

### **Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang of Wenzhou dies at the age of 88 – His successor was taken away to northwest China on a forced trip**

Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang, appointed by the Pope and recognized by the government, was born on December 10, 1927 into a Catholic family in Zhejiang. He studied theology at the Sheshan Seminary near Shanghai and was ordained a priest in 1954. He spent the years from 1955 until 1971, and once again from 1982 until 1988, either in prison or in a forced labor camp. In January of 2009, he was consecrated Bishop with papal approval and on December 23, 2010, he was publically installed as Bishop of Wenzhou. “As a bishop, he spared no effort in safeguarding the rights and interests of the Church,

earning great esteem among all the faithful,” wrote the Vatican News Agency *Fides*. For example, he wrote a Pastoral Letter to all the faithful to protest against the massive removal of crosses carried out by government authorities in the Province of Zhejiang (a translation of his Pastoral Letter in German can be found in *China heute* 2014, No. 3, pp. 165-167).

According to *AsiaNews*, approximately 5,000 of the faithful attended Bischof Zhu’s funeral on September 13. Underground priests were forbidden by the authorities to take part in the funeral. Shortly before Bishop Zhu’s death, his Coadjutor Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin (born 1963), who heads the underground part of the diocese, was taken on a “sightseeing tour” to Qinghai Province by the authorities. He eventually returned but, according to *UCAN*, on September 26 he was once again sent “on tour,” possibly in connection with the death of the neighboring Bishop Xu Jiwei (see the entry of September 25, 2016) or because of the Vatican announcement that he was the successor of Bishop Zhu (see below). In addition to Bishop Shao Zhumin, Fr. Jiang Sunian, underground Chancellor of the Diocese of Wenzhou, and two other priests were also temporarily taken away.

According to Canon Law, as Coadjutor Bishop Shao automatically succeeds Bishop Zhu. This was once again expressly confirmed on September 21 by the notification of the news agency of the Vatican (*news.va*). Some Catholics told *AsiaNews* that the Government, however, had planned that Fr. Ma Xianshi, currently Director of the Council of priests in the official part of the diocese, would take over as the successor to Bishop Zhu. This suggests that the matter of a successor to Bishop Zhu will also be included in the current Sino-Vatican talks. – There are many Christians in the city of Wenzhou. According to *news.va*, the Catholic Diocese of Wenzhou has about 140,000 faithful, of whom approximately one third (according to *AsiaNews*) or two thirds (according to *UCAN*) belong to the underground Church there (*AsiaNews* Sept. 7, 8, 13; *china.ucanews.com* Sept. 22; *Fides* Sept. 21; *news.va* Sept. 21; *UCAN* Sept. 7, 26).

**September 8, 2016:**

### ***South China Morning Post* reported on arrests for the murder of women to sell them as “ghost brides”**

In Northwest China three men were arrested after they had killed two women to sell them as “ghost brides,” according to a report in the *South China Morning Post*. One of those convicted, Ma Chonghua, allegedly killed the two women with lethal injections, after he had kidnapped them in Gansu Province. With the help of two other suspects, he is said to have finally sold the corpses in Shaanxi Province. An old belief, according to which the death of unmarried persons brings disaster, is still alive in rural regions of Northwest China. Even though the buying and selling of corpses is banned, it is still the practice in many places to arrange “ghost weddings” for dead family members to prevent misfortune. Ma is accused of having sold one of the corpses, that of a 47 year old woman with mental illness, for 40,200 Yuan to a villager in Shaanxi, who was looking for a bride for his deceased, unmarried 67 year old brother.

According to an article in *Zeit online*, in the last ten years the demand for ghost weddings has begun to grow once again (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 8, 2016; *Zeit online* Nov. 7, 2013).

**September 12, 2016:**

### **Council of State publishes White Paper on “New progress in the Judicial Protection of Human Rights in China”**

The white paper focuses on the human rights protection in the field of justice. Among other things, it says that progress was made to “ensure lawyers’ right of practice, so that lawyers are playing a bigger



role in safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of parties concerned,” *Xinhua* wrote (german.xinhuanet.com Sept. 13). The English version of the white paper can be found at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-09/12/c\\_135681609.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-09/12/c_135681609.htm).

September 25, 2016:

## Bischof Xu Jiwei of the Diocese of Taizhou (Zhejiang Province) dies

81 year old Bishop Anthony Xu Jiwei was consecrated in 2010 with a papal mandate and was also recognized by the Chinese government. He died three weeks after the death of Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifang in the neighboring Diocese of Wenzhou. Bishop Xu was born in 1935 in Shanghai and studied from 1948-1958 first at the minor seminary of Ningbo and then completed his studies for the priesthood at Shanghai's regional seminary. Not yet ordained, he spent long years in prison and in forced labor camps. In 1985 he took part in a refresher course at the seminary in Shanghai and that same year he was finally ordained a priest. In 1999 he was appointed administrator for the Diocese of Taizhou and in 2010 he was consecrated bishop of the diocese.

Taizhou is a small diocese with only 9 priests and about 3,000 churchgoers in the official Church as well as three priests who care for the spiritual needs of a few thousand underground Catholics. In 2010 the Pope entrusted Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin, underground Bishop of Wenzhou, with the care of the underground community in Taizhou Diocese (for more on Bishop Shao, see the entry of September 7 above). As far as the successor to Bishop Xu as Bishop of Taizhou is concerned, nothing is known at present.

The prosperous coastal province of Zhejiang is one of China's Christian strongholds with approximately 2 million Protestants and 200,000 Catholics. The province was particularly hard hit during the government's campaign to tear down the crosses from church buildings (*AsiaNews* Sept. 26; *Fides* Sept. 25; *UCAN* Sept. 26).

September 29, 2016:

## State Council publishes “National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2016–2020)”

Under the sub-heading “Freedom of religious belief” the action plan speaks of improving the rule of law with regard to religious affairs and singles out the following projects: 1) Amending the “Regulations on Religious Affairs”; 2) Supporting the efforts of the religious circles for better self-managements; 3) Encouraging religious circles to organize charity activities; 4) Making efforts to run the religious institutes well and improving the training of religious professionals; 5) Halting commercial use and prohibiting the “contracting” of Buddhist monasteries and Daoist temples; 6) Improving organization of the Hajj; and 7) Exchange with the outside world.

All of these points are already part of the current agenda of the State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA). The English text of the Action Plan can be found at: <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0929/c90000-9121608.html>.

October 1, 2016:

## ***Guide to the Catholic Church in China* is now available online**

As of October 1, 2016, the *Guide to the Catholic Church in China*, in the form of an e-book, is now available online. Valuable data on the individual dioceses, religious congregations and Church personnel in China can now be accessed online in this *Guide to the Catholic Church in China*, issued since the mid-1980s under the authorship of Fr. Jean Charbonnier, MEP, at Zhonglian in Singapore. *The Guide 2014 Plus*, an updated edition of the print version of 2014, is now available online at no charge at: [www.zhonglian.org/ebook.html](http://www.zhonglian.org/ebook.html).

October 2, 2016:

## **On his return flight to Rome from Azerbaijan, Pope Francis reports that he has received a gift from President Xi Jinping – there are “good relations”**

During the in-flight press conference Pope Francis responded to the question of a journalist about China: “As for China. You are familiar with the history of China and the Church: the patriotic Church, the underground Church... But we have good relations, we study and we talk, there are working commissions... I am optimistic. Now I believe that the Vatican Museum has organized an exhibit in China, the Chinese will do another at the Vatican... There are many professors who go to teach in Chinese universities, many nuns, many priests who can work well there. The relations between the Vatican and the Chinese... We have to establish a relationship, and for this we are having discussions, slowly... Slow things go well, always. Things done in a hurry do not go well. I have great esteem for the Chinese people. The day before yesterday, for example, there was a two-day conference, I believe, at the [Pontifical] Academy of Sciences on *Laudato Si'*, and there was a Chinese delegation representing the President. And the President of China sent me a gift. There are good relations.”

According to information provided by Gianni Valente of the *Vatican Insider*, President Xi's gift to Pope Francis was a silk print of the famous “Nestorian Stele” of Xi'an. The gift was presented to the Pope by Zhou Jinfeng, Secretary General of the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation. Together with a delegation of this foundation under the leadership of Hu Deping, son of the former Secretary General of the Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, he had taken part in the seminar on *Laudato Si'* (for the text of the Pope's interview, see: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161002\\_georgia-azerbaijan-conferenza-stampa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161002_georgia-azerbaijan-conferenza-stampa.html); *Vatican Insider* Oct. 6).

This “News Update” was first published in *China heute* 2016, No. 3, pp. 147-154 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the “News Update” refer to the year 2016.