

News Update on Religion and Church in China November 13, 2016 – March 29, 2017

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2017, No. 1, pp. 3-18) covered the period September 26 – December 2, 2016.

General – Civil Society, Law

December 20, 2016:

Beijing publishes list of Chinese entities permitted to act as partners for foreign NGOs

Only a few days before January 1, 2017, when the new “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in the Mainland of China” took automatic effect, the Chinese government published a list of those Chinese institutions designated to serve as partners for foreign NGOs. According to the provisions of the new law, all of the approximately 7,000 foreign NGOs currently operating in China, must now be registered with the police. Not only must they demonstrate that they contribute to the public welfare in China, but they must also register through a Chinese partner organization, from among those specified in the government’s list and which are associated with the purposes of the foreign NGOs. The ‘authorized partner organizations’ are almost exclusively entities of the State. Foreign NGOs, which thus far have had no Chinese partner organization, as well as those whose previous partners are not on the list, must find a new partner in order to register. The search for authorized partner institutions has proven to be difficult since the institutions referred to in the list are not necessarily interested in such partnerships. Thus, many foreign NGOs in China now find themselves in a state of illegality. This has as a consequence that, in many cases, these NGOs are no longer able to gain access to the funds in their bank accounts and that employees who are Chinese nationals can no longer be paid and projects already in the works cannot be carried out. In addition, it turns out that it has suddenly become difficult for foreign NGOs to obtain an extension of the visas of their foreign employees (sueddeutsche.de March 13, 2017).

Chinese text und English translation of the list can be found at: chinalawtranslate.com/境外非政府组织在中国境内活动领域和项目目录/?lang=en. A German translation of the law can be found at: *China heute* 2016, No. 3, pp. 155-163.

Jan Kwee

January 11, 2017:

Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou publishes guidelines for lecturers of “Ten Not Allowed” actions, among which is the dissemination of religion

As the *South China Morning Post* has reported, “criticizing the Constitution,” “criticizing Chinese Communist Party leaders” and “spreading religion and superstition” are at the top of the list of ten not allowed subjects which teachers must henceforth avoid in their lecture halls. According to the newspaper, the directive shows that the guidelines of Sun Yat-sen University, generally considered a liberal institution, show how universities themselves are tightening up control over their teaching staff in order to fall in line with the declared party policy of requiring a reinforcement of “ideological work” on university campuses.

The Catholic news agency *AsiaNews* reported that Chinese universities monitor the religious activities of students and faculty among others by means of “leadership groups for religious work” (宗教工作领导小组). At some universities, they form part of the United Front leadership groups according to *AsiaNews* (*AsiaNews* March 22, 2017; *Global Times* Jan. 12, 2017; *rfa.org/cantonese* Jan. 13, 2015; *South China Morning Post* Jan. 12, 2017).

February 22, 2017:

Anti-corruption authority of the Chinese Communist Party announces inspection of 29 leading universities

Peking University, Qinghua University and Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou as well as others are among the universities to be visited as part of the 12th round of inspections by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the Chinese Communist Party. According to the CCDI’s own report, the inspections will concentrate on a “political checkup” of each university’s Party committee. The CCDI report stated that in December of 2012, Xi Jinping had stressed that the party committees must have comprehensive leadership of the universities and have control of the direction each university is going.

Renmin University in Beijing and Fudan University in Shanghai were already checked by the CCDI in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Ideological control of the universities has intensified since Xi Jinping became Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party in late 2012 (*ccdi.gov.cn* Feb. 23, 2017; *South China Morning Post* Feb. 23, 2017).

March 13, 2017:

Coming into force of the “Provisional Measures for Random Inspections of Social Organizations” (NGOs)

The regulation adopted by the Ministry of Civil Affairs stipulates that the authorities responsible for the registration (usually civil affairs authorities) of the different administrative levels are to carry out spot checks on a certain percentage of the social organizations (*shehui zuzhi* 社会组织) registered with them, ranging from 3% at the county level to 10% per cent at the national level. The authorities are to ensure that the organizations comply with all relevant laws and regulations. There are regular or occasional random checks, which can be made either in writing or by inspectors during physical visits to each organization. The results of the random checks serve as a basis for the evaluation of social organi-

zations and are meant to provide authorities with criteria enabling them e.g. to determine from which NGO to buy services or to which NGO to grant tax benefits (full text of the Provisional Measures, Chinese title 社会组织抽查暂行办法, with English translation at chinalawtranslate.com).

However, the *South China Morning Post* of January 16 wrote that smaller NGOs are concerned about the extra administrative burden involved in complying with these new guidelines. Registered NGOs are already required to submit annual reports to the relevant authorities.

As of June 2016, there were 670,000 NGOs (social organizations, *shehui zuzhi*) registered with the respective civil affairs authorities. Of those, 329,000 were mass organizations (*shehui tuanti* 社会团体), 5,028 were foundations (*jjinhui* 基金会) and 336,000 were private nonprofit units (*minban feiqiye danwei* 民办非企业单位), according to China's White Paper "The Right to Development" (english.gov.cn Dec. 1, 2016).

Religious Policy

December 19, 2016:

WeChat closes all links intended for the collection of donations for religious purposes

According to the *Global Times*, the team of WeChat, a widely used instant messaging service with additional functions for smartphones, has issued a statement informing users that all links enabling the donation or transfer of funds to religious groups have been disabled and will no longer be permitted. The team explains this decision by referring to the March 2015 "Guidelines for Religious Affairs," according to which, non-religious organizations are prohibited from organizing or conducting religious activities and also from collecting funds for religious purposes. WeChat's new policy does not, however, only apply to donations to non-religious groups or to those which are not registered with the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) but instead to any transfer or donation funds for religious purposes. This means that collecting donations via WeChat will henceforth be impossible even for all officially registered and state-recognized religious groups (*Global Times* Dec. 20, 2016).

Jan Kwee

January 25, 2017:

Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate publish interpretation on the application of the Criminal Law on "cults"

Article 300 of China's Criminal Law covers the offence of "organizing or using secret societies or cult organizations (*xiejiao zuzhi* 邪教组织), or using superstition to undermine the implementation of the nation's laws and administrative provisions." In their interpretation of January 25, the above-mentioned state organs defined as "cult organizations" within the meaning of article 300, any "illegal organizations, founded on the pretext of religion, under the name of Qigong or other names, which deify or exalt their leaders, beguile and deceive others through methods such as fabricating and spreading of superstitious, heretical teachings, attract and control members, and endanger society" (article 1). Article 2 lists the offenses carrying penalties of 3–7 years imprisonment and fines, which are graded, for example, according to the number of pieces of propaganda material distributed. The recruitment of 50 or more

cult members also falls under article 2 of the interpretation. Articles 3 and 4 contain a list of aggravating and mitigating circumstances. High fines are called for when the cult activities are undertaken in collaboration with foreign organizations and individuals; if they extend beyond province boundaries; when performed publicly at important places or on State holidays; when government employees take part in cult activities or if cults are being spread among minors or in schools (article 8).

An informal English translation of “The Supreme People’s Court and Supreme People’s Procuratorate Interpretation on Several Issues Regarding the Applicable Law in Criminal Cases such as those of Organizing or Exploiting Cults to Undermine the Implementation of the Law” can be found at: www.chinalawtranslate.com/关于办理组织、利用邪教组织破坏法律实施等刑事/?lang=en.

In addition to Falun Gong, various other groups claiming Christian roots such as the “Church of Almighty God” are banned and persecuted in China, as are others of Buddhist background or inspiration.

January 26, 2017:

State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes its working agenda for 2017

The plans adopted, as every year in January, for the new year indicate the intention to determine [programmatic] “views” on the work concerning each of the five religions “in the new situation,” something which might indicate the need for a reorientation in the work of SARA.

For Buddhism and Daoism, the plans continue to focus on the “problem of commercialization,” as well as on the long pursued goals of achieving “civilized incense offerings,” the “reasonable release of living beings” and “ecological temples.”

For Islam, deradicalization is the primary goal. Regarding *halal* (i.e., Islamic rules regarding the purity of foodstuffs), Muslims are to be brought to a proper understanding and the Chinese Islamic Association should be instructed to standardize export certificates. The whole matter of *halal* must be kept from getting out of hand (see the entry of March 29, 2017, in this section). Local authorities should be instructed with regard to their handling of the Muslim internal migrants. The handling of conflicts between different Sufi orders is another issue on the agenda.

In-depth education on the principle of the independent self-management of the Church is among the work projects planned for the Catholic Church. The self-election and self-ordination of bishops is to be carried forward. The Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference are to study the implementation of the “three-fold system of democratic Church government” [i.e., the “Work Regulations for the Catholic Patriotic Association,” the “System for the Joint Conference of Chairpersons of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and of the Bishops’ Conference” and the “Management System for Catholic Dioceses in China,” all of them not in accord with Canon Law] and will be “supported” in their exchanges with foreign countries. Catholics as well as Protestants will be guided to hold fast to the principle of “Sinicization” during this year of 2017. There are plans to produce a number of Protestant short films on this theme. The Protestant governing bodies should also strive to complete the “Church Order of Chinese Protestant Churches.”

For official dealings with the popular folk religions, SARA plans to continue collecting further experiences on the local level. In general, stability in the religious sphere, the avoidance of mass incidents and the management of religious matters on the Internet continue to be focal points of the government’s attention.

Interesting details of the SARA work agenda include plans for publishing a document on the standardization of services and care for the aged in the official religions. In addition, there are plans for taking part “in bi-lateral Chinese-American, Chinese-European and Chinese-German dialog on human rights.”

So far, it does not look as if SARA has realistic hopes of dealing with one large topic on the working agenda this year, i.e., the increased legalization of religious work during 2017. The proposed promotion and regional implementation of the revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs” cannot yet take place, since the revised draft presented by SARA back in September of 2016 – despite repeated announcements – has still not been adopted by the State Council.

The text of SARA’s 2017 working agenda can be found at: www.sara.gov.cn/xxgk/ndgzjd/bs/380338.htm.

February / March 2017:

Reports indicate that Chinese audio and video platforms are systematically deleting religious content

The *Global Times*, a newspaper close to the Party, has reported that users of the online platforms Ximalaya FM and Youku Tudou have been complaining about the deletion of posts with religious content. In the case of the examples given, the religious content deleted was specifically Christian in nature. Employees of the two companies justified this to the *Global Times* citing orders from the government; a Youku representative told the newspaper that, in the future, all videos with religious content would be removed. According to *UCAN*, the Xiaodelan Bookstore, a Catholic subscriber to Ximalaya, posted a WeChat note on February 27 to the effect that three of its programs had been removed from Ximalaya overnight. A Catholic layman from Hebei told *UCAN* that most of the audio clips, containing sermons and Church news, which he had shared from the Ximalaya website, had since been blocked (*Global Times* Feb. 28; March 8, 2017; *UCAN* March 10, 2017).

March 29, 2017:

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region adopts “Regulations on Deradicalization”

The new regulations list 15 different forms of “extremism” which are now forbidden in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, where Islam is the majority religion. Among them are: interference in the freedom of religion, of religious belief and in marriage, burial and inheritance matters of others, as well as interfering in others living together with people of different ethnic backgrounds and religions. It is furthermore forbidden to displace people of another ethnicity or religion from their place of residence, as is the dissemination of extremist ideology. Under the terms of the regulations, it is also forbidden to decline public services such as radio and television and to foster an expansion (*fanhua* 泛化) of the concept of *halal* to other areas than food. It is also forbidden to wear burka-like clothing or full-face veils or to try to force others to adopt their use. Forbidden as well are “abnormal” beards. It is prohibited to publish, print, distribute, download, consult or hold texts or recordings with extremist content. Other manifestations of radicalization forbidden by the new regulations are marriage or divorce performed through religious ritual without taking part in the legal marriage procedure. The deliberate destruction of official documents such as identity cards and the soiling or defacing of renminbi currency notes are also forbidden.

Among the countermeasures described in the regulations are the correct distinction between ethnic traditions, normal religious activities, illegal religious activities and extremist actions. The document lists the tasks of public authorities and social sectors in the fight against extremism (*South China Morning Post* March 30; *Xinhua* March 30, 2017; the text of the law 新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例 can be found at: www.xj.chinanews.com/xinjiang/20170330/11798.shtml).

According to reports in the Western media, pressure from the authorities on Xinjiang's mostly Muslim Uighur population has intensified since the inauguration of the new Governor Chen Quanguo in August of 2016. The media report a parade of 10,000 members of the police and paramilitary police held at the central square of Urumqi on February 18 and similar marches in Hotan and Kashgar. In addition, in November of 2016, all residents of Xinjiang reportedly were required to turn their passports over to the police for safekeeping. However, individual attacks have continued to occur, such as in the County of Pishan (Hotan) on February 14, which left 8 dead, including the three attackers (*AsiaNews* Feb. 27, 2017; *New York Times* Feb. 20, 2017; *South China Morning Post* Feb. 15, 2017).

Daoism and Popular Religion

November 13 to December 11, 2016:

Wuhan: Fourth official ordination of Daoist priests of the Quanzhen tradition since the founding of the People's Republic

Nearly 200 male and female Daoists of the Quanzhen monastic tradition of Daoism received their ordination as Daoist priests (*chuanjie* 传戒, also known as the "Transmission of the Precepts") in the Changchun Temple in Wuhan, Hubei Province. The temple is subject to the authority of Abbess Wu Chengzhen, who in 2009 became the "first female abbot in the 1,800 year history of Chinese Daoism" (*Global Times* Nov. 16, 2009). In 2015 Abbess Wu Chengzhen was appointed one of the vice-chairpersons of the Chinese Daoist Association. In the course of the nearly month-long process, the candidates for ordination were first tested, followed by various rituals and teachings of the Daoist masters (see the schedule and documentation on <http://chuanjie.daoisms.org/index.html>). After the founding of the People's Republic and a hiatus of 40 years, the ordination of male and female Quanzhen Daoists was only taken up once again in 1989.

In addition to the ceremonies of the Quanzhen Daoists, from October 27 to November 3, 2016, more than 280 priests of the non-monastic Zhengyi tradition of Daoism took part in a ceremony for the "Conferring of the First Register" (*chu shou lu* 初授箓), which was organized by the Chinese Daoist Association. However, according to estimates, most Daoist priests of the Zhengyi tradition, who marry and live in their families, have no connection with the government-sanctioned Chinese Daoist Association (www.taoist.org.cn/showInfoContent.do?id=2697&p=%27p%27).

November 19–30, 2016:

Statue of the Celestial Master of Mount Qingcheng in Sichuan travels with an official delegation to Taiwan

A delegation of almost 100 Daoists from various temples in the Province of Sichuan traveled with three holy statues to Taiwan, where they visited about 20 Daoist temples. Several government officials accompanied the pilgrims, including the vice-director of the Commission of Ethnic and Religious Affairs [CERA] of Sichuan Province. The three statues from Sichuan, including one of the Celestial Master Zhang Daoling, the founder of Celestial Master Daoism, were solemnly installed in each temple and ritual blessings were performed. The program also included cultural performances such as dragon dance and demonstrations of martial arts. The exchange was organized by the Sichuan Association for the Promotion of Exchanges between Both Sides of the Taiwan Strait, the CERA of Sichuan, the Daoist

Association of Sichuan and the Daoist temple Daodeyuan in Kaohsiung, Taiwan (taiwan.reports.com Nov. 21, 2016; *Xinhua* Nov. 23, 2016).

December 5, 2016:

Conference on the religious policy toward folk religion held in Quanzhou

150 experts from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), religious authorities of the provinces and representatives from the “Pilot Regions for Popular Belief Work,” among others, took part in the conference, which had been organized to deal with reflections as well as concrete measures for establishing a future government policy toward traditional folk religion. In his address to the conference, Wang Zuo’an, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, spoke of the “popular, spontaneous, decentralized and regional nature” of popular beliefs and of the “objective reality,” that “in the long run they will persist in the Socialist era” (a reference to “Document No. 9” from 1982, with which the Communist Party rehabilitated the religions following the cultural revolution). The sites and activities of popular belief must be incorporated into the government administration if they are to develop their positive effect, Wang said. He argued that good “popular belief work” is important for uniting the masses, for resistance against foreign infiltration, for the promotion of China’s excellent traditional culture, for improved relations with overseas Chinese and for the unity of the motherland (sara.gov.cn Dec. 5, 2016).

From December 30, 2016:

Statue of Caishen (財神), the “God of Wealth,” from Zhouzhi (Shaanxi) visits Taiwan

“In order to promote the flourishing of Taiwan’s economy” (according to a newspaper report from Ilan, Taiwan), Du Zongzhen, head of the Caishen Temple in Zhouzhi (Xi’an, Shaanxi, PRC), has accompanied that temple’s statue of the deity on a 13 day visit to 16 cities and counties of Taiwan, where the statue was revered at more than 100 temples. The visit took place at the invitation of Wei Jinxiong, Director General of the Taiwanese Chinese Association for the Promotion of Trade, Technology, Culture, Education and Agricultural Development (*Renmin ribao* as reported on xinhuanet Jan. 23, 2017; *Yilan xinwenwang* as reported on travelnews.tw Dec. 30, 2016).

Buddhism

January 3–14, 2017:

Dalai Lama holds Kalachakra initiation in India – Reports on travel restrictions for Tibetans from the People’s Republic of China

Media reports indicate that already by the beginning of January, more than 100,000 pilgrims had gathered for this important ritual at Bodh Gaya, the place where the historical Buddha experienced en-

lightenment. According to the Tibetan government in exile, the Chinese government imposed strict travel restrictions in attempts to prevent Tibetans from participating in the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra initiation. Thousands of pilgrims from Tibet, who were already present in Nepal or India and who were in possession of legal travel documents, reportedly were forced to return to Tibet under threat of heavy penalties for themselves and also for their families. On January 5, *Radio Free Asia* reported having received a copy of an official announcement from the Tibetan Autonomous County of Dechen in Yunnan, which threatened prison terms ranging from 10 days to 5 years for any Tibetan taking part in the event.

However, speaking to the *Global Times*, a newspaper close to the Party, Xu Zhitao, deputy director of the bureau of Tibet-related issues of the Communist Party's United Front Department, denied that the Chinese Government would use threats to force Tibetans to return home prematurely. He stressed that there were pilgrims from China attending the Kalachakra ceremony who hold Chinese passports. "The number of Tibetans attending the ritual decreased dramatically in recent years after the local governments clarified to local Tibetans that the ritual is about separatism, and also due to tightened border control," Xu Zhitao told the *Global Times*.

Radio Free Asia later reported that many Tibetans, after returning early from India to Haidong in Qinghai, were questioned by the authorities and given 500 Yuan for their cooperation; most of them, however, had their passports confiscated.

In July of 2016, the Panchen Lama had held his first official Kalachakra ritual in Tibet. According to the *Xinhua* news agency, more than 100,000 worshippers were present each day of the ceremonies. The Chinese government is counting on using the 26 year old government-installed Panchen Lama to counter the influence of the 81 year old Dalai Lama among the Tibetan faithful (*Global Times* Jan. 5, 2017; *Radio Free Asia* Jan. 5, 2017; tibet.net Jan. 8, 2017).

Islam

Since December 10, 2016:

One of China's most popular Muslim websites has been shut down

Since December 10, 2016, the URL for the website Zhongmuwang 中穆网 (www.2muslim.com), one of the largest Chinese-language sites on Islam in the country, could no longer be accessed and as of March 31, 2017, has disappeared completely from the Internet.

According to *AFP*, a Chinese Muslim student in the United States, by the name of Gu Yi, reported that the Internet portal was closed, after he had posted a December 8 open letter to Xi Jinping on a discussion forum on the Zhongmuwang website, in which 54 Chinese students from 10 countries demanded the release of activists and called Xi, among other things, the "leader of a totalitarian system and the main commander of its suppression." On the morning of December 10, Xi Wuyi, a Marxism researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, posted on her much-acclaimed microblog (*weibo*) a screenshot of this post with the comment "Zhongmuwang is a tool of the evil-doers [...] When will this stop?" and later on the same day she added: "Tonight, the good news has come: Zhongmuwang has finally met its end." *Radio Free Asia* and others saw a link between Xi Wuyi's posts (which were later deleted) and the shutting down of the site. To date, it does not seem that there has been any official government comment on the closure of the site.

Xi Wuyi regularly sounds the alarm on her microblog concerning developments which, in her opinion, run contrary to the principle of the separation of state and religion, such as in 2016 concerning the

(unrealized) proposal for a law on the management of *halal* foods or in 2013 concerning Christian missionary activity at Chinese universities (see: *RCTC* 2013, No. 4, pp. 6-7 and 2016, No. 3, p. 6) (*AFP* Dec. 14, 2016; rfa.org/cantonese Dec. 12, 2016).

March 11, 12, 2017:

South China Morning Post reports on the growing phenomenon of “online hatred” against Muslims in China

According to an article by reporter Viola Zhou, there has been a noticeable and steady increase in examples of anti-Islamic rhetoric being posted on Chinese social networks. She gives the example of a mini platform on WeChat which earned the initiators, three young Muslim women who wrote about headscarves, faith and life, a flood of insults such as “When are you going to go back to Arabia?” or “China doesn’t need evil cults!” There was also a “campaign against religious food” on weibo. According to Viola Zhou’s report, slogans have also been appearing, such as: “Why not just kill all the Greens [Muslims]?” According to James Leibold of La Trobe University in Australia, few voices can be found on the Chinese internet to counter this kind of religious hate and, as a result, there is an ever deeper divide between the Han-Chinese majority and China’s Muslims. Anti-Islamic posts seem to escape the scrutiny of internet censors though they are in clear violation of Chinese law, something which Viola Zhou says in her article that Leibold attributes to the fact that many high ranking party cadres are very concerned about the spread of religion in China and make a direct connection between Islam and terrorism. In her second article, Viola Zhou wrote that although the government treats the Hui and the Uyghurs very differently, nonetheless, many Han Chinese regard both groups as potential threats (*South China Morning Post* March 11, 12, 2017).

Christianity

November 26, 2016:

Shanghai University: Symposium on “Chinese texts and the Sinicization of Christianity” – Project to build database of historical Chinese-language Christian texts

About 30 scholars from various Chinese universities met to discuss a wide range of Christian texts dating from the Ming dynasty to the end of the Republic. As reported on the internet site *Fuyin shibao* (Gospel Times) the organizer of the symposium explained that ancient Chinese-language Christian texts provide an important carrier of the Sinicization of Christianity.

The background of the symposium is very interesting. Among the organizers were members of the project group “Collation and Research into a Catalog of Chinese-language Christian Texts” (汉语基督教文献书目的整理与研究), led by Tao Feiya, a researcher in Christianity from Shanghai University, with support from the National Social Science Fund of China. According to the reports on *Fuyin shibao*, the project consists in creating a database which will eventually include all pre-1949 Christian texts (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) in the Chinese language known to exist anywhere in the world. The organizers hope to begin by creating a complete catalog of all such texts, with the hope of eventually including the actual texts themselves in a full-text database. The report gives no indication as to whether or to what extent the team is cooperating with similar projects and databases outside

of the People's Republic of China. But it is reported on the website of Shanghai University, that research students associated with the project have already been searching in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Europe, the USA, Japan and Korea for material to add to the project (cla.shu.edu.cn Nov. 29, 2016; gospeltimes.cn Nov. 28, 2016; news.shu.edu.cn Oct. 31, 2016; www.suibi8.com/essay/8fe9fd-9431549.html [program for the conference]).

February 28, 2017:

UCAN: Christians in Xinjiang facing new pressures from the government

The Catholic news agency *UCAN* has cited a report by *Radio Free Asia*, according to which a religious official in Xinjiang has confirmed that Catholic underground churches as well as Protestant house churches have been warned to end all activities in the area. According to an official of the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, "They all have to worship in [an officially approved] church." *UCAN* reports that this pressure is being applied in the name of "anti-terrorism" measures, with officials warning last year against the "infiltration of Western hostile forces" in the guise of religion. It appears that local authorities are already applying the measures in certain areas. One resident in the Shayar County of the Aksu Prefecture recounts that the targeted Christian communities in the cities of Aksu and Korla no longer come together. Christians there had been warned locally not to meet privately anymore for worship and were told that if they were caught violating this prohibition the result would be an accusation of "illegal assembly" and imprisonment, the resident said (*UCAN* Feb. 28, 2017).

Katharina Feith

March 2017:

Authorities in Zhejiang Province order surveillance cameras installed in Christian churches

The U.S.-based organization China Aid has reported that in early March of this year authorities in the coastal province of Zhejiang ordered surveillance cameras installed in all official Protestant churches. Should any congregations balk at this directive, the authorities were ordered to install the cameras by force, if necessary. Security and the prevention of terrorism were given as the justification for such a measure. *UCAN* has also reported that all the Catholic parishes of the Diocese of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province – those of the underground as well as those of the official Church – have also been ordered to install such surveillance cameras in their church buildings by the end of March. Priests of the official part of the diocese have circulated a text message encouraging the faithful to try to negotiate with authorities in an attempt to avoid having surveillance cameras installed – at least within the worship space of the church. In the Province of Zhejiang, which has an above average number of Christians, authorities forcibly dismantled the steeple and roof crosses of about 1,500–1,700 churches between the spring of 2014 and the beginning of 2016 (China Aid April 2, 2017; *UCAN* March 22, 2017).

Catholic Church

December 9–14, 2016:

Self-appointed, unofficial Bishop Dong Guanhua abducted by the authorities

Six government officials, including one from the Religious Affairs Bureau of the Communist Party's United Front Department, forcibly abducted Dong and took him on a "sightseeing trip" to Henan and Zhejiang, Dong Guanhua himself told *UCAN*. Later on, following his release, Dong said to *UCAN* that he had been told that the reason for his detention had been his conversations with foreign journalists. In 2016, Fr. Dong Guanhua, an underground priest of the Diocese of Zhengding in Hebei Province, had let it be known that eleven years previously, he had been secretly consecrated a bishop without having received the appointment from the Pope. On September 13, 2016, Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, who also belongs to the underground Church, announced that Dong had been automatically excommunicated. Dong Guanhua, in turn, announced that he had consecrated the underground priest, Fr. Zhang Guoqing, as a bishop in Heilongjiang in September of 2016 (*UCAN* Dec. 22, 2016).

December 27–29, 2016:

9th National Assembly of Representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church meets in Beijing

The highest governing body of China's official Church held its regular meeting of delegates mandated by the government's religious policy and elected, among others, the leadership team of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association as well as of the official Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference, a body not recognized by Rome:

List of Presidents, Vice Presidents and Secretaries General of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association Elected by the 9th National Assembly of Representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church

	President	Vice presidents	Secretary General
Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference	Bishop* Ma Yinglin 马英林 (Kunming)	Bishop Fang Xingyao, Bishop Shen Bin 沈斌 (Haimen), Bishop* Zhan Silu 詹思禄 (Mindong), Bishop Fang Jianping 方建平 (Tangshan), Bishop* Guo Jincai, Bishop Li Shan 李山 (Beijing), Bishop Pei Junmin 裴军民 (Shenyang), Bishop Yang Xiaoting 杨晓亭 (Yan'an), Bishop He Zeqing 何泽清 (Wanzhou), Bishop Yang Yongqiang 杨永强 (Zhoucun)	Bishop* Guo Jincai 郭金才 (Chengde) 10 vice secretaries general
Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association	Bishop Fang Xingyao 房兴耀 (Linyi)	Bishop* Ma Yinglin, Bishop Shen Bin, Bishop* Lei Shiyin 雷世银 (Leshan), Liu Yuanlong, Bishop* Huang Bingzhang 黄炳章 (Shantou), Shu Nanwu 舒南武 (lay representative from Jiangsu), Bishop* Yue Fusheng 岳福生 (Harbin), Bishop Meng Qinglu 孟青录 (Hohhot), Sr. Wu Lin 吴琳 (Wuhan), Shi Xueqin 施雪琴 (lay representative from Fujian)	Liu Yuanlong 刘元龙 (lay representative from Beijing) 9 vice secretaries general

Bishop*: bishop without papal mandate.

Sources: www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/17020726-1.htm and www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/17020727-1.htm.

For more background information on the controversial National Assembly, see *China heute* 2017, No. 1, pp. 4-7 (in German).

January 4, 2017:

Death of Bishop Tu Shihua (1919–2017)

Bishop Anthony Tu Shihua, Ordinary Bishop of the Diocese of Puqi (Hebei Province), has died at the age of 97. A well-known supporter of China's Communist Party, on January 10, Bishop Tu Shihua was given the honors of a State funeral at the capital's prestigious Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery in Beijing, the final resting place for the highest-ranking revolutionary heroes, high government officials and individuals deemed of major importance due to their contributions to the Party and to society. More than 300 persons took part in the graveside rites, including Wang Zuo'an, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). Liu Yandong, Vice-Premier of the State Council, and Sun Chunlan, head of the United Work Front Department, sent floral wreaths. The last Catholic Bishop to be buried in this national cemetery was Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan of Beijing in 2007. On January 9, more than 500 people took part in the solemn Requiem Mass celebrated for Bishop Tu in Beijing's Cathedral (South Church).

Bishop Tu was born on November 22, 1919 in Mianyang (Hubei Province) and was ordained a priest in 1944. As one of the first bishops to be consecrated without the permission of the Vatican, Tu Shihua became Bishop of Hanyang in 1959 and then Bishop of Puqi in 2001. His death brings to an end that first era of 51 bishops who were consecrated without permission from the Vatican between 1958 and 1963. According to a January 21, 2017, article in the *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner*, resistance against him on the part of the Catholics proved to be so great that Bishop Tu was more or less forced to work in Beijing, outside his own diocese, for decades. There, he dedicated himself mostly to academic work, writing articles and translating books.

For 24 years, Bishop Tu was one of the vice-presidents of the Patriotic Association, then for six years he served as vice-president of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference and for 12 years he served as an advisor to the leadership of both organizations. In addition to his other duties, from 1983 to 1992 he served as the vice-rector of the National Major Seminary in Beijing.

Bishop Tu campaigned tirelessly for a Church that would be independent from Rome – something which made him extremely unpopular in the eyes of many believers. In a January 9 article, *UCAN* reported that a Chinese diocesan priest, who knew Bishop Tu personally, said that Tu had long been mulling over the implications of his illegitimate status and, as a result, no longer exercised his episcopal ministry. "He had been based in Beijing since 1982," the priest continued, "and only spent one year, 2010, in his own diocese. A priesthood ordination in the diocese in 2014, the first since 1923, was entrusted to Bishop Gan Jinqiu of Guangzhou."

With the death of Bishop Tu, there remain seven Chinese bishops, who are not recognized by the Vatican. *UCAN* reports that in 2016, a Vatican delegation met with Bishop Tu in Beijing in order to verify his petition to have his status in the Church regularized. In the context of the current Sino-Vatican discussions, the Holy See is believed to have been viewing his petition in a positive light (*AsiaNews* Jan. 5, 2017; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Jan. 21, 2017; *UCAN* Jan. 9 and 11, 2017).

Katharina Feith

January 20, 2017:

Auxiliary Bishop Ma Daqin once again takes up a position in the Catholic Patriotic Association of Shanghai

As reported by both *UCAN* and *AsiaNews*, since September of 2016, Shanghai's Auxiliary Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin is once again a member of the Patriotic Association (PA) of the Shanghai district of Songjiang.

At the end of his Mass of consecration on July 7, 2012, Bishop Ma had made a dramatic announcement of his withdrawal from the Patriotic Association. He was immediately taken away and placed under house arrest. He was then stripped of his title as bishop by the State-sanctioned Catholic governing bodies.

On January 20, 2017, at a joint meeting of Shanghai's Catholic Patriotic Association and Commission for Church Affairs, Bishop Ma was once again accepted into the standing committee of the Shanghai Patriotic Association, but was registered only as "Father Ma Daqin."

In June of 2016 Bishop Ma had caused widespread unrest in the Catholic Church in China when he published an article on his blog praising the Patriotic Association and expressing his remorse for having left the PA (see: *RCTC* 2016, No. 2, pp. 18-19). According to *UCAN*, since then the underground community of the Diocese of Shanghai has largely withdrawn its original support for Bishop Ma. Although Bishop Ma continues to live at the Major Seminary of Sheshan, it appears that the restrictions imposed on him as part of that house arrest have been significantly relaxed (*AsiaNews* Jan. 26, 2017; *UCAN* Jan. 26, 2017).

February 14, 2017:

Death of Bishop Wang Milu (1943–2017)

At the age of 74, underground Bishop Casimir Wang Milu, Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Tianshui (Gansu Province), has died in hospital from the combined effects of a stroke and subsequent pneumonia.

Bishop Wang was born on January 24, 1943 in the Gangu County of Gansu Province. Both of his brothers are also active as priests in the underground: Fr. Wang Ruohan and Bishop John Wang Ruowang (consecrated secretly in 2011). His sister, Sr. Wang Tianxing, is a nun in a religious community. In 1956, Casimir Wang entered the minor seminary in Tianshui and was imprisoned for three years during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). He was ordained a priest in either 1979 or 1980. Bishop Wang belonged to the first group of three bishops secretly consecrated in 1981 by Bishop Fan Xueyan of Baoding (the other two were Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding and the deceased Bishop Zhou Shanu of Yixian, both in Hebei Province). In 1984, Bishop Casimir Wang was once again sent to prison for another ten years. *UCAN* reported that in 2003 the Vatican asked him to resign because of "a series of controversial actions and concerns about his mental health." The specific complaint, among others, was that he had gone ahead and ordained men who did not have the necessary theological or personal qualifications. Those ordinations led to great unrest in the diocese. His brother, Fr. John Wang, succeeded him in the office of bishop. Despite his mismanagement of the diocese, Bishop Casimir Wang was known to be a humble person with great missionary zeal. He was especially concerned with the poor and with people living in the remote mountain regions, where he was often on the road.

It was estimated that between 500 and 1,000 persons took part in the funeral rites for Bishop Casimir Wang on February 18 in the Gangu County. Despite permission on the part of the government, the Requiem Mass and burial were not presided over by Bishop Wang's brother, Bishop John Wang, but by one of the priests whom Bishop Casimir Wang had ordained. Bishop John Wang wanted to avoid endorsing a rumor that his deceased brother Casimir was a cardinal (*AsiaNews* Feb. 14, 20, 2017; *UCAN* Feb. 17, 21, 2017).

Katharina Feith

February 21–22, 2017:

Joint conference of the leaders of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Bishops' Conference in Wuhan

The newly elected presidents, vice-presidents and secretaries general of both bodies met jointly to discuss their agenda for the future. High-ranking representatives of both the Party's United Front Work Department and of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) took part in the conference. As can be gathered from reports on the website of the two Catholic bodies, a work report for 2016, plans for 2017, as well as some ideas about agenda points for the next 5 years were presented during the conference. United Front representative Wang Zhigang called on both Catholic executive bodies to adhere steadfastly to the principle of a democratic self-governing Chinese Church, and he admonished them to unite and win over the "underground forces." SARA Vice-Director Chen Zongrong issued a call for the continuation of the self-election and self-consecration of bishops.

On February 22, Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, there was a solemn concelebrated mass, amply documented with photos and names on the website of both bodies, in which both legitimate bishops as well as those illegitimate bishops not recognized by the Pope took part. Then, the Catholic representatives paid homage by laying flowers at the tomb of Bishop Dong Guangqing, consecrated in 1958 as one of the first two Chinese bishops to be consecrated without papal appointment. Bishop Fang Xingyao, Chairman of the Patriotic Association, had already praised Wuhan on the previous day as a model for the whole Church in China with regard to self-election and self-consecration. According to *UCAN*, some commentators portrayed the visit to the grave of Bishop Dong as constituting a subtle rejection of Cardinal Tong's article on Sino-Vatican dialogue (*chinacatholic.cn* Feb. 27, 2017; *UCAN* March 6, 2017; for Cardinal Tong's article see below for entry of February 9, 2017 in the section "Sino-Vatican Relations").

March 18 and 29, 2017:

Official Catholic governing bodies and Jinde Charities call for Palm Sunday to be the "first donation day of China's Catholic Church for disaster relief"

In a circular letter of March 18, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the official (though not recognized by Rome) Chinese Bishops' Conference announced that they had, in cooperation with Jinde Charities, designated Palm Sunday this year as a day of donations for disaster relief, in accordance with the new Charity Law and the experience of the universal Church. They called on the whole Chinese Church to make donations, for which Jinde as a State registered foundation could issue charitable donation receipts enabling the person to apply for a tax refund. The circular also pointed to Pope Francis' 2017 Lenten Message, in which he called on Catholics to support the Lenten fundraising efforts of Church organizations worldwide.

The Catholic Relief Organization Jinde Charities, headquartered in Shijiazhuang (Hebei Province), which has been involved in domestic Chinese disaster relief for years, presented its own call for the new day of donations on its website on March 29. According to *UCAN*, Chinese Catholics who view the Patriotic Association as a tool in the hands of the government for the purpose of achieving control over the Church, look on the initiative with skepticism, with some thinking that such cooperation between Jinde and the Patriotic Association would bring Jinde into disrepute. There were, however, also those who expressed their approval of the idea of a national day of donations. *UCAN* pointed out that, while such national fundraising days may be familiar to Catholics in other countries, this year's Palm Sunday

action is the first national donations day not only of the Catholic Church in China, it is a first for any religion in China (china.ucanews.com April 5, 2017; *Fides* April 6, 2017; mzb.com.cn March 21, 2017; sara.gov.cn March 28, 2017; *UCAN* April 3, 2017; the appeals can be found at: www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/17030518-1.htm and www.jinde.org/Project/show/id/1904.html).

Sino-Vatican Relations

December 20, 2016:

Statement of the Holy See regarding the ordination of bishops in Chengdu and Xichang, as well as on the 9th National Assembly of the representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church

Greg Burke, press spokesman for the Holy See, issued the following statement on these issues:

“For quite some time, the position of the Holy See regarding these two kinds of events, which involve aspects of the Church’s doctrine and discipline, is well known. The presence of a Bishop at these two episcopal ordinations, whose canonical position is still being examined by the Apostolic See following his illegitimate ordination, has caused unease for all concerned and has disturbed Chinese Catholics. The Holy See understands and shares their sorrow. Regarding the Ninth Assembly, the Holy See will make a judgment based on proven facts. In the meantime, the Holy See is certain that all Catholics in China anxiously await positive signals, which will help them to place their trust in the dialogue between the civil authorities and the Holy See and to hope for a future of unity and harmony”.

The episcopal consecrations in Chengdu (November 30, 2016) and Xichang (December 2, 2016) were carried out with both Papal and government permission, but both involved concelebration by an illegally ordained, excommunicated bishop (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 1, pp. 15-17). The date of the controversial Catholic National Assembly (see above for entry of December 27-29, 2016 in the section “Catholic Church”) was made known in early December (*Vatican Information Service* Dec. 21, 2016).

December 27, 2016:

Director of State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) on Sino-Vatican relations

In his speech at the opening of the 9th National Assembly of representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church, Wang Zuo’an said: “The position of the Chinese Government on Sino-Vatican relations is clear and consistent. [China] is willing, on the basis of the corresponding principles, to have a constructive dialogue with the Vatican to reduce differences, to expand the consensus and to improve relations. [We] hope that the Vatican can take a more flexible and pragmatic attitude and with concrete actions create favorable conditions for the improvement of relations.” He also stressed that for the Catholic Church in China “there is absolutely no possibility of a return to the old way where control over the Church was exercised by foreign forces” (www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/17020730-1.htm).

January 22, 2017:

Pope Francis speaks in an interview with *El País* about dialogue with China and full churches in China – From St. Peter Square, he extends congratulations for the Lunar New Year

Questioned in an interview with the Spanish newspaper *El País*, published on January 22, 2017, as to whether Vatican diplomacy could extend to China anytime soon, the Pope replied: “Actually there is a commission which has been working with China for years and which meets every three months, once here and once in Beijing. And there is much dialogue with China. China has always had this halo of mystery that is fascinating. Two or three months ago, with the exhibition of the Vatican museum in Beijing, they were happy. And they will come here next year to the Vatican with their things, their museums.” When asked whether he will soon be traveling to China, he responded: “I [will go], when they invite me. They know that. Besides, in China the churches are full. One can practice religion in China.”

In his remarks following the usual noon Angelus prayer in St. Peter’s Square, the Pope extended his greetings and best wishes to all the men and women in East Asia and elsewhere, and especially to the families, who would be celebrating the Lunar New Year on January 28 (*internacional.elpais.com* Jan. 22, 2017; *vatican.va* Jan. 22, 2017).

February 7–8, 2017:

Delegates from China take part in Vatican Conference on “organ trafficking” and “transplant tourism”

The participation at the conference by Huang Jiefu, Director of the Chinese Human Organ Donation and Transplant Committee and former Deputy Health Minister, as well as a further Chinese representative was controversial. Human rights organizations accuse China of harvesting organs from executed prisoners and from detained adherents of the Falun Gong movement. On January 1, 2015, China passed a regulation which states that organs to be used for transplants may be taken from voluntary donors only (see: *RCTC* 2015, No. 2, p. 5). The *Global Times*, a newspaper close to the Chinese Communist Party, described Huang Jiefu’s invitation to the conference by the Vatican as a “response to China’s progress.” The international conference was organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (*AsiaNews* Feb. 7, 2017; *Global Times* Feb. 7, 2017; *South China Morning Post* Feb. 8, 2017; *UCAN* Feb. 14, 2017).

February 9, 2017:

John Cardinal Tong of Hong Kong publishes his second declaration on Sino-Vatican dialogue

In his article he describes “The future of Sino-Vatican dialogue from an ecclesiological point of view” – that is the title he gives it. As for the issue of (future) appointments of Bishops, “a preliminary consensus has reportedly been reached,” writes Cardinal Tong. He then turns to the other problems still to be solved:

As to the future of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), Cardinal Tong makes the following suggestion: As soon as the two sides have reached an agreement which will make the principle of the “self-nomination” and “self-election” of bishops – which is incorporated in the statutes of the

CCPA and which is problematic from an ecclesiological point of view – obsolete, the CCPA could turn into “a voluntary, non-profit, patriotic and Church-loving organization composed of clergy and faithful” and take on a social and charitable function.

According to Tong, the seven illegitimate bishops consecrated without papal appointment have all already submitted to the Pope their petitions for forgiveness – something that is a pre-condition for their recognition; now, time is needed to sort out the individual cases (some of which also include charges of moral misconduct).

Cardinal Tong views as perhaps the most difficult problem in the Sino-Vatican dialogue the question of how to deal with the situation of the more than 30 bishops from the unofficial communities who are not recognized by the government. The Holy See will “undoubtedly” request that the government recognize “their identities and power to govern their dioceses as bishops.” Nevertheless, it is not yet clear to Cardinal Tong how willing Beijing might be to accept this request; Beijing will perhaps ask the bishops of the unofficial communities “to declare explicitly their positions on the Constitution of China, its laws and policies.” The Cardinal says that it is going to take time to build up trust between the underground bishops and the government.

Finally, Cardinal Tong, based on critics of the dialogue, tries to explain why it is right that the Catholic Church is trying to obtain “essential freedom” (regarding the bishop appointments), instead of waiting for the “complete freedom” of religions and ethnic groups in China (see the text of his statement at: <http://sundayex.catholic.org.hk/node/4047>).

According to Bernardo Cervellera of *AsiaNews*, Cardinal Tong’s article has triggered reactions of both “joy” and “dismay.” Catholic voices, including voices from mainland China itself, have repeatedly called Tong’s perspective “over optimistic” or “naive,” especially concerning the future role of the Patriotic Association as a charitable organization. It has also been argued that freedom is not divisible. However, in an interview with *AsiaNews*, Fr. Sergio Ticozzi, a PIME missionary and a collaborator in the Holy Spirit Study Centre, which is headed by Cardinal Tong, said that in order to gain a better understanding of Cardinal Tong’s article, you must take into consideration the genre of the text: it is – thus Ticozzi – not a report on objective facts, but rather “the description of a reality that the writer would like to see happen,” with the purpose to establish confidence in the future of the dialogue (*AsiaNews* Feb. 9 and 13, 2017, among others).

Cardinal Tong’s first article on Sino-Vatican dialog, “The community of the Church in China with the universal Church”, appeared on August 7, 2016 (full text at: www.hsstudyc.org.hk/20160804_en.pdf).

February 17, 2017:

Newspaper article cites former Chairman of the Patriotic Association with criticism of Cardinal Tong’s article

In an interview granted to the *South China Morning Post*, Liu Bainian, former chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and a man still possessing considerable influence, criticized the article on the Sino-Vatican dialogue published by the Bishop of Hong Kong, John Cardinal Tong, on February 9 (see the preceding entry). Liu countered that there is still distance between the two sides on the choice of the bishops and that in his opinion the 30 bishops of the underground not recognized by the government were not patriotic and thus not considered trustworthy by China (*South China Morning Post* Feb. 17, 2017).

February 21, 2017:

Hong Kong's Bishop Emeritus, Joseph Cardinal Zen, warns in interview of "bad agreement" with China

In an interview with the website *LifeSiteNews*, the retired Bishop of Hong Kong said that he was deeply worried "because it seems that the Vatican is going to make a very bad agreement with China." He believes that some of the people surrounding Pope Francis have wrong ideas and he fears "that they may sell out our underground Church." According to Cardinal Zen, the unofficial Church does not have much public voice. He is of the opinion that some Vatican officials consider the faithful of the underground to be "troublemakers" (*LifeSiteNews* Feb. 21, 2017).

February 26, 2017:

Chinese State television airs panel discussion on Sino-Vatican relations

On the English-language talk show "Dialogue with Yang Rui," the journalist Francesco Sisci, who had interviewed Pope Francis on the subject of China, and Zhong Houtao, of the Taiwan Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), each had a chance to have their say. Speaking with *UCAN*, Wang Meixiu, a researcher in Catholicism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that she thought that the transmission had been a positive step, although she didn't believe that the topic had been dealt with sufficiently in depth during the discussion. She believed that the discussion would have had a greater impact had it been conducted in Chinese (*AsiaNews* Feb. 28, 2017; *UCAN* March 3, 2017).

Hong Kong

March 26, 2017:

Carrie Lam new leader of Hong Kong's government

With a total of 777 votes out of the 1,194-member Election Committee, consisting mostly of Beijing-friendly representatives, Carrie Lam, former administrative head of Hong Kong and the candidate clearly preferred by the regime in Beijing, became the first woman ever to hold the office of Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. John Tsang, her main rival, received 365 votes. In pre-election polls, the majority of the Hong Kong voting population, which continues to battle for genuinely democratic elections, was in favor of Tsang. Immediately following the announcement of the election results, democracy activists launched protests against Lam, who promised to try to close the deep political divides in the metropolis and to overcome the city's social divisions, something which most Hong Kong people do not believe she can do.

Carrie Lam, born in Hong Kong and a practicing Catholic, was educated by the Canossian Sisters and later studied social sciences. Following her studies, she joined the civil service.

During the campaign, Lam had proposed a Mainland Chinese-styled Religious Affairs Bureau in Hong Kong, a proposal that she later withdrew when it triggered sharp criticism and protests from groups in civil society, especially from the Catholic Church. In a congratulatory letter to the new head of government, Hong Kong's Catholic Bishop John Cardinal Tong expressed the hope that during her tenure

she will engage herself in working toward the goal of universal suffrage in future elections for Hong Kong's Chief Executive. Among other points, the cardinal also urged the new Hong Kong government to "continue to protect the local people's freedom of religious belief, freedom of expression and a pluralism in running schools, as well as respect the Church's marriage and family values" (*AsiaNews* March 4, 29 and 30, 2017; *General-Anzeiger* [Bonn] March 27, 2017; *Merics China Update* 6/2017 merics.org; *UCAN* March 30, 2017).

Katharina Feith

This "News Update" was first published in *China heute* 2017, No. 1, pp. 11-18 (in German).