

News Update on Religion and Church in China March 19 – June 30, 2018

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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 2018, No. 2, pp. 3-25) covered the period November 19, 2017 – March 13, 2018.

Politics

March 21, 2018:

Communist Party of China publishes “Plan to Deepen the Reform of Party and State Institutions,” further blurring the line separating party and state

As part of the very far-reaching program of reconstruction, a number of major state agencies were placed under the aegis of various party organs. Thus, the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council have been integrated into the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party. These and many other shifts in the apparatus of the party and government organs are seen as strengthening the party’s primacy over the state and as a reversal of structures erected by Deng Xiaoping which led to a greater separation of party and government. According to *Xinhua*, “mass organizations,” which include the official religious associations, are to be involved in the reform plan, although no further information was made known (*AsiaNews* May 7; *Global Times* March 21; gov.cn March 24; *Merics China Update* 6/2018; *UCAN* March 27; *Xinhua* March 21). – See the entries of March 21, 2018 and of April 1, 2018 in the section “Religious Policy.”

April 18, 2018:

China creates International Development Cooperation Agency

China has officially announced the creation of an International Development Cooperation Agency. The new agency will be responsible for the strategic guidelines and foreign aid policy, for coordinating and drafting proposals on any key aspects concerned, for reforming the foreign aid system, and for the

implementation of their planning and monitoring. This will centralize the development cooperation that has thus far been parceled out among numerous authorities. So far, China has mainly promoted development projects in neighboring states and in particular has supported the Silk Road Initiative. Whether more money will flow into developing countries in the future and whether the aid is not as much motivated by Chinese economic interests as in the past, still remains to be seen (*Xinhua* April 18; *Merics China Update* 6/2018, March 9–22).

May 5, 2018:

Celebrations in honor of Karl Marx's 200th birthday

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, who was born in Trier, Germany, on May 5, 1818. The Chinese government took this opportunity to present the city of Trier with a 5.50 m statue (18 ft.) to honor the memory of the “greatest philosopher in the history of mankind.” Using this and other epithets, Xi Jinping paid homage to Karl Marx in his speech in the big commemoration ceremony in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on May 4, as reported by *Xinhua*. The newspaper *Trierischer Volksfreund* reported on the solemn unveiling of the statue on May 5. The ceremony took place in the presence of the Lord Mayor of Trier, Wolfram Leibe, of the Prime Minister of the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate, Malu Dreyer, and of Guo Weimin, Vice Minister of the Press Office of the Chinese State Council.

In his own speech, President Xi Jinping stated that the commemoration of Marx was one way to demonstrate the firm conviction of the “scientific truth of Marxism.” The analysis of this speech by the Party newspaper *Renmin Ribao* emphasized the importance of Marxism for China, and praised Xi's speech as a brilliant summary of Chinese Marxism.

Newspaper columnist Cary Huang sharply criticized the Chinese government in her column in the *South China Morning Post*. She interpreted this emphasis and orientation towards Marxism as a sign of defensiveness in the face of forces which oppose the absolute power of the party and its leadership. She said that for a long time now it has been almost impossible to find any signs of Marxism in China. On the contrary, China has been taking on the features of a capitalist, market-oriented society, such as those described in Charles Dickens' novels. These are precisely the forms against which Karl Marx had campaigned, based on his convictions, Cary Huang said. According to *Ping Kuo Jih Pao*, Willy Lam Wo-lap said that the Chinese leadership is trying to maintain its legitimacy by referring back to Marx. The Catholic bishop of Trier, Stephan Ackermann, said in an interview with the *Katholische Nachrichten-agentur* that although Marx had given rise to social reform, he certainly was no saint. Ackermann was speaking of the importance of criticizing systems which exploited people as workers. Here, according to Ackermann, Marx was very justified to speak for the need of reforms. Historical Marxism, however, has also brought about much “misery” in this world, the Bishop said (*KNA* May 5; *Ming Pao* May 5; *Ping Kuo Jih Pao* May 5; *Renmin Ribao* May 6; *South China Morning Post* May 12; *Xinhua* May 4, 6).

Religious Policy

March 21, 2018:

State Administration of Religious Affairs integrated into the United Front Department, Party assumes direct control over religions

In the dual structure of party and state organs, the State Administration of Religious Affairs 国家宗教事务局 (SARA), placed directly under the State Council, was responsible for the carrying out of

religious policies and for the supervision of religious organizations, while, with regard to the party, the United Front Work Department (UFD) of the Central Committee had political oversight over religious matters. The SARA was founded (under another name) in 1951 and re-founded in 1979 after the Cultural Revolution.

In the course of the recent restructuring of party and state organs (see above), announced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party on March 21, 2018 and confirmed by the State Council on March 24, the SARA has been dissolved as an independent government agency and has now been placed directly under the Party's UFD, with all of its functions being taken over by the UFD. The UFD will continue to use the governmental "label," i.e., the name of the SARA, in dealing with the outside. This means that specific religious affairs and organizations will in future be administered exclusively by the party and not by the state, even if, in addition to the name, personnel and structures of SARA might also be brought into the UFD.

According to *AsiaNews*, some observers think that SARA will now become the executive arm of the UFD. This seems feasible given that the "Plan to Deepen the Reform of Party and State Institutions" in listing the future tasks of the UFD, lacks the previous concrete tasks of the old SARA, such as drafting legal norms or supervising religious organizations. It also remains to be seen what impact this restructuring of institutions will have on the local level. Under the old system, the grass-roots clergy in effect had to deal with representatives of both authorities.

Voices from the Chinese churches and commentators see this incorporation of the State Administration of Religious Affairs into the United Front Work Department as a signal that in future the party is going to be exercising stronger control over the religions (*AsiaNews* April 3; May 7; chinasource.org April 2; gov.cn March 24; *Xinhua* March 21). Chinese text of the "Plan to Deepen the Reform of Party and State Institutions" at www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c_1122570517.htm.

April 1, 2018:

SARA Director Wang Zuo'an named Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department

On April 1, it was announced that Wang Zuo'an has been promoted to one of the ten vice-ministerial positions of the United Front Work Department (UFD), while continuing his current post as director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). Born in 1958, Wang, who had worked at UFD from 1983–1987, then joined the SARA and has been its director since 2009. He was not re-elected to the Central Committee at the 19th CCP Party Congress in the fall of 2017.

At an April 3 press conference (see below), Chen Zongrong, until then Vice-Director of SARA, told journalists that the new organizational structure had been formally announced on April 1 during a gathering of the leading officials of the UFD as well as of the SARA and of the State Council's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. Both SARA and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office have now been incorporated into the UFD. "We are in a process of adjustment," Chen said, with a new leadership of the UFD to be formed. According to Chen, the reform demonstrates the strengthening of the Party's centralized, unified leadership over religious work and will optimize the institutional mechanisms for religious work. "The CPC advocates atheism and advocates the promotion of atheism, but it does not mean that the freedom of religious belief of citizens cannot be guaranteed," Chen said (*AsiaNews* April 3; english.scio.gov.cn April 3; fo.ifeng.com April 2).

April 3, 2018:

State Council publishes White Paper on “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief”

The Chinese government’s first and so far only White Paper on religious freedom had been published in 1997. This new White Paper essentially repeats well-known Chinese positions on religious policies. It dispenses with the detailed description of the “inglorious” role of the Western missionaries in the 19th / 20th centuries which had given the 1997 White Paper a very conservative ideological character.

The 2018 White Paper puts the number of religious believers in China at 200 million, whereas in the 1997 White Paper the estimate was 100 million. At the press conference announcing the document, Chen Zongrong, previously Vice-Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, said that the estimate of 100 million went back to Zhou Enlai’s statement from the 1950s, and that since then China’s population has more than doubled (english.scio.gov.cn April 3). – See the full English text of the new White Paper at www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_8004087.htm.

April 4, 2018:

Local authorities in Henan urge all residents who believe in one of the five religions to register

In a notice of April 4, 2018, issued by the Neighborhood Committee of Pingyuan (presumably belonging to Anyang City in Henan), any residents who believe in Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism or Islam, are urged to go immediately to the Neighborhood Committee (i.e., the lowest administrative level) in order to register. This was reported by the US-based organization China Aid, which also published a photo of the announcement. An employee of the Pingyuan Neighborhood Committee told China Aid over the phone that residents had to bring their household registration and identity card and that they had to fill out a form, filling in their name and personal details, religious affiliation and when converted, religious affiliation of the members of the family, etc. The *Global Times* (which is under the auspices of party newspaper *Renmin ribao*) wrote that a Pingyuan Neighborhood Committee employee had confirmed the announcement saying that “the higher religious department” had asked neighborhoods to carry out a “census” (chinaaid.org April 11; globaltimes.cn April 9; UCAN April 13).

The registration of ordinary believers has thus far not been the practice in the People’s Republic of China. The revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” which went into effect on February 1, stipulate that village committees and residents’ committees must assist the government in the management of religious affairs (§ 6). For the situation in Henan see also the sections “Christianity,” “Protestantism” and “Catholic Church.”

May 7, 2018:

State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes draft on “Measures for the Administration of Collective Religious Activities of Foreigners within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China”

The document was published as “draft for the solicitation of comments” with a deadline of June 7, 2018. According to the draft, the new regulation concerns all religious gatherings of 50 or more people (§ 2).

Collective religious activities of aliens (CRAA) must take place at sites registered for religious activities (hereinafter, “temples and churches”) or in temporary sites for CRAA approved by the religious affairs department of a people’s government at the county level or above (§ 3). What is new in this measure is the application process by at least three elected representatives of the foreigners who wish to engage in CRAA, called “organizers.” These organizers “shall have no negative records,” must not enjoy any kind of immunity in China and may only act as organizers in one place at a time (§ 5). The organizers must submit their application to the religious organization of the respective religion and sign a contract with the respective temple or church which is to be reported for the record to the religious affairs department (§§ 6, 7). Host temples and churches provide the clergy for the direction of the CRAA; if it is really necessary for a foreigner to conduct the service, this must also be reported to the authorities (§ 8). The procedure for applying for a temporary site for CRAA (§ 9 ff.) makes it possible for services to be provided to foreigners who belong to religions not recognized in China, such as Jews, Mormons or Bahai’s.

Chinese citizens are not allowed to participate in CRAA (§ 16). CRAA “must accept oversight by religious affairs departments”; hosting temples and churches or providers of temporary sites must proactively inform themselves about the nature of foreigners’ religious activities and immediately report any illegal actions to the authorities (§ 18). Should temples and churches or providers of temporary sites violate any laws or legal provisions in their services for CRAA, they will be punished according to the law (§24).

The new measures, which have not yet been officially adopted, are based on the “Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens Within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China” (1994) and the “Implementing Rules” for these Provisions (2000, revision 2011). The Chinese text of the draft of the new regulations (中华人民共和国境内外国人集体宗教活动管理办法[征求意见稿]) and an English translation can be found at chinalawtranslate.com.

May 23, 2018:

Nationwide Session of the United Front Work Department for regulating the “excessive construction of large outdoor religious statues”

Wang Zuo’an, referred to in the report as the “Vice Minister of the Central Committee’s United Front Work Department and Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs,” held the keynote address, and leaders of the United Front departments and religious affairs departments of all provinces participated. The meeting called for the regulation of the construction of large outdoor religious statues to be given priority in the context of regulating the problem of the commercialization of Buddhism and Daoism (zytzb.gov.cn May 25).

In November 2017, new directives with the title “Some Views on the Further Regulation of the Problem of the Commercialization of Buddhism and Daoism” were issued by the SARA and other departments. The large outdoor statues referred to are probably primarily Buddhist and Daoist giant statues, for which an admission charge is often expected of visitors. In recent months, however, there were also reports of the demolition of a Catholic outdoor “Way of the Cross” in Henan and of the statue of a Saint in Hebei (see entries of June 5, 2018 and of May 2018 in the section “Catholic Church”).

Since the revised religious rules came into effect on February 1 of this year, the construction of large outdoor religious statues outside the grounds of religious sites is now prohibited, the construction of such statues within temple or church grounds must be authorized by the authorities (§ 30).

June 1, 2018:

State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes “Measures for the Approval and Management of Provisional Places for Religious Activities”

An important new feature of the revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” which came into force on February 1, 2018, was the introduction of “provisional places for activities” in article 35. Detailed provisions were now fixed in the new “measures,” which were dated February 22, 2018.

The application for a provisional place for religious activities can be made by religious citizens when there is a need for collective religious activities but barriers to the establishment of a regular site for religious activities (which requires a laborious preparation phase, proof of finance, etc.) are prohibitive. Prerequisite for the application is that there is still no registered place of worship of that particular religion in the same area. Any approval granted is valid for a maximum of three years. The application must be made by elected representatives of the faithful, who also sign a statement of commitment regarding compliance with laws etc. The application is made directly to the local religious affairs department, which then obtains the consent of the respective local religious organization. The local religious organization has the authority to supervise and give instructions to the provisional place. Religious activities in provisional places may not be led by persons who do not have the status of religious personnel or by foreigners, and the acceptance of donations from abroad is not allowed (see the text of the 宗教临时活动地点审批管理办法 at <http://sara.gov.cn/zcfg/582592.htm>).

It seems that the new rules aim at regulating informal religious meeting places that have sprung up as a consequence of migration and urbanization, such as the informal places of worship set up by Muslim migrant workers from northwestern China on the outskirts of Shanghai where there are no official registered mosques. From a remark by Chen Zongrong (SARA) at the press conference on April 3, 2018 (see the entry above) connecting “venues for religious activities privately set up by the Christian churches” (i.e., house churches) with the new possibility to apply for a provisional place for religious activities, it can be deduced that the new “Measures” are also meant as a means of regulating so far unregistered Protestant house churches. However, for house churches that distance themselves from the official Protestant “Three-Self-Church,” this alternative may be only moderately attractive given the proposed oversight role of the latter.

June 8, 12 and 30, 2018:

Ningxia and Beijing launch “Four-Enter” actions for religious sites

After launching the campaign of “Four-Enter” mosques in northwest China in May (see entry of Spring 2018 in the “Islam” section), in June the campaign was extended to all five official religions in some places. The elements of the “Four-Enter” (四进) campaign are: 1) national flag, 2) constitution and laws, 3) socialist core values and 4) the outstanding traditional Chinese culture. These four elements are to enter all sites for religious activities.



Wall displaying the socialist core values at a bicycle station in Beijing, May 2018. – The socialist core values are being advertised everywhere in China – and they are now also to be displayed in all “Four-Enter” sites for religious activities. The twelve values are: wealth and strength 富强, democracy 民主, civilization 文明, harmony 和谐, freedom 自由, equality 平等, justice 公正, rule of law 法治, patriotism 爱国, dedication 敬业, honesty 诚信, kindness 友善. Photo: Martin Welling.

In Ningxia, the campaign was launched on June 8 by Buddhists and Protestants and on June 12 by Daoists and Catholics. Photos show celebratory flag-raising ceremonies. In Beijing, on June 30, a “Four-Enter” opening which included all five religions took place on the square in front of the Protestant Haidian Church. In many provinces, however, there does not seem to be any trace in the media about “Four-Enter” actions. On July 4, *Radio Free Asia* learned from a staff member at the State Administration of Religious Affairs that the campaign was not aimed at all religions, but at certain religions and at Islam in particular.

There have been earlier reports that religious sites in certain regions have been requested by the authorities to hoist the national flag, e.g. in Tibet and in various places in Xinjiang, Zhejiang and Hubei; nationwide actions are new (rfa.org July 4; sara.gov.cn July 4; tianzhujiao.me June 21; zytzb.gov.cn June 14). See *RCTC* 2016, No. 3, pp. 15-16, as well as the entry of June 11, 2018 in the section “Daoism.”

Religions in General

April 1, 2018:

***South China Morning Post*: Mormons elect first Chinese-born elder as an “Apostle” to the “Quorum of the Twelve”**

The *South China Morning Post* (*SCMP*) reported that the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” known commonly as “the Mormons” and headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, has now elected to its ruling panel, the “Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,” the first two church elders who are not white. The two are: the Brazilian Ulisses Soares and Gerrit Gong, an American of Chinese descent whose grandparents had emigrated from China to the United States.

More than half of the Mormons now come from outside the U.S., so some Mormons said that the church leadership, through greater diversity, now more closely reflects the ethnic composition of its members worldwide. According to the *SCMP*, this is also seen as a sign that under the leadership of the new Mormon president, Russell Nelson, the church will focus even more on globalization. Nelson is said to be able to speak Chinese and there is speculation that the appointment of Gong may be a step to support the development of the community of Mormons in China. The *SCMP* article quotes a Mormon church researcher, Matt Martinich, who estimates the number of Mormons in Mainland China to be about 10,000. There are no official figures to be had because the People’s Republic of China does not recognize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a religion.

Gong and Soares previously served in the “Quorum of the Seventy” – which is subordinate to the Quorum of the Twelve – whose members are chosen for a limited time. The elders who serve as members of the Quorum of the Twelve, however, are elected for life, and the longest-serving becomes the new church president. So it is now possible that a person of color may one day become church president (*SCMP* April 1).

Daoism

April 26, 2018:

Daoist Ritual at inauguration of the construction site of a Gansu nuclear project – Chinese Academy of Sciences apologizes

The groundbreaking ritual for the construction of an experimental thorium reactor in Minqin County, Wuwei City, Gansu Province, became public knowledge after a worker uploaded video footage of it

onto the internet. According to ThePaper.cn (April 29), the said nuclear project is being carried out in cooperation between the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Gansu Province. The Daoist priest who performed the ceremony is said to have been invited by the local contractor. On April 30, the academy apologized on its Weibo microblog for not having prevented its contractor from “deviating from the spirit of science” (german.china.org.cn May 2; opinion.people.com.cn May 2; scmp.com May 1; sixthtone.com May 2; thepaper.cn April 29; *Xinhua* April 29; for the related debate see <https://stephenjones.blog/2018/05/03/daoist-debate/>; www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2108391 thepaper.cn; www.sixthtone.com/news/1002327/weve-got-to-stop-calling-taoism-a-superstition; *China heute* 2018, No. 2, pp. 75-76).

June 11, 2018:

Chinese Daoist Association releases appeal to raise the national flag at all Daoist sites as part of the “sinicization of Daoism”

The text is addressed to the Daoist associations of provinces, districts and cities. All officially approved sites for Daoist activities are called upon to display the national flag in a conspicuous spot on the site and thereby release the positive power of patriotism. With the help of the national flag-raising campaign, the Daoist sites should spread respect for the constitution and the laws as well as lead the believing masses to cling to the sinicization of Daoism and to adapt themselves actively to the socialist society (the text of the appeal titled 关于在全国道教活动场所悬挂国旗的倡议 can be found at www.daoisms.org/article/sort028/info-36507.html).

In recent times, and in particular following Xi Jinping’s speech at the National Conference on Religious Work in 2016, the concept of “sinicization” has become a central demand of China’s government for all religions, especially for Christianity and Islam.

Buddhism

April 2018:

Following protests, a new scheme to launch an IPO (Initial Public Offering of stock) on the Buddhist holy mountain Putuoshan has been blocked

Putuoshan Mountain is located not far from Shanghai on an island belonging to the city of Zhoushan (Zhejiang Province). It is one of the four mountains sacred to Chinese Buddhism. In 2017, a total of eight million people visited the place. The Putuoshan Tourism Development Company operates the tourist infrastructure of the island such as ferries, cable cars and the shops and stands selling joss-sticks. According to a report by Kai Strittmatter in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), various authorities of city and province are involved in the company.

In early April, the Putuoshan Tourism Development Company proposed launching the offering of stock on the holy mountain on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. According to the *Apple Daily*, the annual income from Putuoshan tourism was estimated at 386 million Yuan in the securities prospectus. The SZ reported that planners hoped to bring in a further 612 million with the IPO, money which would then be invested in additional tourism infrastructure such as thermal spas. Just six months earlier, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), along with other government departments – including the China National Tourism Administration and the China Securities Regulatory Commission – had issued “Some Views on the Further Regulation of the Problem of the Commercialization

of Buddhism and Daoism” (关于进一步治理佛教道教商业化问题的若干意见), which specifically prohibits “using sites for Buddhist or Daoist activities as company assets to launch an IPO” (see text of the document at www.sara.gov.cn/xwfb/xwjj20170905093618359691/575692.htm).

On April 11, a post titled “The ‘IPO of Putuoshan’ Violates the Legal Rights and Interests of Buddhism” appeared on the website of the official Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA). Seen from a superficial point of view, the actual Buddhist property, the temples themselves, is not included in the stock package proposed at the IPO, the article said. However, it argued, Buddhism is the most important resource attracting people to the mountain. The author expressed the belief that the IPO would inevitably lead to a vulgarization of Buddhism and would bring harm to its reputation. In the event that Putuoshan shares should prove successful on the stock market, that very success would trigger a chain reaction in which other Buddhist and Daoist mountains like the Wutaishan, the Jizushan, the Wudangshan or the Longhushan would surely follow suit, the author said. He wrote that the IPO was a clear violation of the new state regulations and called on the competent authorities to “resolve the matter appropriately.” Later in April, the Putuoshan Tourism Development Company halted its IPO at the request of government securities regulators.

Two other Buddhist mountains, Emeishan in Sichuan and Jiuhuashan in Anhui, have been listed since 1997 and 2015, respectively. In the summer of 2012 there was already a discussion about a planned IPO of Putuoshan (economist.com April 26; sueddeutsche.de April 23; article from the website of the CBA as on http://fo.ifeng.com/a/20180411/44945154_0.shtml; see also: *RCTC* 2012, No. 4, p. 4).

Islam

Spring of 2018:

Sinicization in Ningxia: Action against Arab-Muslim architectural elements

In the Ningxia Autonomous Region, about one-third of the population belongs to the Chinese-speaking Muslim Hui nationality. In September 2017, the *Global Times* had already reported on government actions against “pan-*halal* tendencies” in Ningxia, such as removing Chinese-Arab signposts. In recent months, the removal of Arab architectural elements, especially from secular buildings, but in part also from mosques, has been increasingly reported in the autonomous region. An article of the *South China Morning Post* from May 14 reports that if one drives south from the capital, Yinchuan, “the roadside is now littered with onion domes – green, golden, and white – freshly removed from market buildings, hotels and parks.” According to the *Post*, much of the Arab-inspired decor was only added to buildings in the last decade, when the Ningxia government wanted to attract tourists with elements of the Hui culture. The many new mosque buildings in the “Arabian” style, continued the report, were partially due to the fact that most of the old mosques, built in the style of Chinese temples, had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. New buildings made of concrete in the oriental style were cheaper and more spacious and were also considered by some Muslims as being more “authentic,” the *Post* said, quoting Hui scholars. Imams and sources close to the government in Ningxia told the *Post* that Arab-style design elements would no longer be allowed on mosques in the future.

On February 20, 2018, the U.S.-based organization China Aid provided a photo of a Dazhanchang Township Party document which contained an eight-point action plan of Zhongning County in Ningxia for religious sites. The document stated, among other things, that “Arab and Saudi-style building elements are to be removed” and that mosques have to be sinicized, with all “Arab-style minarets demolished by the end of March.” In Yinchuan, the muezzins’ call to prayer was banned because of concern about noise pollution, according to the *Post*. The measures sparked concern among the ethnic Hui Muslims in Ningxia that similar repressive measures could be used in their region as had already

been put into effect in Xinjiang (chinaaid.org Feb. 20; *South China Morning Post* May 14; *UCAN* March 27).

In April 2017, the tendency of “Arabization” in mosque construction was criticized at a conference on mosque architecture in Xi’an (see *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 9-10).

May 18, 2018:

Sinicization of Islam: Chinese Islamic Association launches campaign for “Four-Enter” mosques – All mosques are supposed to display China’s national flag

With a ceremony at the Beijing’s Dongsì Mosque and a written appeal to all regional Islamic associations and mosques, the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA), the official umbrella organization of Muslims in China, launched the “Four-Enter” mosques (“四进”清真寺) campaign. According to the CIA’s call, the following four elements should enter every mosque in China: 1) The national flag; 2) China’s constitution, laws and legal norms; 3) the socialist core values, and 4) the outstanding traditional culture of China. In detail, the CIA’s appeal calls for the following actions:

The national flag should be raised all year round in a clearly visible place in all mosques that have the capability of doing so. The mosques must also study China’s constitution and laws, especially the Regulations on Religious Affairs, and must properly handle the relationship between state law and religious law. Mosques may hire a lawyer to protect their rights (!). The socialist core values must be prominently displayed on placards in the courtyard of each mosque so that the faithful can learn them; they are to be interpreted and disseminated through Qur’an exegesis and preaching and may be practiced through charitable services. Mosques should be open to visitors and they may arrange for special persons to present to visitors Islam’s patriotism, love of peace, tolerance, respect for women, etc. The traditional Chinese culture is to be studied by Muslim clergy in the form of the classics and included in regular mosque education (*jingtang jiaoyu* 经堂教育, “scripture hall education”). The works of the Chinese Muslim scholars of the past (meaning the so-called “Islamic Confucians,” *Huiru* 回儒) must be consulted in mosque instruction and in the interpretation of the Qur’an. Thus the appeal of the Chinese Islamic Association.

At the opening of the campaign, Wang Zuo’an, director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs and now Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party, said that the “Four-Enter” mosques are a concrete contribution to the sinicization of Islam. According to *Xinhua*, similar opening ceremonies for the “Four-Enter” mosques have been held in Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang – all northwestern provinces with large Muslim populations. During the month of June, the campaign spread to other parts of the country as well as to other religions (see the appeal of the CIA at: www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/jujiaoredian/201805/19-11988.html; *AFP* May 21; chinaislam.net.cn May 19; *Xinhua* May 18; zytzb.gov.cn June 19).

May 22 and June 6, 2018:

Global Times reports on criticism of Islam at universities

On May 22, the *Global Times*, a newspaper close to the party, published an article about online complaints allegedly made by Northwest Minzu University students in Lanzhou (Gansu), who said their preparations for the semester’s final exams were “severely disturbed” after some Muslim students started praying on campus at 3:00 a.m. during the month of Ramadan. A university spokesperson interviewed by the *Global Times* said that the university forbids all on-campus religious activity, but

added that “Aside from members of the Communist Party of China or Communist Youth League of China, students have the right to practice their beliefs in accordance with law at religious sites outside the campus.”

In a June 6 article, the *Global Times* quoted an employee of the Nanjing Agricultural University who denied that religion had been disseminated in a course on Islamic culture taught by a Pakistani doctoral candidate at the university – an accusation made by Marxist expert Xi Wuyi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on her blog on May 30. The employee added that in any case the course had already been cancelled half a year before because the lecturer did not have the academic qualifications to teach at a Chinese university (*Global Times* May 22; June 6).

April / May / June, 2018:

New reports confirm the dramatic extent of the re-education camps in Xinjiang

According to reports by *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*, Human Rights Watch and others, since April of 2017 in Xinjiang Province, in the course of “de-extremification” measures, there have been extrajudicial mass detentions in “transformation through education” (*jiaoyu zhuanhua* 教育转化) centers of Uighurs and Kazakhs who have shown signs of harboring “strong religious views” or “politically incorrect” views (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 4, p. 11).

In May of this year (2018), Adrian Zenz of the European School for Theology and Culture in Korntal, Germany, an expert on Chinese minority policies in Tibet and Xinjiang, carried out a study demonstrating the large scale of the reeducation camps. In it, he evaluated accessible public sources, such as online procurement bids from various levels of government in Xinjiang for the construction or equipping of “transformation through education training centers” or facilities with similar names as well as related job postings. Zenz came to the conclusion that he could conservatively estimate that at the present time approximately 200,000 people were being detained in Xinjiang’s re-education camps. In his paper, he wrote that “While there is no certainty, it is reasonable to speculate that the total number of detainees might range anywhere between several hundred thousand and just over one million [...] It is therefore possible that Xinjiang’s present re-education system exceeds the size and capacity of the entire former Chinese re-education through labor system [that was officially abolished in 2013].”

The dramatic increase in Xinjiang re-education is generally attributed to the policies of Chen Quanguo, who became Party Secretary of Xinjiang in August 2016.

The May 2018 study by Adrian Zenz can be found at: www.academia.edu/36638456/_Thoroughly_Reforming_them_Toward_a_Healthy_Heart_Attitude_-_Chinas_Political_Re-Education_Campaign_in_Xinjiang (*Associated Press* May 18; *AP* as reported in the *South China Morning Post* May 17; *Asia-News* April 13; *Deutsche Welle* June 20 – <https://p.dw.com/p/2zucA>; *rfa.org* June 14, 27; *Reuters* April 18; *South China Morning Post* April 2; *Washington Post* May 16; *Xinhua* March 13).

Christianity

April 2018:

Dramatic crackdown on Christian churches in Henan province – Access to Christian churches forbidden to minors

From Henan, there is an increasing number of reports that the authorities are banning children from attending Christian services and religious education, cracking down on unregistered communities,



Sign on a church in Henan with the inscription: "In order to ensure the order and safety of the congregation, minors are not allowed to enter the church. Catholic church of the Nangaocun Village." Photo: *UCAN*.

dismantling crosses and so on. Both Protestant and Catholic communities are being affected, and also officially registered churches are being targeted.

Speculating about the reasons behind the sudden pressure that began in early February and (at least according to Catholic reports) intensified significantly in April, reports indicate that Henan is China's province with the highest number of Protestant Christians and that house churches are multiplying fast there. On the Catholic side, according to *AsiaNews*, most of the Catholics in Henan belong to the underground. *UCAN* cited rumors that Henan's new party secretary, Wang Guosheng, who had been in office since mid-March 2018, wanted to rectify the province within a year after his predecessor had come under criti-

cism for, among others, the presence of the many Christian churches in the poor counties of Xihua and Luoning and because of the increase in the number of house churches. Ying Fuk-tsang from the School of Divinity of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, however, wrote that according to his own study of reports by Communist Party and government organs from Henan, the crackdown on the Christians in the province has been under preparation for at least two years (i.e., since the 2016 National Conference on Religious Work). According to Ying, the party sees itself in a "fight over the next generation."

The prohibition on the participation of minors in religious activities is not covered by any known Chinese law (*America Magazine* May 1; china.ucanews.com April 19; la-croix.com May 4; rfa.org April 19; *UCAN* April 18; May 10, 11, 24). See: *RCTC* 2017, No. 4, p. 12; 2018, No. 2, pp. 12, 17 and 19 as well as the related entries in the sections "Protestantism" and "Catholic Church" of this News Update.

April 4, 2018:

***Apple Daily*: Bibles have suddenly disappeared from online stores**

According to a report by the Hong Kong newspaper *Apple Daily* (*Ping Kuo Jih Pao*), the Chinese government has apparently stopped the sale of Bibles through online shops. The Bible is no longer available in many online stores such as Taobao, JD.com, Weidian, Dang Wang or Amazon.cn, according to *Apple Daily*, not even the versions printed by the official churches. – Although Bibles are being printed in China, until now they could not be purchased commercially but only in church bookstores or online. This latest action by the government is certainly also related to the new legal regulations on religions and to increased pressure on Christianity and on Islam in particular (*Apple Daily* April 4 as reported on *BBC Monitoring*; nytimes.com April 5).

April 7, 2018:

Harbin's only "functioning" Orthodox church reopens for worship following renovation

The Pokrov Church in Harbin has been closed since 2014 for renovation. The opening Divine Liturgy, with a hundred faithful attending, was conducted by Father Yu Shi, who was ordained with the permis-

sion of the Chinese State Administration of Religious Affairs in 2015 after completing his training in St. Petersburg. “On the Orthodox Church issue, China and Russia do not have problems of principles,” reported the *Global Times* quoting Zhang Baichun, an expert on the Orthodox Church at Beijing Normal University. Zhang said that there are still some minor issues to resolve, such as the issue of ordination of priests, the sending of more theology students to Russia, as well as the question of allowing Orthodox services in some other cities. To date, the Orthodox Church in China has only been locally approved in some places (*Global Times* April 11).

For more on the Pokrov Church and on other Orthodox churches in Harbin see the contribution of Piotr Adamek in *China heute* 2018, No. 2, pp. 118-121 [in German].



The Pokrov Church in Harbin. Historical photograph: www.orthodox.cn.

Protestantism

End of March until June of 2018:

China Aid: Reports of government action against Protestant communities in Henan

As reported by the US-based China Aid, citing local Christians, the authorities in Henan have been targeting house churches since February 1, and by March 19, 2018, 100 house churches had been closed in Nanyang City. On May 26, China Aid said that forms for registering as religious sites have been distributed to house churches in Henan and Anhui.

In early June, the organization reported that the Ningling County Council had ordered the removal of all church crosses. There were reports that the government was destroying Christian decorations, such as tiles with the inscription “Emanuel,” which people had affixed to the outside of their houses. One Christian wrote that officials were now demolishing Christian images even inside private homes, such as the one in his own mother’s bedroom.

According to a China Aid report from mid-April, in Lushan County, the religious affairs department summoned 700 preachers belonging to registered “Three Self Churches” for a conference during which they were told to study the “Regulations on Religious Affairs.” They were also told to increase from 95% to 100% the percentage of churches displaying the national flag, and were ordered to ban children under the age of 18 from visiting the churches. China Aid further said that according to reports of local Christians, the religious affairs bureau was establishing branches in towns and villages and assigning special groups to monitor religious activities in villages, and the village cadres were now responsible for administrating religious activities in their jurisdiction. According to another witness, the authorities had closed down the Sunday schools in the official churches. According to China Aid, there have also been reports of cases where authorities have attempted to convince Christians to give up their beliefs or suffer unpleasant consequences, such as the loss of social assistance to cover the subsistence level or pension, that children would not be allowed to go to school, that officials would be dismissed, or that family businesses would be adversely affected (chinaaid.org March 26; April 10, 11, 18, 21, 30; May 26; June 3).

March 27–28, 2018:

Outline published of “Five-Year Work Plan to Promote the Sinicization of Protestant Christianity in China (2018–2022)”

The extensive document, signed by the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council, is dated December 2017. On March 27 and 28, these two Protestant governing bodies held a special ceremony in Nanjing to launch their “Five-Year Work Plan.” Also present were representatives of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Communist Party’s United Front Work Department (UFWD).

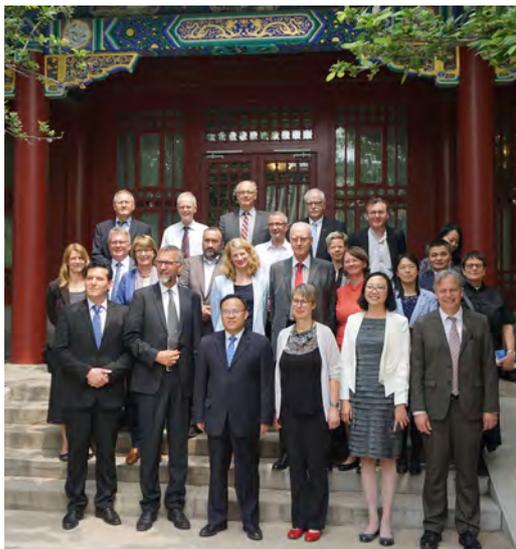
The international report on the Five-Year Work Plan placed special emphasis on passages of the text relating to the Bible. In Chapter 2, it states that the “major tasks” include the following: “Contents of the Bible that are compatible with the core values of socialism should be deeply researched in order to write books that are popular and easy-to-understand.” Also, “Be conscious of fostering research talent on the Bible and lay a solid foundation for reinterpreting the Bible and writing annotations for it.” As tasks for the year 2019, among other things, the plan seeks to link the approaching 100th Anniversary of the Union Version of the Chinese Bible with “organizing related commemorative activities and seminars for promoting Sinicized biblical interpretation. Recruit Chinese Christians to annotate the Bible so as to provide basic theological support for advancing the Sinicization of Christianity.”

The Five-Year Work Plan also includes purely political projects, such as, in 2021 the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party.

The text of the 推进我国基督教中国化五年工作规划纲要 (2018–2022) was published at www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/10284; quotes according to UCAN’s English translation of the Five-Year Work Plan at www.ucanews.com/news/protestant-five-year-plan-for-chinese-christianity/82107.

May 10–11, 2018:

Chinese-German interreligious consultation in Shanghai



The German participants of the interreligious consultation visit the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in Beijing, May 2018. The two SARA representatives in the 1st row are Yu Bo (3rd from the left) and Xiao Hong (5th from the left). Photo: China-Zentrum.

On May 10 and 11, the China Christian Council (CCC) issued an invitation for a Sino-German interreligious consultation in Shanghai on the theme: “Different religions – common future.” A 15-member delegation from Germany, consisting of representatives of Protestant and Catholic Churches, of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), together with representatives from politics and science, made up the German side of the consultation. It was supplemented locally by members of the German consulate staff as well as by leaders of the German-speaking Christian communities in Shanghai and Beijing. From the Chinese side, there were representatives of all five officially recognized religions, as well as officials from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), the Shanghai Municipal Administration, representatives from the sciences and from the Amity Foundation – all together a total of 23 persons. The “team for foreign contacts” of the CCC provided simultaneous translation for all of the presentations

and discussion contributions. Following the actual consultations, the German delegates were invited by the Amity Foundation in Nanjing and the SARA in Beijing to take part in an extensive visiting program that ended on May 15.

The event was the continuation of an earlier German-Chinese interreligious consultation, which had taken place in Hamburg and Berlin from May 8–11, 2016. See: *RCTC* 2016, No. 3, pp. 11-12.

Isabel Hess-Friemann

June 4, 2018:

Death of the evangelical theologian Chen Zemin

Chen Zemin, longtime study director of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS) and close companion of Bishop K.H. Ting, has died at the age of 101. Professor Chen strove to develop a native Chinese theology. Most of today's leaders in the church structures and in the educational institutions of the China Christian Council have gone through his school (see the obituary by Liu Ruomin in *China heute* 2018, No. 2, pp. 80-81 [in German]).



Professor Chen Zemin at his desk, 2007. Photo: Liu Ruomin.

June 11, 2018:

AsiaNews: New wave of arrests and deportations of Korean missionaries

AsiaNews reports that officials in Wenzhou have arrested two South Korean Protestant missionaries who worked there as “underground pastors” in a church that is not part of the “Three-Self Movement.” The church rooms were searched by the police and closed for a week. According to *AsiaNews*, last month alone, 30 Korean missionaries were arrested and brought before a judge in the Ningxia Autonomous Region and in the provinces of Shanxi, Hebei and Henan. The *Christian Today* website reports that there are more than 4,000 Koreans currently working as missionaries in Mainland China. *AsiaNews* writes that since April, the State Administration of Religious Affairs has intensified controls on foreign believers, with a clear focus on missionaries from South Korea. Pastor Eric Foley of Voice of the Martyrs Korea is quoted by *AsiaNews* as saying that over the past 18 months, raids on Korean missionary activity have greatly increased. More than a thousand have been deported between 2013 and 2017, and there could be more to come, once new regulations introduced on February 1, 2018 come into full effect (*AsiaNews* June 11).

Catholic Church

March 19, 2018:

Inner Mongolia: Underground priest physically removed from his parish – forced to work as a laborer on a farm

AsiaNews has reported that Fr. Ding Zhanmin, pastor of the underground Church in Beishaliang, Hohhot Diocese of Inner Mongolia, was forced by officials from the Baotou District Religious Affairs

Bureau to leave his parish on March 19 and was escorted to Xilin Gol (also Inner Mongolia) where he was ordered to work on a farm. Representatives of the United Front, through threats and bribes, had repeatedly attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to persuade Father Ding to join the Patriotic Association. Fr. Ding's parish should subsequently be taken over by the official Church. According to witnesses close to Fr. Ding, *AsiaNews* said, heavy pressure has been placed on underground priests to join the Patriotic Association, stressing that "even the Holy See has now made compromises." "In fact," *AsiaNews* continued, "since the so-called dialogue between China and the Holy See got under way, the rumor is spreading that membership of the PA no longer poses any problem. Many priests of the underground Church have turned to the Holy See for clarification, but without receiving an answer." Fr. Ding had already been arrested once before in January of 2012 along with four other priests (*AsiaNews* March 26).

March 25, 2018:

Chinese Catholics donate for disaster relief

Following the donation of a total of 157,000 Euros for disaster relief by Chinese Catholics in 21 dioceses on Palm Sunday 2017 during the first nationwide fundraising day, the campaign, supported by Jinde Charities, was launched once again on Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018. The funds raised during the past year were used by Jinde for materials, health care, psychological support and reconstruction projects in Hunan, Jilin, Guizhou and in Hualien (Taiwan) (*Fides* April 6; see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, pp. 16-17).

March 26, 2018:

Bishop Vincent Guo Xijin from Mindong is briefly "taken away" by authorities

On Monday of Holy Week, the "Underground" bishop and his secretary were picked up at their home following a talk with the local religious affairs bureau. He was able to return to the diocese one day later or, at the latest, before Easter. According to a local source cited by *UCAN*, the authorities wanted to prevent Bishop Guo from celebrating the Chrism Mass with the priests of his diocese on Holy Thursday because the Chrism Mass is an expression of his authority as bishop. At Easter 2017, Bishop Guo had been abducted for twenty days. This past January, there were reports (which so far have not been officially confirmed) that the Vatican had asked Bishop Guo to step down as the local bishop so that the illegitimate Bishop of Mindong, Bishop Zhan Silu, could be recognized by the Pope (see: *RCTC* 2018, No. 2, pp. 20-21) (*AsiaNews* March 27; *nytimes.com* April 3; *UCAN* March 28).

From April 1, 2018:

In Henan Province, authorities are preventing minors in many places from going to church – Pressure is being placed on schools as well

According to a list published by *AsiaNews* on April 20 (see below), in Zhengzhou Diocese, during the Mass on April 1, Easter Sunday, government personnel took the children out of church, and since then have been guarding the church doors every Sunday to prevent children from entering. At the church of Qixian in the Diocese of Kaifeng and in the Cathedral of Anyang, posters were installed with the inscription "Access for minors forbidden"; also in these two places, police officers have been stationed

at the church doors every Sunday since then. In the Diocese of Anyang, a Catholic kindergarten was closed and parents were asked to register their faith in their children's school. It says in the list that in a church of the Diocese of Xinxiang on April 18 children's bibles were confiscated.

According to *UCAN*, two elementary schools in Linzhou and Xingyang, Henan Province, sent out a letter with the title "Why minors must not enter religious sites – open letter to all parents of elementary and middle school students in the city" on April 11 and 12. The letter stated, with reference to the principle of separation of education and religion, that religion should not interfere in national and public education, adding that "it is illegal for organizations or individuals to guide, support, allow or condone minors to believe in a religion or to participate in religious activities" (*AsiaNews* April 20; china.ucanews.com April 17; rfa.org April 19; *UCAN* April 18, 20).

April 8, 2018:

Announcement of the official Catholic governing bodies of Henan Province prohibits religious instruction and church attendance for minors – A "red line" that Catholics are warned not to cross

The Catholic Patriotic Association and the Catholic Church Affairs Commission of Henan Province announced that all forms of religious education for minors are banned throughout the province and that believers are forbidden to take their children to church for worship. In the circular of April 8, which is addressed to the subordinate local Catholic governing bodies in Henan Province, reference is made to an April 3 order by the provincial government for the separation of education and religion. The circular warned that in these matters "it was only propaganda and education previously, but now it is a red line, a high-pressure line, so take it seriously," adding that otherwise the religious sites in question will be closed down and the legal status of the religious officials will be canceled (see photo of the circular with Chinese text and tentative translation at <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Henan,-church-banned-for-children-under-18:-taking-the-legs-from-under-the-Christian-community's-growth-among-young-people-43646.html>).

Radio Free Asia interviewed Father Wang Yuesheng, chairman of the Patriotic Association of Henan Province. He referred first to the principle of the separation of education and religion, but then said when asked, that they had already been in contact with the central government in this matter. He added that "we will not give up the fight for our rights" and that the matter had two sides (*AsiaNews* April 17; rfa.org/cantonese April 19).

April 20, 2018:

AsiaNews publishes appeal with list of attacks on the Catholic Church in Henan

An appeal calling for prayers for the Catholic Church in Henan that *AsiaNews* received on April 19 from different parts of China and that also circulated online on Chinese networks, listed forceful actions of the authorities against churches in 7 of the 10 dioceses of the province. *UCAN* has also reported on these acts. In addition to the ban on the church visits by minors (see entry above of April 1, 2018), the list also reported the following incidents:

On April 17, in the village of Hutuo, Gongyi City in the Diocese of Luoyang, a church in which an underground priest resided was demolished, the priest expelled, and the grave of the Underground Bishop of Luoyang, Bishop Li Hongye (1920–2011), was destroyed. Several crosses in the province were forcibly removed. In the Diocese of Puyang, a church was destroyed, and officials in Qingfeng



The grave of Bishop Li Hongye in Hutuo was completely destroyed on April 17, 2018.
Photo: *UCAN*.

County forced community leaders to report names and personal details of parishioners. According to the list, in the Diocese of Shangqiu officials went from house to house announcing: “Now, believing in religion is no longer allowed by the government, and whoever believes in it, your children will not be allowed to go to school; your elders’ subsidies will be deducted; and if you still do not listen to this advice, you will be expelled from public office; and if there are retirees at home, their pension will be stopped.”

On April 24, in the Diocese of Zhumadian (the eighth Diocese of Henan from which attacks were reported), the unregistered Catholic church of Gadazhang, whose pastor is officially registered, was placed under seal by the authorities.

According to *AsiaNews*, the Catholic Church in Henan exists mainly in the Underground. There is only one bishop recognized by the government in the whole province, Bishop Zhang Yinlin of Anyang. Several of Henan’s bishoprics are vacant (*AsiaNews* April 20; *china.ucanews.com* April 17, 18, 19; *UCAN* April 18, 20, 25).

May 2018:

Statue of Chinese saint dismantled

Shortly after the statue of Saint John Wu Wenyn was erected at the church at Dongdongtou in Yongnian parish of the Diocese of Handan in Hebei Province, on May 3, 2018, in a solemn ceremony attended by 35 priests and numerous faithful, the statue had to be removed again. Wu Wenyn was born in the village of Dongdongtou in 1850 and was a catechist in the community. He was tortured during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and executed. On October 1, 2000, Pope John Paul II declared him a saint in Rome. He is the only saint of the diocese of Handan.

According to a source known to *UCAN*, the authorities had urged the church to remove the statue after the ceremony “stirred a commotion on the internet.” This is considered a further step in the direction of increasing reprisals (*Fides* May 17; *UCAN* May 24).

May 15, 2018:

Largest cathedral in northern China consecrated

In Chengde, Hebei Province, a US\$ 11 million (RMB 70 million) complex of cathedral, sisters’ convent and bishop’s residence was built for the illicitly ordained Bishop Guo Jincai. Bishop Guo is not yet recognized by Rome, but is one of the seven bishops to be legitimized after the conclusion of a Sino-Vatican agreement. Most of the cost of the 15,000 square meter complex was covered by funds from the Catholic Patriotic Association of Hebei Province and the Hebei Catholic Administrative Commission. Hebei Province has one million Catholics, and Chengde Diocese has 30,000, most of them farmers.

On May 15, Bishop Guo presided over the inauguration Mass with ten bishops concelebrating. In addition to Bishop Guo, there were Bishop Ma Yinglin (Chairman of the official Bishops’ Conference), also unrecognized by Rome, and the recognized bishops Fang Xingyao (chairman of the Patriotic Association), Shen Bin, Meng Qinglu, Fang Jianping, Li Shan, Pei Junmin and Yang Yongqiang (the latter are all vice-chairmen of the Patriotic Association and / or of the Bishops’ Conference). Bishop Sun Jigen of

Handan was also present. More than 800 of the faithful as well as some government officials attended the ceremony.

After the Mass, a symposium was held in which government officials expressed the hope, according to *UCAN*, that the Diocese of Chengde under the leadership of Bishop Guo would continue to uphold the flag of “loving the country and the church” and adhere to the principle of independence and the direction of Sinicization. Bishop Guo said the new complex reflected the care and support of the party and government for patriotic religious communities and individuals. He affirmed that he would follow the guidance of President Xi Jinping’s socialist ideology in the new era (*UCAN* May 25).

May 16–17, 2018:

“Five Year Outline for the Development of Sinicization of Catholicism” adopted by Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and official Bishops’ Conference

A “Five Year Outline for the Development of Sinicization of Catholicism” (天主教中国化五年发展纲要) was adopted after discussion by acclamation at the 4th Joint Assembly of Leaders of the Ninth Term of the Chinese Catholic “One Association One Conference” movement. The text discussed was obviously already a revised version, because changes were explained. Nothing further was made known about the content of the document (*chinacatholic.cn* May 22).

June 5, 2018:

Authorities destroy the Way of the Cross in Diocese of Anyang, Henan Province

The 14 Stations of the Cross, carved from slate, with depictions of the suffering of Jesus in Chinese style were forcibly removed by the authorities using excavators and other heavy equipment. According to *UCAN*, the Way of the Cross led to the shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the only Catholic pilgrimage site in the province. The pilgrimage church in Tianjiajing Village, Linzhou, was built in 1903–1905 by order of the then Apostolic Vicar of North Henan, Monsignor Stefano Scarsella, of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), in thanksgiving to God for having preserved local missionaries from the dangers of the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. The church was severely damaged by the Japanese in World War II, as well as during the Cultural Revolution. Later on, many Catholics repeatedly made their pilgrimage to the site. According to *UCAN*, there were about 10,000 pilgrims from 3 provinces on July 16, 1986, Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The following year, 1987, the government of Henan declared the pilgrimage site illegal and since then has allowed few pilgrims access to the shrine (*AsiaNews* June 9; *UCAN* June 8).

June 12–13, 2018:

Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and official Bishops’ Conference hold joint session on theological seminaries

The joint meeting on “seminary work” in Chengdu was aimed at reinforcing the “line of running the seminaries according to [the principle of an] independent, autonomous and self-governing church,” according to the report posted on the website of the two bodies. The first item on the agenda was an

exchange of experiences on political education at seminaries. Then, given the declining number of vocations, for the first time they discussed the topic of “research on priestly vocations.” In addition to leading representatives of the two official Catholic bodies, the leaders of nine Catholic theological seminaries (places not mentioned) as well as representatives of the State Administration of Religious Affairs and of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee participated in the meeting (chinacatholic.cn June 20).

June 15, 2018:

Death of Bishop Joseph Li Mingshu of Qingdao

Bishop Joseph Li Mingshu of the Diocese of Qingdao in Shandong Province has died at the age of 93. He was consecrated bishop there on August 13, 2000, with the approval of both the Vatican and the Chinese government. The Diocese of Qingdao was formerly a mission area cared for by the Divine Word Missionaries (Steyl Missionaries). Today the diocese numbers 12 priests and a local women’s religious community with 12 sisters. The succession of Bishop Li is not yet determined (*AsiaNews* June 18; tianzhujiao.me June 16; *UCAN* June 20; vaticannews.va July 7).



Bishop Li Mingshu (left) in 2003 in the Mission Museum of Steyl. Next to him is Mr. Liu Bainian in front of a historical photograph of the mission station of the Divine Word Missionaries in Qingdao. Photo: Archive China-Zentrum.

Sino-Vatican Relations

March 22–23, 2018:

Symposium “Christianity in Chinese Society: Impact, Interaction and Inculturation” at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome

Religious scholars from state academies and universities of the People’s Republic of China, western sinologists and theologians of the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Holy Spirit Seminary in Hong Kong presented a series of lectures. *UCAN* reported that Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yulin, a Vice-Chairman of the official Chinese Bishops’ Conference, talked about the role model function and positive influence of the Catholic Church in Chinese society through her social ministry; he said that this was an important form of adaptation. In his welcoming address, John Cardinal Tong of Hong Kong spoke of the indispensability of dialogue. Among the participants were Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary of the Holy See for Relations with the States, who delivered an address, and Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, who reportedly led at least the last Vatican delegation to Beijing. One of the co-organizers of the symposium, according to the program notes, was Hong Kong’s Catholic Yuan Dao Study Society, which in recent years has been one of the organizers of such conferences between Catholic and Chinese scholars and Chinese religious leaders in Hong Kong and Beijing. Composed as it was and in this place, the symposium was certainly something new. The symposium was, according to *America Magazine*, “read as a clear sign of an improvement in Sino-Vatican relations” by observers (*America Magazine* March 28; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* April 14; *UCAN* April 28; *Vatican Insider* March 22; poster and program of the symposium).

End of March:

Media speculate about “Holy Week Deal” between China and the Vatican

On the one hand, the speculation can be traced back to a blog post by Cardinal Joseph Zen (Hong Kong), who wrote on March 15 that he would not give up until “that unfortunate signing happens, rumored to be on March 23 or 27.” On the other hand, on March 28, the party-friendly Chinese *Global Times* quoted Bishop Guo Jincai as saying that an agreement could be signed “as early as the end of this month.” He said that the negotiations had reached the “final stages” and the timing depended on “technical issues.” Guo is Secretary-General of the official Chinese Bishops’ Conference and one of the seven bishops not recognized by the pope. However, the *Global Times* also wrote that Wang Meixiu of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences does not share Guo’s optimism, partly because of the need to clarify the issue of the bishops not recognized by Rome, but also because, Wang said, “legal and political changes in China also need to be taken into consideration.” The newspaper was referring to the new “Regulations on Religious Affairs” and to the absorption of the role of the State Administration of Religious Affairs by the United Front Work Department of the Party. On March 28, Lu Kang, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, said that China was ready to meet the Vatican halfway to promote constructive bilateral dialogue and progress – reported the *Global Times* (*CNN* April 1; *globaltimes.cn* March 28; *UCAN* March 21; April 4).

March 29, 2018:

Press Secretary of the Holy See denies rumors that the Vatican is about to sign an agreement with Beijing

Vatican News reported this, writing: “Replying to journalists’ questions on Thursday, Greg Burke said there is no ‘imminent’ agreement between the Holy See and the Peoples Republic of China. He added that Pope Francis remains in ‘constant contact’ with his advisers on the situation of the Church in China and follows the progress that is taking place in dialogue between the two sides” (*Vatican News* March 29).

April 3, 2018:

Sino-Vatican relations at the press conference on the State Council’s White Paper on the Freedom of Belief

At the international press conference, journalists asked many questions about the state of the negotiations between Beijing and the Vatican. As representatives of the former State Administration of Religious Affairs, Chen Zongrong and Xiao Hong initially limited themselves to the stating that an effective channel for dialogue existed and that China was prepared to improve relations through constructive dialogue. When a journalist from Singapore’s *Lianhe Zaobao* newspaper said that some Catholics felt restricted in their religious freedom because the government did not allow the pope to appoint bishops in China, Chen said China’s constitution laid down clear guidelines in the matter. “China’s religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination. [This means that foreign bodies] should not interfere in any way with China’s religious affairs.” Chen said that he does not agree that it limits the freedom of religious belief “if we do not allow Rome to fully control the right to appoint bishops” (*english.scio.gov.cn* and *scio.gov.cn* April 3).

April 30, 2018:

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin uses less optimistic tones in an interview with *Vatican Insider*

According to Cardinal Parolin, there are successes and failures in the dialogue with the Chinese government. It was important to proceed with the dialogue. “If the government were not Communist and respected religious freedom, there would be no need to negotiate. Because we would already have what we wish for,” Parolin said. The goal is “spaces of freedom for the Church, so that she can live a normal life that is also in communion with the Pope.” It is “fundamental that [...] the official community, subject to the control of the government, and the so-called underground community – which today each walk their own path – be united.” We hope to reach an agreement on episcopal appointments, Parolin said. “And we hope that the agreement will then be respected. We have the will to do so and we hope that the Chinese government also has this same will” (www.lastampa.it/2018/04/30/vaticaninsider/parolin-a-great-sign-of-hope-for-korea-vuqyEwvhuYvkuoVZRUq6JN/pagina.html).

May 24, 2018:

Day of Prayer for the Church in China – Call of the Pope and pilgrimage statistics from Shanghai

At the end of the general audience in St. Peter’s Square on May 23, Pope Francis said: “Tomorrow, 24 May, the annual Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary ‘Help of Christians’ will be celebrated. She is particularly venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai, China. This occasion invites us to be united spiritually with all the Catholic faithful who live in China. Let us pray for them to Our Lady, that they may live the faith with generosity and peace, and that they may be able to perform practical gestures of fraternity, harmony and reconciliation, in full communion with the Successor of Peter. Dearest disciples of the Lord in China, the universal Church prays with you and for you so that despite difficulties you may continue to entrust yourselves to God’s will. Our Lady will never leave you lacking her help and will protect you with her motherly love.”

According to a list published on the website of the Diocese of Shanghai, more than 17,400 persons pre-registered for the pilgrimage to the Basilica of Mary on Mount Sheshan between April 29 and May 31, 2018. These figures did not include those who had taken part in the diocese’s own pilgrimage on May 15. The registered pilgrimage groups came almost exclusively from Shanghai and the neighboring provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Inter-diocesan pilgrimages are often prevented by the authorities. In May of the previous year, 19,300 pilgrims had taken part in the Sheshan pilgrimage, including significantly more groups of pilgrims from more distant provinces than this year (w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180523_udienza-generale.html; catholicsh.org May 24; see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, p. 17).

First half of June 2018:

New Round of Sino-Vatican talks in Rome – The Vatican is also said to have expressed concern over the tightening of Chinese religious policies

According to a *Reuters* report from journalist Philip Pullella (who also interviewed Pope Francis in June), “Vatican and diplomatic sources” said on June 15 that the Vatican and Chinese delegations had

met “in Rome in recent days” to talk about the question of episcopal nominations. The Vatican also expressed its concern over restrictions, including the prohibition of “unaccompanied minors” (*sic*) in some regions from entering churches, one of the sources told *Reuters*.

This is the first time that the Vatican has leaked that it had raised issues of religious freedom in China in the internal negotiations with Beijing. The last meeting of the two delegations took place in December 2017 in China (*Reuters* June 15).

June 20, 2018:

AsiaNews publishes passages from *Reuters* interview with Pope Francis – “Dialogue is a risk, but I prefer the risk to the sure defeat of not talking”

AsiaNews has released the excerpts relating to China from the recording of Philip Pullella’s interview with Pope Francis, which, according to *AsiaNews*, had been held two days previously. The excerpts were not published in this form by *Reuters*. We quote here from *AsiaNews* (www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope-talks-to-Reuters-about-the-dialogue-with-China-44224.html):

Q: How is rapprochement with China going?

A: We are at a good point, but relations with China follow three different paths. First of all, there is the official one. The Chinese delegation comes here, takes part in meetings, and then the Vatican delegation goes to China. Relations are good and we have managed to do good things. This is the official dialogue.

Then there is a second dialogue, of everyone and with everyone. ‘I am a cousin of the minister so and so who sent me to say that ...’ There is always an answer. ‘Yes, all right, let’s go forward.’ These side channels are open, let’s say, at a human level, and we do not want to burn them. We can see goodwill, both from the Holy See and the Chinese government.

The third path, which for me is the most important in the rapprochement with China, is cultural. Some priests work at Chinese universities. Then there is also culture, like the exhibit that was put on in the Vatican and in China. This is the traditional path, like those of the great ones, like Matteo Ricci. [Note by *AsiaNews*: The twin exhibit at the Vatican and in Beijing, decided last November, should have been held in March 2018, but, according to Vatican sources, has not yet been realized for ‘technical reasons.’]

I like to think about relations with China as, multifaceted, based not only on the official diplomatic one, because the other two are very enriching. I think things are going well. In your question, you mentioned two steps forward and one step backward. I think the Chinese deserve the Nobel Prize for patience, because they are good, they know how to wait, time is theirs and they have centuries of culture ... They are a wise people, very wise. I respect China a lot.

Q: How do you respond to concerns such as those of Cardinal Zen?

A: Cardinal Zen taught theology in patriotic seminaries. I think he’s a little scared. Perhaps age might have some influence. He is a good man. He came to talk to me. I received him, but he’s a bit scared. Dialogue is a risk, but I prefer the risk to the sure defeat of not talking. With respect to time, someone mentioned Chinese time. I think it is God’s time – forward, calm.”

Hong Kong

May 29, 2018:

Hong Kong: Appeal for the release of Bishop Cui Tai

The Hong Kong Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission issued a statement on May 29 calling on the Chinese government to release Bishop Augustinus Cui Tai, Coadjutor Bishop of Xuanhua in Hebei Province. The bishop belongs to the underground Church. The appeal is supported by Cardinal Joseph Zen. According to the statement, Bishop Cui was taken away by government officials to an unknown location in mid-April of 2018. It also states in the appeal that Bishop Cui, without any reason nor local process, has spent the past eleven years, i.e., since 2007, in continuous custody or under house arrest. "During this time, Msgr. Cui was often locked up in secret detention centres, or in hotels, or taken away for forced 'travel' under the escort of government officials." Only on Chinese holidays was he occasionally allowed to visit his elderly sister. The appeal also calls for adequate medical treatment for Bishop Cui, who suffers from various illnesses, as well as the release of other imprisoned clerics. Bishop Su Zhimin and Father Liu Honggen of Baoding are both explicitly named.

Bishop Cui was born in Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province, in 1950. He studied at Baoding underground Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1990 by Yixian Bishop Shi Enxiang. In 2013, he was ordained Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Xuanhua (*Asianews* May 30; *UCAN* May 30).

June 23, 2018:

Bishops of Hong Kong and Macao on "ad limina" visit to Pope Francis

Hong Kong Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung, his Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing OFM and Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sang of Macao came to their joint Ad Limina visit to Pope Francis on June 23, 2018. This was their first visit in ten years. Speaking to *AsiaNews* after their visit with the Holy Father, Bishop Yeung said the Vatican's position toward China was clear: "The Vatican does not want to irritate anyone; it does not want to make any wrong moves [for the Church], but at the same time it must do something for the good of the Church and of Chinese society." One must keep talking, diplomatic relations would not be taken up overnight. "The Pope," said Bishop Yeung, "asked us to pray. We want to pray for him, for the Church in China, and for all those who have sacrificed their lives for the faith in China ..." (*AsiaNews* June 23).

Taiwan

May 14, 2018:

The bishops of Taiwan make their "ad limina" visit to Pope Francis

For the seven Taiwanese bishops, this was their first Ad Limina visit in 10 years, and thus the first since Pope Francis began his pontificate. The delegation was led by Archbishop John Hung Shan-chuan, SVD, of Taipei, current chairman of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference. Other members of the group included Archbishop Liu Cheng-chung of Kaohsiung, Bishop Li Keh-mien of Hsinchu, Bishop Su Yao-wen of Taichung, Bishop Chung An-chu of Chiayi, Bishop Lin Chi-nan of Tainan and Bishop Huang Chao-ming of Hualien.

Upon his return from Rome, in a May 15 interview with *Radio Free Asia*, Hung said he had expressed concern to Pope Francis about the possible establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican. He said Taiwan felt orphaned internationally. Hung said: “I told the pope I hoped they [the Holy See] would not see us as part of China and would not connect us. They can establish diplomatic ties, but the rights and interests of Taiwan should not be sacrificed,” Archbishop Hung said. He also told the pope to protect Taiwan. “Please do not leave us behind in any situations.” And Pope Francis replied, “Certainly not!” The Holy Father assured Taiwan’s bishops that the shepherd would never abandon his flock. At the same time, he asked the group for their prayers for the Catholics in China.

The bishops then invited Pope Francis to the National Eucharistic Congress in Taiwan planned for March of next year. Thus far no pope has ever visited Taiwan. However, should the visit not become a reality, Archbishop Hung hopes for at least a video message from the Holy Father to the Catholics of Taiwan.

There are currently 300,000 Catholics in Taiwan, about 2% of the population. The Holy See is one of only 18 countries in the world – and the only one in Europe – to maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan. As recently as May of this year, the Dominican Republic and Burkina Faso broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and established relations with the People’s Republic of China (*AsiaNews* May 11; *Kyodo News* May 23; *Taipei Times* May 11; *UCAN* May 16, 22).

Mai 29, 2018:

***Apple Daily Taiwan*: Buddhist temple in Taiwan defaced, turned into Chinese Communist Party shrine**

The former Buddhist Biyun Temple in Changhua County, Taiwan has been purchased by retired colonel Wei Mingren from the Mainland and converted into a site of homage to Chinese Communism and its leaders. Retired colonel Wei served in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. He acquired this abandoned Buddhist temple and transformed it into a “base of communism and socialism,” reports *Taiwan News*. Veteran Wei appears in public wearing his old army uniform, saying that it is only natural “in China,” of which he claims Taiwan is a part, to start the day with the raising of the Mainland Chinese flag and the singing of the national anthem of the People’s Republic.

Two groups are now increasingly protesting against this form of use of the former temple. The first is a group of Buddhist nuns with the help of two local politicians. As reported by *Apple Daily Taiwan*, Su Huanzhi, a candidate for mayor of Taipei, and Changhua County Council member Hsu Shuwei, accompanied by a group of nuns, have filed a complaint with the local authorities in Changhua charging that the colonel and his followers are “insulting Buddhism” by such a use of the former temple for purposes of communist propaganda.

Likewise, the political group “Taiwan Guo” (“The State of Taiwan”) is staging loud protests in front of the former temple. This group, as the name suggests, is committed to having Taiwan recognized as an independent state. For them, hoisting the national flag of the People’s Republic of China, and singing the Chinese national anthem, the “March of the Volunteers,” are an affront to Taiwan’s “sovereignty as a state.” They have staged several protests in front of the temple grounds. Their most recent protest, as reported by *Liberty Times News*, took place in the presence of 60 police officers who made sure that there were no physical clashes between the larger group of followers of “Taiwan Guo” and Colonel Wei and his followers (*Apple Daily Taiwan* May 29; *Chinatimes* Jan. 2, 2017; *Liberty Times News* June 8).

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