

News Update on Religion and Church in China June 26 – October 3, 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 March 19 – June 30, 2018.

Politics

July 10, 2018:

Liu Xia, widow of Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo, has left for Germany

After a 15 month-long tug-of-war with the Chinese government, Liu Xia finally left China for Germany on 10th July. This move was mainly possible after quiet diplomacy on the part of the German government and Chancellor Angela Merkel as well as constant public pressure and appeals from intellectuals and human rights activists. Her husband, Liu Xiaobo, died of cancer in a Shenyang City hospital on July 13, 2017, at the age of 61. At the time of his death, Liu Xiaobo, a critic of the Chinese system, had been serving a long-term prison sentence imposed on him on December 25, 2009, and which was scheduled to run until 2020. Until her recent emigration from China, Liu Xia, a well-known poet, had herself been under house arrest since her husband was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2010, although she herself had never been charged with any offense. Following a noticeable deterioration of her health, last spring the Federal Government, among others, urged that she be released (*South China Morning Post* July 22; *zeit.de* July 10; see also *China heute* 2017, No. 3, pp. 144-145 [in German]).

July 31, 2018:

China’s Communist Party launches campaign for the “promotion of a patriotic striving spirit” among intellectuals

On July 31, the party’s news agency *Xinhua* released a circular on this topic that was issued by the CCP’s Propaganda and Organization Departments. According to the document, the “patriotic striving spirit” (弘扬爱国奋斗精神) is to be aroused through training, etc., especially among young and middle-aged

intellectuals in universities, research and other institutions, so that their “ideological, emotional and value-related identification with the combat objectives of party and Government is strengthened.” The whole purpose of the campaign is to “unite the hearts of intellectuals” so that they “[...] follow the party with ever greater determination,” said an editorial by *Renmin ribao* on August 2. In recent months, according to the *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, murmurs of discontent in mainland China’s intellectual circles have been growing, voicing concern over political developments since the abolition in March this year of the limits to the term of office of the country’s president. According to the *SCMP*, in an article circulating on social media, law professor Xu Zhangrun of Tsinghua University listed eight main reasons for anxiety and panic, including heightened ideological control, return to class struggle, closed-door policies and a return to totalitarianism. In an analysis quoted by the *SCMP*, the campaign was a kind of response by the authorities to criticism by intellectuals (*Renmin ribao* Aug. 2; *SCMP* Aug. 8, *Xinhua* July 31).

August 6, 2018:

Publication of the “Measures on Information Disclosure by Charitable Organizations”

On the basis of the legal provisions of China’s Charity Law (慈善法), which took effect on September 1, 2016, regulations were published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, taking effect on September 1, 2018. All basic information, annual reports, financial reports and reports on fundraising, programs, foundations, capital flows, investments and other financial transactions of charitable organizations have to be published on a public, unified information platform set up by the Ministry. Also to be disclosed are each organization’s statutes, as well as information about decision-makers, founders, key sponsors, managers and individuals or organizations that have connections to the organization. Organizations eligible for public fundraising must also provide details of the salaries of the five highest paid employees, as well as expenditures for business travel, vehicle purchases and other expenses.

Already on January 24, 2018, the measures to manage “credit [trustworthiness] information from social organizations” were published and thus took effect. These measures include the creation and publication of a list of organizations with unlawful activities and another list of organizations that are considered to be severely untrustworthy (*Xinhua* Aug. 8; the text of the “Measures on Information Disclosure by Charitable Organizations” [with English translation] can be found at: www.chinalawtranslate.com/慈善组织信息公开办法/?lang=en; the text of the “Measures on the Management of the Social Organizations’ Credit Information” [with English translation] can be found at: www.chinalawtranslate.com/社会组织信用信息管理办法/?lang=en).

Jan Kwee

August 28, 2018:

Proposed draft of the Civil Code removes all birth control content

For the upcoming Year of the Pig, the Chinese government issued a new stamp in August, depicting a happy pair of pig parents with their three happy piglet offspring. This is obviously meant to indicate an end of the two-child policy. In 2015, China ended its rigorous one-child policy that has been in place since 1979 and allowed married couples to have two children. Also at that time, the Chinese Post released a new stamp for the Year of the Monkey – portraying a monkey and two little monkeys.

As the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) and others write, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress discussed a draft of the new Civil Code at the end of August. “... that

contains no reference to ‘family planning’, indicating that there will be no more restrictions on the number of children Chinese families can have,” says MERICS. Changes to the draft Civil Code are to be submitted to the National People’s Congress.

According to a *BBC* report, on September 10, the National Health Commission announced on its website that the government’s three existing family planning offices had been merged and that a new department for “population monitoring and family development” was to be launched.

China sees itself as facing increased pressure by, among other things, an aging population, a persistently low birth rate and a chronic shortage of workers. In 2017, the birth rate was 1.6 children per woman. Many today cannot afford and do not want to have more children but the birth rate would need to be at least 2.1 children per woman in order to keep the population at a constant level.

It was also along these lines that the Province of Jiangxi issued new guidelines in mid-June, according to which abortions after the 14th week of pregnancy are only allowed if there are medical indications and with the written consent of three doctors. Similar regulations have existed in other provinces for some years now. This should also prevent abortions motivated by gender selection. According to a 2013 government figure, 336 million abortions have been performed in China since 1971 (*AsiaNews* Aug. 30; *BBC* Sept. 11; *CNN* Aug. 8; *The Guardian* June 22; *merics China Update* 13/2018, 12/2018; *South China Morning Post* Aug. 28; *The Telegraph* Sept. 11).

Religious Policy

End of July / Beginning of August 2018:

Reports of escalation in the “great coffin war of Jiangxi”

On the grounds of wanting to preserve land resources, the provincial government of Jiangxi, southern China, introduced a “zero burial” directive in February this year. The China Aid website called the subsequent crackdown “the great coffin war of Jiangxi.” According to reports from the *South China Morning Post* (*SCMP*), coffins, which are often tailor-made and therefore expensive for the poorer rural population, are often purchased early on by people who feel themselves growing old. There is a long tradition in rural China for people to have tailor-made coffins, which are then stored at home in the belief that they will bring longevity and good fortune. Such coffins can cost up to 5,000 yuan, and some district governments offered compensation of about 2,000 yuan if those coffins were handed over to the authorities. In Gao’an County, 5,800 coffins were collected from 24 villages. However, there are also dramatic photos of old people (see *SCMP* article) clinging to their coffins while the latter are being removed by the authorities.

Both China Aid and *SCMP* reported that enforcement of this February directive escalated at the local level. In April and June of this year, there had been cases of reopening graves and forcibly cremating the bodies of those who had been buried in defiance of this government policy. Provincial Governor Liu Qi of Jiangxi believes that the introduction of a “greener” burial directive designed to improve the country’s shortage of land was right in principle, but admitted that the implementation had gone “off track” and caused offense, *AsiaNews* said. The “draconian” implementation also received criticism in the state media, as in a *People’s Daily* article calling on the local government to reconsider its policy and its implementation (*AsiaNews* Aug. 4; *The Guardian* Aug. 1; *People’s Daily* July 30; *SCMP* July 31).

July 29, 2018:

***Bitter Winter* publishes a Chinese secret document containing a plan to crush the “cults” – The “Church of Almighty God” is now the most persecuted group**

Bitter Winter has published photos of a document dated April 10, 2018, issued by a “Leadership Group for the Prevention and Treatment of Cults.” The place of origin of the document has been made unrecognizable, but it seems to be a local party document. The document contains a “Plan to Develop Investigation and Regulatory Work [Regarding] the Problem of Cults” (开展邪教问题排查整治工作方案). As *Bitter Winter* explains, the plan is to proceed against the “cults” between April 2018 and January 2019, by means of, among other things, the use of propaganda in the media, targeted training, encouragement of reporting and tip-offs, collection of information and focused arrests.

The Chinese authorities have identified and banned a series of movements which it labels heterodox “cults” (*xiejiao* 邪教). “The Church of Almighty God is now the most persecuted of them all, replacing Falun Gong as the religious minority most severely targeted by the regime,” according to Massimo Introvigne, director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (Centro studi sulle nuove religioni, CESNUR). CESNUR, based in Turin, Italy, has been in existence since 1988. Since May this year (2018), it has been producing the *Bitter Winter* website for news about religions in China (cesnur.org; <https://bitterwinter.org/plan-for-persecuting-xie-jiao/>; freedomofbelief.net May 15).

July 31, 2018:

The national organizations of the five state-recognized religions issue a common call for displaying the national flag at all religious sites

The “Joint Conference of the National Religious Organizations” adopted the document at its 6th meeting in Beijing; Wang Zu’an, deputy minister of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party and director of the National Religious Affairs Administration, addressed the participants.

The appeal of the religious organizations contains the following points, among others: Religious activity sites that have the conditions to do so are required to raise the flag and may hold flag raising ceremonies on holidays such as National Day, Labor Day and on New Year’s Day and on religious holidays. At flag raising ceremonies, participants must assume a deferential stance and the national anthem must be played or sung. The flag must be hung in a central location that is clearly visible and, if religious symbols or flags are displayed at the same time, the Chinese flag must hang in front of all the others. In addition, the constitution, the national flag law, the heroes and martyrs of the flag and the patriotic striving spirit are all to be studied. All institutes for religious education have to complete and put into practice their own “flag raising system.” According to the joint call, the national flag should wave not only over the individual religious sites, but in the hearts of the religious masses.

The semi-official *Global Times* commented that for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like China, strengthening national and civic consciousness is particularly important. It also argued that the display of the national flag at religious sites “is a common phenomenon in the world [...], especially in the US” [where it is voluntary, not obligatory, and where many believers object to its presence (added by D. Streit)].

The raising of China’s flag is part of the nationwide “Four-Enter” campaign. Under this campaign, not only the national flag but also the constitution and the laws, the socialist core values and the outstand-

ing traditional Chinese culture should enter every religious site. This policy was first launched in May of 2018 as part of the campaign for the “Sinicization” of Islam (see: *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, pp. 8-10, 12). The Chinese Buddhist Association held a formal hoisting of the national flag at the Guangji Temple in Beijing on August 17. Much media attention was focused on the first flag ceremony, which was held at the Shaolin Temple in Henan on August 27. There were also reports of local China Christian communities expressing their opposition to any display of the national flag at their churches (text of the appeal titled “关于在宗教活动场所升挂国旗的倡议” at www.zyztb.gov.cn/tzyw/292967.jhtml; <https://chinabuddhism.com.cn> Aug. 17; *Global Times* July 31; August 8; *South China Morning Post* Aug. 28)

August 2018:

Official English designation of the religious affairs department at the national level is no longer SARA, but NRAA

Since August of this year, on the official website www.sara.gov.cn of the religious affairs department at the national level, the Guojia zongjiao shiwu ju 国家宗教事务局 (literal translation: State Religious Affairs Bureau), the English translation of this institution is no longer State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), but National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA). The English name change apparently reflects the fact that since March of 2018 the department is no longer under the authority of the State Council, i.e., the government – but is now under the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China. The Chinese name Guojia zongjiao shiwu ju remains unchanged. In future, *RCTC* will use the new official English name National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA).

August 12, 2018:

Chinese media report a lawsuit against leaders of the Church of the Almighty God in Heilongjiang and accuse US of exploiting “cults” to support anti-Chinese activities

Since July 31, 2018, a lawsuit has been ongoing in Daqing against leading members of the Heilongjiang branch of the “cult of the Almighty God,” according to an August 12 English-language bulletin released by *Xinhua*. Those accused had been arrested in June of 2017. No reference was made to the number and names of the accused.

That same day, the Chinese-language newspaper *Huanqiu Shibao* (*Global Times*) accused the United States of protecting the cults and of using them for anti-Chinese operations. Everyone knows the “FLG” (i.e., Falun Gong) and its founder is Li Hongzhi, the paper said and went on: “But not everyone knows that there is another cult inside China currently threatening society whose leader is also hiding in the US [...]. This is the “Almighty God” (*quannengshen* 全能神).”

The “Church of the Almighty God,” founded in the 1990s and also known as the “Doctrine of the Eastern Lightning,” proclaims the second coming of Christ in our days, i.e. the re-incarnation of Christ in the form of a Chinese woman. The group has been proselytizing for years, especially in Christian communities. Since the group came out all across China towards the end of 2012 with Doomsday prophecies, and after a murder in a McDonald’s restaurant in Zhaoyuan in May of 2014, the authorities have been proceeding against it in a massive fashion.

August 17, 2018:

In the party journal *Qiushi*, Wang Zuo'an writes: "There is no affiliate relationship between the religions of China and the religions of foreign countries"

Wang, deputy minister of the United Front Department of the Chinese Communist Party since April 1, 2018 and long-time director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, published a policy article on religious work in *Qiushi* (2018, No. 16), a journal on party theory. In it he wrote: "All religions of our country hold to the principle of independence, autonomy and self-government. There is no affiliate relationship [*lishu guanxi* 隶属关系, other translation option: 'subordinate relationship'] between the religions of China and the religions of foreign countries. The religious organizations and religious affairs of our country are not subject to any foreign domination."

Reuters drew attention to the ongoing Sino-Vatican negotiations on episcopal appointments which were taking place even as these statements were being published (*Qiushi* Aug. 17, online at www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-08/17/c_1123284988.htm; *Reuters* Aug. 18).

August 26, 2018:

New "Regulations for Disciplinary Sanctions of the CPC" are published – several paragraphs concern religion

Party members are not allowed to believe in a religion. This is stated, for example, in the 2015 "Regulations for the United Front Work of the Communist Party of China." Related sanctions are included in the new party regulations for disciplinary penalties, which contain 142 articles. Article 62 refers to "party members who believe in a religion." Those who do must be "ideologically educated" and, if they do not conform, they are to be encouraged to leave the party or be removed from the party. Those who participate in seditious activities using religion must be punished with party exclusion. Other paragraphs concern the "organization or use of religious activities to oppose the party's line, course, policies or decisions" (article 61), the organization of or participation in "superstitious activities" (article 63) and violations of laws and religious customs of other countries during stays abroad (article 132). The rules came into force on October 1, 2018. The text of the 中国共产党纪律处分条例 can be found at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0827/c1001-30251784.html>; see: *China heute* 2015, No. 3, p. 156 (Regulations for the United Front Work of the CPC [in German]).

September 2, 2018:

Henan school prohibits parents from "guiding, supporting, allowing or condoning minors to believe in a religion or participate in religious activities" – Similar bans elsewhere

China Aid has published a photograph of a "Letter to the Parents of Teenage Students in Tongzhaipu Town," located in Tanghe County, Nanyang City, Henan Province. The letter is dated September 2, 2018, and points out that according to the Constitution, the Education Law, the Law on the Protection of Minors and the Regulations on Religious Affairs, the principle of separation of education and religion prevails and that religion should not interfere with the education of citizens. The letter further states that it is "an unlawful act to guide, support, allow or condone minors to believe in a religion or



At the bottom of the wall of this Catholic church in Henan, the local party organization has painted the characters “prohibited access to minors under 18 years of age.”
Photo: UCAN.

Puyang City in Henan, dated April 18, 2018, and signed by six departments of the district, including the United Front Department.

There had previously been other reports of pressure on Christian students and parents, especially from Henan, but also from other provinces. Hong Kong-based *Ping Kuo Jih Pao* (*Apple Daily*) reported that, according to one Wenzhou church, the Zhejiang Provincial Education Department has asked all elementary and secondary school students to declare their religious beliefs in a personal data form. The newspaper further reported that over 100 Christian students at Zhejiang Taishun Secondary School No. 7 were forced to declare themselves as non-believers, and at another school Christian students were encouraged to call themselves non-believers so as not to jeopardize their future prospects.

UCAN reports that Catholics in Henan are choosing to meet for worship in their homes instead of in churches so that the children can attend the services; even priests would come to these house meetings. A Catholic woman from the Diocese of Shangqiu in Henan is quoted as saying that the churches have no choice now but to pass on the faith to the children in secret (*Apple Daily* Sept. 16, after *BBC Monitoring*; www.chinaaid.net/2018/09/blog-post.html [Letter of Tongzhaipu]; www.hualongqu.com/news_show.aspx?id=5497 [Letter of Hualong]; UCAN Aug. 11).

An overall prohibition for minors entering religious sites existed for years only in Xinjiang. Since 2017/2018, reports of bans on church and mosque visits and religious instruction for children of other regions are also increasing. For other material on this topic, see also the entries of July 10, 2018, and of July 23, 2018 in the section “Buddhism,” and of July 16, 2018 in the section “Islam.” For more on the bans forbidding church attendance by children and adolescents see *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, pp. 13-14, 18-19, among others.

September 10, 2018:

Draft “Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services” published

Government regulation of “religion on the Internet” had been announced for some time and was outlined in two articles of the 2017 revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs.” Now, on September 10, 2018, the National Religious Affairs Administration submitted a draft of “Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services (Draft for Solicitation of Comments).” The deadline for

participate in religious activities. [...] It is the responsibility and duty of both schools and all parents to teach minors that they cannot believe in a religion. Parents, both believers and non-believers, must teach their children that they are not allowed to enter sites for religious activities, or participate in religious activities, religious training classes, or winter or summer camps. The letter contains a detachable return section which is to be signed by both the head of the family and by the student confirming that they will follow the instructions.

The authenticity of the Tongzhaipu document is supported by another parental letter with the identical text (lacking only the answer section) found on the website of the Party Committee of the Hualong District of

the submission of replies was October 9, 2018. According to article 15 of the draft, “Inciting minors to participate in religious activities” is among the conduct or content that Internet religious information services must not contain. This is the first time that such a prohibition concerning religious activities of minors appears in a nationwide legal document. For other details of the very restrictive draft, see the contribution in *China heute* 2018, No. 3, pp. 146-147 (in German). Text of the 互联网宗教信息服务管理办法 (征求意见稿) at <http://zqyj.chinalaw.gov.cn/readmore?id=2602&listType=2&PageIndex=1>; for an English translation see the website chinalawtranslate.com.

Buddhism

June 26, 2018:

Chinese Buddhist Association calls on its local branches to crack down on commercialization

The official Buddhist umbrella organization has issued a “Notice on Conscious Action against the Unfavorable Impact of Commercialization in the Realm of Buddhism” (关于自觉抵制佛教领域商业化不良影响的通知), addressed to its branches in every province. The 7-point “Notice” refers to a 10-point document titled: “Some Views on the Further Regulation of the Problem of the Commercialization of Buddhism and Daoism” issued by the State Administration of Religious Affairs and other authorities in November of 2017. The newly issued Buddhist “Notice” calls for an end to commercialization in the narrow sense by Buddhist and non-Buddhist actors, such as the subcontracting of monasteries or the public offering of holy mountains, but also criticizes problems related to the “religious style,” such as the construction of magnificent buildings and unauthorized giant statues outdoors or unreasonable “release of living beings.” Instead, it calls for a vow-oriented, simple way of life, greater control of monastic finances, of the clergy, of the ordination processes and of the Buddhist Internet services (text at www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=506&id=39328; German translation of the 2017 document “Some Views ...” can be found in *China heute* 2018, No. 2, pp. 101-104 [in German]).

The curbing of “commercialization” in relation to both Buddhism and Daoism has long been at the forefront of the agenda of party-state religious policies. As Ji Zhe, researcher at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris, said to the *South China Morning Post* (Sept. 21), the so-called commercialization is often led by the local governments, who also make the most of the profit, while “the monks are always taking the blame.”

July 10, 2018:

200 teenaged novices under the age of 16 are being forced to leave the Tibetan Buddhist monastery of Dza Sershul and placed in state schools to continue their education

According to a report by the American broadcaster *Radio Free Asia* (RFA), there has been a report circulating in the Tibetan social networks about the forced removal from monasteries of adolescent novice monks. The Dza Sershul Monastery is located in Sershul (also Dzakucha, Chin. Shiqu) County in Kardze (Chin. Ganzi) Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province and, according to the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), is the largest Gelugpa monastery in the historical Tibetan region of Kham. Other smaller monasteries in the area have also been called on to send novices aged 15 and under to state schools; in case of non-compliance, the monasteries were threatened with closure, according to a

local source quoted by *RFA*. Similar incidents were reported from Qinghai Province. ICT pointed out that in Tibet novices traditionally enter the monastery at a very young age. Since the mid-1990s, there have been attempts by the Communist Party to prevent the entry of young novices, although the degree of enforcement of this measure has been very different from monastery to monastery, ICT said (*rfa.org* July 10; *savetibet.org* July 12).

July 23, 2018:

***Global Times*: Underage students in Tibet may not participate in religious activities during the summer holidays – Separation of education and religion is held up as legal basis**

According to the head of the political education department at Lhasa Middle School, cited by the *Global Times*, the Ministry of Education of the Tibet Autonomous Region has sent a guideline on this topic to elementary and secondary schools, whereupon his own and other schools have sent relevant regulations to students and parents. The students were required to sign and return the forms. Xiong Kunxin from Minzu University in Beijing told the *Global Times* that the legal basis for this measure is the separation of education and religion as spelled out in China's education law. The *Global Times* article pointed out that “northwest China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region also disallows underage students from taking part in religious activities.”

The website *freetibet.org* reported that parents of students from Lhasa's No. 3 Higher Middle School were required to sign a six-point notice, the second point of which was: “During the holidays, school children must be restricted from engaging in religious activities. [...]”

The Tibetan author Song Jieja wrote in *UCAN* that he believes that Chinese religious policy towards Tibetan students has moved from forbidding their presence at major religious festivals to a complete ban on participation in all religious activities (*freetibet.org* July 19; *Global Times* July 23; *South China Morning Post* July 24; *UCAN* Sept. 4).

Aug. 15, 23, 24, 2018:

The Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA), Abbot Xuecheng, has been stripped of all responsibilities in the association following allegations that he had been sexually harassing Buddhist nuns. He is currently under police investigation

Until his recent downfall, Xuecheng 学诚 (born in 1966) has been the highest ranking “official” Buddhist in the PR China. He has been at the head of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) since 2015. He also holds or held political office as a member of the National Political Consultative Conference. He has been abbot of the Longquan Monastery in Beijing, which was considered a model of modern Buddhism due to its tech-savvy reputation, its high proportion of monks with university degrees, as well as its many lay followers and volunteers. Chinese media treated Xuecheng as the very model of modern Buddhism. In recent years, he increasingly dominated the events in the CBA. Among the official representatives of the five religions, Xuecheng also appeared to be the contact man preferred by various state agencies; he was the first of the religious leaders chosen to chair the rotating presidency of the Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations, launched in 2016.

At the end of July 2018, a 95-page “Report on Important Circumstances” circulated in Chinese online media, written by two former monks of Longquan Monastery. They accuse Master Xuecheng of imposing or attempting to engage in sexual activity with Buddhist nuns who were his students. As evidence, the authors document chat histories with some people affected. They also describe maladministration in the Longquan Monastery, such as a “systematic mental control” and inducing female followers to adopt an idealizing worship of the master, as a basis for such incidents. They also accuse Xuecheng of illegal construction and money transactions.

On August 1, the Longquan Monastery dismissed the allegations on its website as false and maliciously damaging Xuecheng’s reputation and demanded an investigation by the authorities. The National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) said on August 2 that it had begun to review the report on CBA Chairman Xuecheng. On August 15, the board of the CBA passed a resolution. In this resolution, the CBA board stated that it accepted Xuecheng’s resignation as chairman, permanent board member and board member of the CBA, and temporarily appointed the vice chairman Yanjue 演觉 [Abbot of the Guangji Temple in Beijing] to head the CBA. The document does not give reasons for the resignation. The NRAA published an investigative report on August 23, saying that the harassing text messages were genuine and a violation of monastic discipline, for which Xuecheng is already being held responsible by the CBA. The NRAA report further said that the public security department of Beijing City has started investigations into the charge of sexual assault. On August 24, the Beijing Buddhist Association removed Xuecheng from his office as abbot of the Longquan Monastery.

The downfall of such a powerful figure in the system of official religious organizations also casts a shadow on the state religious supervision system itself. Ji Zhe, a member of the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris, saw in this situation a flaw in the fundamental power structure of the religious authority of Buddhism in contemporary China. “It is hard for genuinely influential religious figures to rise up when the positions of religious leaders are decided by politics,” said Ji to the *South China Morning Post* (“Report on Important Circumstances” at www.xqdoc.imedao.com/164f59c8b1799c43fe3a7953.pdf; bjethnic.gov.cn Aug. 25; chinabuddhism.com.cn Aug. 15; longquanz.org Aug. 1; sara.gov.cn Aug. 2, 23; *South China Morning Post* Sept. 21).

For more on the Longquan Monastery and the case of its abbot Xuecheng see also the article on the development of contemporary Chinese Buddhism by Carsten Krause (“Auf Spurensuche 1978–2018: Zur Entwicklung des chinesischen Buddhismus in der Gegenwart”) in *China heute* 2018, No. 3, pp. 176-188 (in German).

Islam

July 16, 2018:

***South China Morning Post*: In Linxia, the “Little Mecca of China,” mosque visits and religious instruction for children under 16 are prohibited**

According to the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), authorities in Linxia, in the Autonomous Region of Ningxia of the Hui, have banned children under the age of 16 from attending religious services or religious education, without stating exactly when this prohibition took effect. The number of young people over the age of 16 who are allowed to be taught at a mosque has also been severely limited, the paper said. 51% of the population of Linxia, a city known for its many mosques, belongs to the Muslim Hui nationality. According to the Imam of one of the mosques in Linxia whom the SCMP quoted, around 1,000 boys used to take part in Qur’an classes during the summer and winter holidays but now only 20 officially registered students over the age of 16 will be allowed to study there. Some of those who spoke to the SCMP reporter expressed their concern that Muslim tradition was being forced into oblivion and that it looked as if the “Xinjiang model” might be introduced in Ningxia (SCMP July 16).

August 9–11, 2018:

Planned forced demolition of the Grand Mosque of Weizhou in the Ningxia Autonomous Region is stopped following protests by thousands

Thousands (hundreds, according to some reports) of Hui Muslims protested in front of the Weizhou Grand Mosque for three days after the authorities told the mosque's administrative committee that it would be demolished on August 10 because it had been erected without the necessary building permit. According to the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), the protests were “by far the biggest show of opposition by the Hui” against the government's massive pressure to “Sinicize” all religions.

Built in 2015–2017 with the consent of the local authorities, this large oriental-style new building with numerous domes and minarets replaces an older building of 1979, which in turn had replaced the 600-year-old Chinese-style mosque which had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Weizhou is a Hui town in Tongxin County.

Before the protests began, the faithful are said to have rejected a government proposal to leave the new mosque standing if eight of the nine domes were demolished or replaced by pagodas (different account of events by SCMP and Reuters). The semi-official *Global Times* said that the renovations had exceeded the officially approved measures; it further said that the local Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party has undertaken an investigation of the responsible government cadres for lack of supervision. According to SCMP, on August 11 the authorities announced that plans to tear down the mosque would be suspended for now and that any changes to the construction would take place only with the consent of the community. As a result, the protesters eventually dispersed (AFP according to SCMP Aug. 12; *Global Times* Aug. 11; Reuters Aug. 10; SCMP Aug. 14).

Already in the spring of 2018, it was reported that the authorities in the Ningxia Autonomous Region were removing Arab-style elements, primarily from secular buildings, but also in part from mosques. In April 2017, at a conference on mosque buildings in Xi'an, the problem of “Arabization” in mosque construction had been criticized (see: RCTC 2018, No. 3, pp. 11-12; 2017, No. 3, pp. 9-10).

August 10, 13, 2018:

UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination accuses China of serious discrimination of Muslim ethnic groups in Xinjiang – Chinese delegation denies charge

In its meetings in Geneva, the committee discussed the periodic report of the People's Republic of China. During the questioning of the Chinese delegation, Gay McDougall, Committee Co-Rapporteur for China, expressed concern that the state party had turned the Xinjiang Autonomous Region into a “no rights zone” in the name of combating “religious extremism” and maintaining “social stability.” She cited reports that at least one million people were held in so-called “counter-extremism centers” and another 2 million [sic!] in so-called “re-education camps,” most of them without charge or trial. She further said that the state party was making even everyday expressions of ethno-religious significance to Muslims, such as daily greetings, the possession of certain *halal* products and growing a full beard or wearing a full-face headscarf, into penal offences. McDougall also saw problematic aspects in recent legislation, such as the 2015 National Security Law, the 2016 Counter-Terrorism Law, and the 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs which, by establishing vague definitions of national security, terrorism and extremism, make arbitrary prosecutions and convictions possible.

The Chinese delegation replied that there are no arbitrary detentions or lack of freedom of religious belief in Xinjiang. There are no “re-education centers” or “counter-terrorism training centers” there,

it said. The Chinese delegate pointed out that Xinjiang was a victim of terrorism, so the Autonomous Region had carried out special campaigns to clamp down on violent terrorist activities according to the law and had put on trial and imprisoned a number of criminals involved in severe offenses. Criminals involved in minor offenses were supported in their rehabilitation with assistance and education, their legal rights in vocational education and employment training centers were protected, the delegate said (see report at: www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23452&LangID=E).

In a report about Xinjiang on September 9, Human Rights Watch also spoke of an estimated 1 million people detained without trial in camps in Xinjiang. Even outside the camps, Muslims belonging to the various Turkic peoples are subject to extraordinary restrictions, such as arbitrary restriction of their movement through checkpoints, political indoctrination and high-tech surveillance, the Human Rights Watch report said. According to the report, border crossings have become increasingly difficult and the government has barred Turkic Muslims from contacting people abroad (see report at: www.hrw.org/node/322139).

In September 2018, the German government suspended its deportation to China of Uighurs and members of other Muslim minorities until further notice (br.de Sept. 11). – See also: *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, p. 13.

September 25, 2018:

Sinicization in Ningxia: A river has been renamed because its name was a reminder of the Prophet's third wife Ayisha

The river Aiyi (Aiyihe 艾依河) in Ningxia has been renamed because – as Wang Genming, an expert in Hui studies, told the semi-official *Global Times* – “Aiyi” to some people sounds like the name of Muhammad's third wife, Ayisha (阿以莎). According to a September 17 communiqué, from the Department for Civil Affairs of the Autonomous Region of Ningxia, the river's new name is Diannonghe 典农河, after Diannong, the predecessor of today's city of Yinchuan, founded in 112 B.C. at the time of the Western Han Dynasty. “This conforms to China's policy of Sinicizing religions and adapting them to socialist society as well as fitting with local history and culture,” ethnologist Xiong Kunxin of Minzu University in Beijing told the *Global Times*. The *Global Times* reports that streets, neighborhoods and restaurants throughout Ningxia have been renamed to “better reflect Chinese culture.” 36% of the population of Ningxia belongs to the predominantly Muslim Hui nationality (globaltimes.cn Sept. 26; nxnews.net Sept. 25 [the official communiqué is dated Sept. 17, but was only posted online on Sept. 25]; sueddeutsche.de Oct. 1).

Christianity in General

Beginning of July, 2018:

Authorities in Henan call on parishes in the province to collect and report data on their parishioners – Concern that low-income subsidies might be cancelled

A Catholic priest from the official part of Luoyang Diocese told *UCAN* that on July 1 a local government official had handed him a notice from municipal authorities. The notice, entitled “Urgent Notice of the Special Project Office,” requested that statistics on the number of believers of each religious site, especially those from poor families, along with further information on their living conditions be documented and reported to the higher authorities by July 4. According to the “Urgent Notice,”

the authorities would also check whether minors visit the sites; whether the official certificates of the religious personnel are hung up; whether the national flag is hoisted and the national anthem is sung; the “Special Project Office” would carry out both announced and unannounced inspections. The priest told *UCAN* he was not going to provide the information, and he feared that the authorities had a hidden agenda and that they intend to use the information obtained in order to cancel the low-income subsidies of poor Catholics. A priest from Anyang Diocese in Henan told *UCAN* that he had received a similar letter.

China Aid reported that some village committees in Henan had forced old people to sign a statement declaring that they no longer believed in Christianity, threatening that if they did not sign, they would be deprived of their subsistence level allowance / retirement pensions. As early as last April, there were reports that a neighborhood committee in Henan had ordered the faithful of all five religions to register their religious affiliation with the agency. The registration of ordinary believers has thus far not been the practice in the People’s Republic of China (*AsiaNews* July 11; *chinaaid.net* Sept. 1; *china.ucanews.com* July 5; *UCAN* July 6; see: *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, p. 6).

July 4, 2018:

***The Diplomat*: China’s work on the New Silk Road also exports “missionaries and Bibles”**

In an article in *The Diplomat*, Jeremy Luedi wrote on July 4 about the merging of China’s “Silk Road Initiative” and missionary activities for Chinese migrant workers by both Chinese and local churches of the respective countries. The world’s largest Bible printing company that also prints for export is in Nanjing. However, more and more of the exported Bibles land in Chinese hands, because the Chinese who work abroad often live in an environment that is characterized by relative freedom of religion. Thus, more and more of them convert to local religions under the influence of religious citizens of the respective host countries. Luedi quotes a Taiwanese pastor who said in 2017 that China could become the largest exporter of Christianity. As an example, he said that three quarters of all Bibles used in Kenya were printed in Mainland China. Chinese believers are accustomed to living their faith covertly, and so they also become covert missionaries within the flood of Chinese companies entering other countries. They evangelize both the local population and Chinese migrant workers. African local churches also let their pastors learn Chinese in order to work later on among the Chinese workers. On the other hand, according to Luedi, Christian missionaries from Taiwan or Hong Kong are viewed with suspicion by the Chinese workers abroad, who see possible connections between religious and political content. Thus, the African churches, free of such baggage, seemingly have greater success in proselytizing. Other Chinese Protestant groups, such as “Back to Jerusalem,” see the Silk Road Initiative as a chance to proselytize the neighboring countries and set high goals. Danny Lee, the UK director of “Back to Jerusalem,” is quoted as saying that they want to see at least 100,000 Chinese missionaries evangelize along the new Silk Road in the future (*The Diplomat* July 4).

Summer / Fall 2018:

Henan Province: Ongoing repression of Christian churches, especially house churches – Local government document from Hebei against “underground Catholic forces”

The pressure on Christian communities in Henan province, which began in February 2018 and which has intensified drastically since April 2018, has continued throughout the summer and autumn. Ac-

According to reports from China Aid, there were massive raids on house churches in numerous places in Henan in early September. In such raids, the furnishings of the churches were destroyed or confiscated and in some cases believers who resisted have been arrested or injured. On September 3, China Aid reported that crosses have been demolished in unprecedented numbers for Henan, such as in Zhengzhou, Nanyang and Yuzhou; in addition, eight house churches were closed in the Jinshui District of Zhengzhou alone. The prohibitions and controls regarding the church attendance of minors were also continued. According to an often quoted opinion (e.g. by *AFP* on September 15), the measures were directed primarily against the strong growth of Protestant congregations and house churches, however, Catholics were also affected. In Henan Province, a majority of Catholics belong to the underground Church.

There were also reports from other provinces about official action against house churches in places such as Liaoning and Jiangsu. In Langfang, Hebei Province, according to China Aid, pressure has been exerted on house owners who “illegally” rented their premises to unregistered communities.

On September 21, ChinaAid also published the photo of a document titled “Notice on Regulating Catholic Underground Forces According to the Law,” signed by the government of the Meihua Town in Gaocheng District, Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province. The document calls for the realization of the “Three There Are Nots,” namely, that in future there are no believers controlled by Catholic underground forces, no churches controlled by Catholic underground forces, and no “illegal activities” carried out by Catholic underground forces. Four phone numbers are listed which can be called to give tip-offs (*AFP* according to *South China Morning Post* 9/15; chinaaid.org July 18, Aug. 25, Sept. 3, 4, 7, 9, 26; chinaaid.net Sept. 1, 21; photo of the Meihua document at: www.chinaaid.net/2018/09/blog-post_77.html). For the situation in Henan see also: *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, pp. 6, 13-15, 18-21.

From September 13, 2018:

Myanmar – The United Wa State Army (UWSA) is working against “illegal” religious activities in the “Wa State”

ShanNews, a local news portal from Shan state in eastern Myanmar, reported on September 25 that the United Wa State Army (UWSA) has been demolishing unauthorized churches, arresting pastors and closing religious schools since September 13. The United Wa State Party (UWSP) is the government in the so-called “Wa State,” an autonomous sub-region in the east of Shan in Myanmar, which lies on the Chinese border. The UWSA is the military arm of the UWSP and is, in fact, acting as the executive branch of government in the Wa state. On September 6, the UWSA issued a six-item statement to its officers and Wa State administration. Since September 13, as a consequence of this statement, UWSA units began interrogating and sometimes expelling foreign missionaries and religious. *UCAN* quotes a Catholic priest as saying that this mainly concerns Baptist churches that are said to have quickly and without official approval set up churches and schools. The current situation seems very confusing. Interesting here, however, is that this order by the UWSA has been issued at more or less the same time as the conviction of John Cao for organizing illegal border crossings. Cao, an ethnic Chinese pastor and permanent U.S. resident, is a well-known activist of the Chinese house church movement and, according to *ShanNews* in Myanmar, has been involved in building schools and delivering relief supplies to the poor. However, the UWSP has historical ties with the Communists in China, and it appears that the Chinese government’s crackdown on non-official religious actors in the PRC is spreading across the border into Myanmar. According to Bertil Lintner of *Asia Times*, the Chinese government wants to assure her quasi-monopoly in influencing the Wa State by ensuring that the UWSA permits foreign religious activities only to a very limited extent (*AsiaNews* Sept. 18, 28; *Asia Times* Sept. 17; *ShanNews* Sept. 25; *UCAN* Sept. 21, 24).

Protestantism

July 23, 2018:

Beijing house churches publish declaration

On July 23, a group of 34 Beijing house churches sent a joint open letter to the Chinese government expressing their dissatisfaction with the government's actions and declaring the legitimacy of their existence and activities, citing the Constitution. They report increasing pressure and restrictions on Christian activities in various provinces of China since the "Regulations on Religious Affairs" came into effect on February 1, 2018. They support their argument citing Article 33, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution, in which the protection of personal rights is laid out, and with Article 36, which protects freedom of belief (www.chinaaid.net/2018/07/30.html).

Isabel Friemann

August 20, 2018:

Death of Fu Xianwei, chairman of the Patriotic Three-Self Movement in China

Elder Fu (傅先偉長老) succumbed to cancer at the age of 74. His death overtook him as he was tending to ongoing business. He was the Chairperson of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Board Chairperson of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. With his death, the country lost the highest political representative of Protestant Christianity in China. On September 6, a funeral service was held for him at the Mu'en Church in Shanghai, attended by guests from home and abroad. The highest Chinese politicians laid wreaths. Fu Xianwei was born into a Christian family in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, in February 1944. Since 1988, he has worked for the Shanghai Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement. In 1996, he was ordained an elder in the Mu'en Church, going on to gain an M.A. at the national theological seminary in Nanjing. In 2008, he was named seventh secretary general of the Three-Self-Movement, and was serving his second term at the time of his death. Fu was also a member of the Standing Committee of the 11th, 12th and 13th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (ccctspm.org Sept. 7; chinachristiandaily.com Sept. 7; ubscp.org Aug. 21).

Isabel Friemann

August 30 / September 1, 2018:

Joint house church declaration

On August 30, the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan released a joint open statement co-signed by various house churches. The text is reminiscent in its wording and character of the confession of the Barmen Theological Declaration. By September 6, leaders of 279 house churches from across China had added their signatures to this confession. In their confession they criticize the growing repression of house churches, invoke God as their sole Lord and Lord of the world, demand a clear separation between church and state and announce that they want under no circumstances to join the government-affiliated Three-Self-Movement, the government's umbrella organization of the Protestant Christians in China (see the text of the declaration at: www.facebook.com/earlyraincovenantchurch/posts/a-joint-statement-by-pastors-a-declaration-for-the-sake-of-the-christian-faith-4t/281309142595959/).

Isabel Friemann

September 4–7, 2018:

Secretary General of the Chinese YMCA Association at CHINA TIME 2018 in Hamburg

Dr. Wu Jianrong 吴建荣, Secretary-General of the National YMCA Association in China, has attended the largest European China event as a guest of the Center for Mission and Ecumenism of the Northern Protestant Church in Hamburg. The event, called “CHINA TIME,” takes place every two years over a three week period in the Hanseatic city. Closer cooperation between church institutions could become part of the city partnership between Shanghai and Hamburg, created in 1986 with the signing of a mutual memorandum. In addition to other activities, there were workshops and discussions in the “Rauhes Haus,” a meeting with representatives of the faculty of theology and a visit to the Seaman’s Mission. During the course of his lecture, Dr. Wu outlined the religious situation in China, the role of the YMCA and the work of the Shanghai Association with its 230 full-time employees and 500 volunteers. He emphasized in particular the importance of integrating children and adolescents of Chinese migrant workers in the cities and gave examples of related projects of the YMCA in Shanghai.

Isabel Friemann

September 9, 2018:

Government shuts down Zion Church in Beijing

On Sunday, September 9, security forces closed down the final service of the Zion house church in Beijing. The Chaoyang City Civil Affairs Bureau charged that the church had held “unauthorized rallies” and that it had “confiscated illegal promotional material.” The church, founded in 2007 by Pastor Dr. Jin Mingri (Ezra Jin), was relatively unmolested until the spring of this year. Up to 1,500 people came to church services, including many from Beijing’s upper middle class. In April, the Zion Church refused government orders to install a surveillance camera system in their worship space, provoking a prompt government shut off of the church’s electricity and water. The Zion Church also refused to register with the official umbrella organizations of the Chinese Protestants, the Chinese Christian Council and the Three-Self Movement. Six smaller offshoots of the church that had opened in various districts of Beijing have also been closed in the past few months (*AsiaNews* Sept. 10; and others).

Isabel Friemann

September 16, 2018:

Amity Foundation elects new Secretary General

On September 16, Ms. Ling Chunxiang was elected Secretary-General at the close of the fifth meeting of the third board of the Amity Foundation. As her two deputies, the Board of at least 20 Directors chose Gu Chuanyong, representing the Jiangsu Province Bureau of Religious Affairs, and Pastor Zhang Keyun 张克运, Chairman of the Jiangsu Three-Self Movement. Ms. Ling began working in the rural development department at Amity upon completion of her MA in the summer of 1999. She led the administration before being appointed in December of 2016 as one of five deputies of the Secretary General. Qiu Zhonghui 丘仲辉 is retiring after 15 years as the head of the foundation. Under his leadership, the Amity Foundation has multiplied its donations from domestic sources by making use of crowdfunding and digital media. For this achievement, he received the highest national award as an AAAAA NGO. He also further internationalized Amity by opening branch offices of the foundation in Addis Ababa (2015) and Geneva (2016). The main areas of Amity’s interaction with the public in 2018

include a solidarity campaign in support of people affected by AIDS, as well as a campaign of protection and legal assistance to victims of domestic violence. From August 26 to September 7, Amity, in cooperation with the National Theological Seminary in Nanjing, held a Diaconal Summer Academy for Chinese Pastors (www.amity.org.cn/index.php?m=Home&c=News&a=view&id=499).

Isabel Friemann

Catholic Church

June 11, 2018:

Priest from Hebei Province charged with holding unauthorized pilgrimage and threatened with loss of priestly status

In a June 11 letter to the Diocese of Shijiazhuang and the Patriotic Association of Shijiazhuang, the Bureau for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Chang'an in Hebei Province, "suggested" that Father Sun Linghui, a member of the official Church in Shijiazhuang, be stripped of his clergy status. Fr. Sun is accused of having led a group of pilgrims to Shanxi Province on May 24 this year. This, the letter said, has had a very bad impact on society. Among other things, the letter makes reference to §73 of the "Regulations on Religious Affairs," which states that the authorities may propose that religious organizations "temporarily stop them from presiding over religious affairs activities or revoke their status as religious professionals" for having committed infractions such as "organizing, or presiding over unapproved religious activities held outside of religious activity sites." According to the letter, the diocese and the Patriotic Association are expected to rescind Fr. Sun's clergy status within 30 days. Another priest is to replace Fr. Sun in his parish. In addition, the Church should strengthen its control over its clerics in order to consolidate harmony in religious circles. The letter also mentioned that Father Sun violated the principle of "religious Sinicization."

According to *UCAN*, this incident appears to be the first such case to arise since the new regulations came into force nationwide on February 1. An unnamed source, however, had also stated that there had been tensions within the community of Fr. Sun and that he had been reported to the authorities by one of his parishioners (a photo of the document can be viewed at: www.tianzhujiao.store/china/2018-07-09/64499.html; *UCAN* July 11).

July 4, 2018:

UCAN reports temporary detention of underground priest from Yongnian, Hebei Province, for contact with a Japanese journalist

Citing a report from the online service *Bitter Winter* in Turin on July 4, 2018, *UCAN* reported that on April 9, 55-year-old Fr. Yan Lixin was arrested and held until April 28 in a guest house. Fr. Yan had been invited to Hong Kong for a course. Before leaving, he made an appointment on his mobile phone to be interviewed by a Japanese journalist. Two days before his departure, using the data from his cellphone network, the police traced Fr. Yan to the house of some believers and arrested him. The authorities tried, without success, to force him to join the Patriotic Association, *UCAN* wrote. He was also forbidden to travel to Hong Kong or to reestablish contact with the journalist.

In the Diocese of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, underground Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin announced a day of fasting and a Holy Mass to be celebrated on the 29th of each month for the safety of Father Lu Danhua. Fr. Lu, the only priest in the neighboring Lishui Diocese, which is co-administered by the Diocese of Wenzhou, was abducted from his home in Qingtian on December 29, 2017, by religious

officials and taken to an unknown location. Officials later said that Fr. Lu had been sent to Wenzhou to study the new religious regulations and that he would return after legal legislation. Bishop Shao ordained him priest on December 14, 2016 (*UCAN* July 4; Aug. 31).

July 17 / August 13, 2018:

Two more churches in Shandong forcibly torn down



Above: Debris of the church in Qianwang, Shandong, which was destroyed on August 13, 2018.

Below: Catholics demonstrate in the ruins of the Qianwang Church with cross flags and a banner calling for an investigation of the demolition.

Photos: UCAN.



In the Diocese of Jinan, Shandong Province, three legally registered church buildings have recently been torn down by the local authorities. Following the demolition of the Shilihe Church earlier this year, the razing of the Liangwang Church followed on July 17, and the Qianwang Church on August 13, both located in Licheng District, on the outskirts of the Jinan Provincial Capital. All three churches were officially registered with the religious authorities and were used normally. The churches ostensibly needed to give way to other urban planning projects, and the church members had been promised parcels of land on which they would be able to rebuild. Without honoring this promise, however, the authorities forcibly destroyed the churches without any warning.

The church of Liangwang dates from 1920 and was rebuilt in 2006. 70 people with bulldozers and pickaxes were involved in razing the church. In Qianwang more than 100 “thugs” were reported to have taken part in the demolition. The church of Qianwang dates from 1750, was rebuilt after being destroyed by a flood in 1938. After the Cultural Revolution in 1987 it was once again rededicated to normal worship. After the destruction, two priests,

a nun and nearly 70 parishioners demonstrated in front of the local government offices. The priests are said to have been promised by officials in Licheng to relocate the Liangwang and Qianwang churches, but that this might take “a long time.” The next church scheduled for demolition is said to be the church of Wangcun, Huashan, not far from the city of Jinan.

Ying Fuk-tsang from the School of Divinity of the Chinese University of Hong Kong told *UCAN* that the crackdown on Catholic and Protestant communities in China in recent time is the result of two years of preparations at the provincial, city and county levels by the increasingly powerful United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party (*AsiaNews* July 18; Aug. 16; *UCAN* Aug. 3, 18).

July 28, 2018:

Reburial of the mortal remains of seven Immaculate Heart of Mary Missionaries (CICM) in Inner Mongolia

UCAN has reported on the reburial of the remains of seven Missionaries of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), whose bodies were transferred to the Sansenggong Church in Bameng Diocese, Inner Mongolia, on July 28. There they were then placed in vaults in the renovated crypt of the church.

In the Bameng Diocese during the Cultural Revolution, the remains of 16 CICM missionaries were exhumed from their graves by Red Guards, taken to the desert and scattered there. In 1992 and 1993, the remains of nine of these missionaries were re-discovered and two of them, honored as martyrs, were placed in burial vaults in the crypt of the Xiayingzi Church, Bameng Diocese. Bishop Matthias Du Jiang of Bameng said in his homily during the reburial that the remains of the seven other missionaries still missing had been recovered later and now in repayment for “their selfless dedication and hard work,” they would finally find their last resting place in a Catholic church. He said that he hopes that the presence of these missionaries will strengthen the community of the faithful so that they, like the missionaries, will stand firm in their faith (*UCAN* Aug. 29).

July 31, 2018:

UCAN publishes translation of the “Five-Year Work Plan on Carrying Forward the Adherence to the Direction Towards Sinicization of Our Country’s Catholicism (2018–2022)” – Chinese dioceses are to create their own plans

The five-year plan was adopted at the May 16–17, 2018 joint assembly of the leaders of the Chinese Patriotic Association and the official Bishops’ Conference (PA-BiCo). The text was not made public at that time. According to *UCAN*, the PA-BiCo sent the document to all Chinese dioceses in June, calling for them to present their own five-year plans for Sinicization by the end of August.

The approximately 6,500 character long text comprises 9 chapters. Chapter 3 entitled “Deepening the political, legal and social identity of the Catholic Church in China” contains the item “Insist on the principle of independence, autonomy and self-government of the Church.” Chapter 4 “Promote the integration of Catholicism with distinguished Chinese culture” demands, among other things, the need for a new historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church. Chapter 5 deals with the construction of “theological thinking with characteristics of the Chinese Church.” Chapter 6 is on the creation of a “Church organization and management model with Chinese characteristics,” which, among other things, means an “organic union” of hierarchy and democratic management. Other chapters deal with the Sinicization of liturgy, ecclesiastical architecture, art and music. The document is very political in style. The name “Xi Jinping” appears in the text just as often as the word “gospel,” i.e., five times.

The PA-BiCo did not publish the text of the Five-Year Plan until October 8, 2018, when it was posted on their newly redesigned joint website in early October. There are also links to two databases on this site – one for churches, provided with some material, and one, still empty, intended for the clergy.

As early as March of 2018, the Protestant governing bodies published an “Outline of the Five-Year Work Plan on Carrying Forward the Sinicization of Protestant Christianity in China.” The draft of a five-year plan for the Sinicization of Islam was adopted by the Islamic bodies at the end of December 2017 (The text of the document: 推进我国天主教坚持中国化方向五年工作规划 [2018–2022] can be found at: www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/18100224-1.htm; English translation at: www.ucanews.com/news/

sinicization-of-china-church-the-plan-in-full/82931; chinaislam.net.cn Dec. 21, 2017; *UCAN* July 20, 23). – See: *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, pp. 16, 21.

August 20, 2018:

1,200 musicians take to their drums at the “Third Heavenly Sound Cup” of the Diocese of Taiyuan for Catholic percussion ensembles from all over China



Even the pastor gets to try a drum. Enthusiastic drummers at the 3rd Heavenly Sound competition in Honggou in the Diocese of Taiyuan.
Photo: chinacatholic.org.

A total of 27 gong (or cymbal) and drum groups with 1,200 members from various dioceses and provinces of China were on hand for the “Heavenly Sound” competition held in the square in front of the Honggou Parish Church, north of Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. Early in the morning, the music groups marched in, filling the heavens with their joint thunder – as the report on the *Xinde (Faith)* website puts it. A solemn high Mass in the church, presided over by Taiyuan’s Bishop Meng Ningyou, was followed by the ceremonial opening of the competition. Guests of honor included the Bishop and 20 priests of various dioceses, as well as a number of specialists in traditional Chinese percussion

music, such as Chairman of the Association of Gong and Drum Artists of Shanxi Province and the Director of the Taiyuan Folklore Museum, Chang Feng, who chaired the jury. In their performances, the colorfully costumed groups presented not only music, but also elaborate choreography (see photos on the website).

The report highlights the participation of many children between the ages of 6 and 13 who “made visible the vitality of the Church.” Jury chairman Chang Feng praised the increase in the number of children and youth groups at this year’s “Heavenly Sound” competition as a hopeful sign for the handing on of this folk tradition.

According to the report, the Taiyuan Gong and Drum Art has been recognized by the State Council since 2008 as an “intangible cultural heritage.” There is a Catholic “Heavenly Sound Association for Gong and Drum Art” (Tianyin luogu yishu xiehui 天音锣鼓艺术协会), a nationwide organization with 25 branch organizations, 40 music groups and 2,000 members. The aim of the Heavenly Sound Association is, “through the gong and drum art, to glorify God, to promote the cultural development of the Church and also to pass on the traditional culture of the Chinese nation.” According to *Xinde’s* report, the vice-chairman of the Association is a candidate for Baptism who resigned his position as vice-chairman of the Province’s Gong and Drum Association in order to devote himself fully to the activities of the Church.

Quotes from Church people cited in the report unanimously state that involvement in the drum and cymbal groups gives believers cohesion and makes them more active. Non-Catholics also join the groups and sometimes, through them, find their way into the Church. The music groups create a solemn atmosphere in the liturgy and, last but not least, they promote a spirit of solidarity and increase young people’s faith in the Church (www.chinacatholic.org/News/index/id/43285.html Aug. 21).

On the long tradition of folk wind and percussion ensembles in the Catholic Church cf. Ma Li’s article “Wenn es uns gefällt, gefällt es auch Gott. Kirchenmusik im heutigen China zwischen europäischer

und chinesischer Tradition” (“If we like it, God likes it too.” Church music in today’s China between European and Chinese tradition), in: *China heute* 2012, No. 3, pp. 166-174 (in German).

August 22, 2018:

Catholic church built in the style of a Mongolian yurt consecrated in Inner Mongolia



The “Yurt Church” in Salaqi shortly after its completion. Construction is still going on in the plaza before the church. Photo: chinacatholic.org.

According to the report on *Xinde’s* website, the “oversized yurt resembles a mother of the Grasslands – the Blessed Mother – who sits upright under blue skies and white clouds, with her children in her arms.” The floorplan of the low, white building is that of a quarter-circle. It has a sky blue and white patterned, low-arched dome roof topped by a blue lantern with a cross. On the roof, above a ribbon of traditional Mongolian ornaments, one can make out the Chinese characters which spell out “Mother of God of Mongolia, pray for us!”

This new church in Salaqi is consecrated to Mary, Mother of Mongolia. The church has seating for 1,000 persons. The solemn consecration included

representatives of various dioceses of Inner Mongolia: Bishop Meng Qinglu of Hohhot was the main celebrant with Bishop Du Jiang of Bameng and the Vicar General of the Diocese of Jining concelebrating. Priests and music groups from a number of other parishes also took part.

Salaqi Town is located in the Tumed Right Banner which is administrated by the industrial City of Baotou in Inner Mongolia. According to the *Guide to the Catholic Church in China 2014*, Salaqi belongs to the Diocese of Baotou, which currently has no bishop. Despite the Mongolian architecture of the church, the Catholics of Salaqi are most likely overwhelmingly Han Chinese. According to the 2000 census, 94% of the residents of the Baotou-administered area are Han and just under 3% are Mongols (chinacatholic.org Aug. 23; Sept. 13; *Xindebao* Aug. 20; Sept.10).

Sino-Vatican Relations

September 18, 2018:

A Vatican correspondent’s take on the content of the forthcoming Sino-Vatican agreement

The agreement will be signed “sometime before the end of September,” wrote Gerard O’Connell in *America. The Jesuit Review*, citing a Vatican source. O’Connell said that, according to “informed sources,” the Holy See and Beijing had agreed on a process for the nomination of bishops, namely, that candidates would be elected at the diocesan level through the “democratic election” system introduced by the Chinese authorities, whereby “the priests of the diocese, together with representatives of women religious and laypeople, vote from among the candidates presented by the authorities that supervise church affairs. The results of these elections will be sent to the Beijing authorities that oversee the church in China, including the bishops’ conference, which will examine them and then submit a name to the Holy See through diplomatic channels. The Holy See will have some months to carry out its own

investigation of the candidate and, based on this work, the pope will either approve or exercise his veto. The Holy See will then communicate his decision to Beijing” – thus O’Connell. Similar variants of the presumed compromise procedure had already been “leaked” earlier.

Fr. Bernardo Cervellera, PIME, director of *AsiaNews*, wrote on September 24 that “until now there was talk of a temporary power of veto,” namely that “the Pope would be able to give the reasons for his refusal within three months, but if the government found the papal motivations inconsistent, it would continue with the appointment and the ordination of the chosen candidate” (*America* Sept. 18; *AsiaNews* Sept. 24).

Since the text of the agreement was not disclosed after the signature, it remains unclear what the agreed procedure would actually look like.

September 22, 2018:

Holy See and People’s Republic of China sign a “Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops” (关于主教任命的临时性协议)

The Holy See and China announced the signing of the agreement on the same day. At a meeting of delegations from both sides in Beijing, the respective “deputy foreign ministers” – the Holy See’s Undersecretary for the Relations with the States, Monsignor Antoine Camilleri, and the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Wang Chao – signed the document.

The very brief message on the website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry does not use the term “Holy See,” but speaks rather of an agreement with the “Vatican.” It explains that both sides will continue working to “promote the improvement of mutual relations.”

The communiqué of the Holy See says that the agreement “foresees the possibility of periodic reviews of its application” and speaks of “the shared hope” that it would “contribute positively to the life of the Catholic Church in China, to the common good of the Chinese people and to peace in the world” (see text of the “Communiqué concerning the signing of a Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops” at: <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/22/180922d.html>).

The content of the agreement concerning which procedure has been agreed upon for future bishop appointments was not and probably will not be announced in the foreseeable future; there is only “leaked” evidence (see, for example, the entry of September 18, 2018, in this section). Negotiations between the Holy See and the Chinese government about episcopal appointments have been going on since June of 2014. Back in 1958, under pressure from the Communist government in China, Catholic bishops were for the first time consecrated without a papal mandate.

September 22, 2018:

The Press Office of the Holy See announces papal recognition granted to the seven (eight) illegitimate Chinese bishops and the erection by the Pope of the Diocese of Chengde

By that date, of the 64 bishops of the official Church in China, seven were not recognized by the Pope and three of them were even explicitly excommunicated. As the Press Office announced on September 22, Pope Francis “has decided to readmit to full ecclesial communion” these seven bishops, and one other posthumously. Those are the Bishops Joseph Guo Jincai, Joseph Huang Bingzhang, Paul Lei

Shiyin, Joseph Liu Xinhong, Joseph Ma Yinglin, Joseph Yue Fusheng, Vincent Zhan Silu, as well as Bishop Anton Tu Shihua, who died in 2017. The statement leaves open whether they (all) have been installed as diocesan bishops. At the same time, in a separate statement, the erection of the Diocese of Chengde was announced (see texts of the two documents at <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/22/180922g.html> and <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/22/180922h.html>).

Chengde Diocese was formally established by the Chinese government in 2010, while Rome continues to follow the original diocesan structure as it existed in 1951. The now legitimized Bishop Guo Jincai had been consecrated bishop of Chengde in November of 2010 without a papal mandate. All eight bishops are said to have asked the pope in writing for forgiveness.

For more background information, reactions and comments in connection with the provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops and the papal recognition of the illegitimate bishops see *China heute* 2018, No. 3, pp. 140-141, 144-146 (in German).

September 22, 2018:

Statement by Cardinal Secretary of State Parolin on the provisional agreement: The goal is pastoral

Cardinal Parolin, head of the Vatican Secretariat of State responsible for negotiating with China, said that the objective of the agreement was pastoral and that the Holy See intends “to create the condition, or help to create the condition, of a greater freedom, autonomy and organization, in order that the Catholic Church can dedicate itself to the mission of announcing the Gospel.” Parolin emphasized that “today [...] for the first time all the Bishops in China are in communion with the Bishop of Rome, with the Successor of Peter.” He spoke of the need to have good pastors recognized by both the Pope as well as by legitimate civil authorities. The Catholic community in China is called by the Pope to concrete gestures of reconciliation, according to Parolin (see text and video of the statement at: <https://zenit.org/articles/cardinal-parolin-comments-on-holy-see-republic-of-china-agreement/>).

The 36 bishops of the “underground Church” recognized by the Pope, but not the Chinese state, are not mentioned in any of the announcements regarding the preliminary agreement and recognition of the illegitimate bishops.

September 23, 2018:

Statement on the provisional agreement by a press spokesman for the official Chinese Catholic governing bodies

An unnamed press spokesman for the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the (official) Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference declared that both bodies sincerely endorsed the provisional agreement between the “two states, China and the Vatican.” In the next paragraph, however, the statement reaffirms that the Chinese Catholic Church “will abide by the principles of independence, autonomy and self-government,” by Sinicization and adaptation to socialist society. The text of the statement appeared on the website of both bodies (see: www.chinacatholic.cn/html/report/18091449-1.htm).

September 25, 2018:

On the return flight from Tallinn Pope Francis comments on the provisional agreement and the recognition of the bishops – “I am responsible”

During the press conference on the return flight from his pastoral trip to the Baltic, the Pope paid tribute to his colleagues in the negotiations with China (he named Archbishop Celli, Prelate Rota Graziosi and Cardinal Secretary of State Parolin by name). He emphasized, however, that he himself was responsible for the recognition of the bishops and for the conclusion of the agreement with China. As for the episcopal nominations, he said, “it is a dialogue about potential candidates. [...] But the appointment is by Rome; the appointment is by the Pope. This is clear.” The Pope also said that he thinks of the Catholics who have suffered: “It is true,” he said, “they will suffer. There is always suffering with an agreement” (see English version of the press conference at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/september/documents/papa-francesco_20180925_voloritorno-estonia.html).

September 26, 2018:

Message of Pope Francis to Catholics of China and to the Universal Church

For the first time since the 2007 letter of Pope Benedict XVI, a Pope once again addresses himself directly to the Catholic Church in China. The occasion for the letter is the provisional agreement and the papal recognition of the previously illegitimate bishops. The Pope is aware that they have created “a certain confusion and prompted different reactions in the hearts of many,” ranging from doubt, perplexity, and the painful questioning of the “value of their sufferings endured out of fidelity to the Successor of Peter” all the way to “positive expectations.” In 11 points, the pope explains various objectives and aspects related to the agreement. He calls on the Catholic community in China to overcome divisions (6), and addresses himself in particular to the Catholic youth in China (8), to the universal Church (9) and to the leaders of the People’s Republic of China. (10) The Pope concluded his remarks with a prayer for the Church in China (see text of the Pope’s message at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180926_messaggio-cattolici-cinesi.html). For remarks on Pope Francis’ message, see *China heute* 2018, No. 3, pp. 142-144 (in German).

From October 3, 2018:

For the first time, two bishops from Mainland China take part in the assembly of the World Synod of Bishops

Bishop Guo Jincai of Chengde and Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yan’an travelled to Rome to participate in the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of Catholic Bishops on the subject of youth (October 3–28). In his homily at the opening Mass, Pope Francis welcomed the two bishops from Mainland China, saying that “the communion of the entire Episcopate with the Successor of Peter is yet more visible thanks to their presence.” Aside from the two bishops who were participating short-term [and returned to China on October 15, before the end of the Synod], one Sister was also invited to the Assembly as an auditor. She is Sr. Teresina Cheng Chaoying of the Sisters of the Mother of God in Daming (Hebei Province), currently studying in Rome.

Bishop Guo is one of the seven bishops regularized by the Pope on September 22 and is general secretary of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference (BiCo). Bishop Yang Xiaoting, consecrated in 2010 with both papal and governmental approval, also has important functions in the official governing bodies of the Chinese Church: He is one of the vice-chairmen of the BiCo and leads its Commission for Theological Research. He studied in Italy and the USA.

Wang Zuo'an, Deputy Minister of the United Front Department of the Chinese Communist Party, announced on September 26 at a gathering of representatives of the Patriotic Association and the BiCo that the two bishops had received permission to participate in the Synod. On October 1, Cardinal Baldisseri, general secretary of the Synod, confirmed that the two Chinese bishops "were invited by the Pope, as a result of the [Sino-Vatican] agreement, and the invitation was accepted by the other side."

Beijing's permission to let the two bishops travel to the synod would seem to "indicate a positive change in Beijing's policy," wrote Fr. Bernardo Cervellera, PIME, director of *AsiaNews*. Until now, China has never allowed Chinese bishops to take part in the synods: in 1998, Pope John Paul II had invited the two Bishops Duan Yinming and Xu Zhixuan (both from the Diocese of Wanxian) to the Synod on Asia. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVII invited three bishops who were also acknowledged by the government, the Bishops Li Du'an of Xi'an, Lucas Ly of Fengxiang and Jin Luxian (Shanghai), and one Underground bishop, Bishop Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar to the plenary assembly of the Synod of Bishops. None of those invited was allowed to travel to Rome. The Synod of Bishops as a permanent institution was created in 1965 by Pope Paul VI (*America* Oct. 1; *AsiaNews* Sept. 27, Oct. 1, 12; *Vatican Insider* Sept. 26; *vatican.va* Oct. 3; www.synod2018.va). – For the Asian Synod of 1998 see: *China heute* 1998, No. 2-3, pp. 49-53, for the general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2005 see: *ibid.* 2005, No. 4-5, pp. 130-131, No. 6, pp. 219-220 (in German).

Hong Kong

June 24, 2018:

Study published on sexual assault in Hong Kong Protestant churches

In the online study conducted by the Hong Kong Christian Council between August 2017 and April of 2018, 55 responses were received from churchgoers. It was the first such investigation within the Protestant churches of Hong Kong. 35 of the respondents identified themselves as victims of sexual misconduct, 20 others spoke of friends or other church members who had been similarly affected. In one out of five cases rape or attempted rape was mentioned. In 53 cases the accused was a man, in 48 the victim was a woman. Half of them were said to involve assaults by pastors or other church leaders. At a media conference on June 24 (see *South China Morning Post*), Jessica Tso Hiu-tung, assistant executive secretary of the Christian Council and the person responsible for the study, said that the study shows that sexual violence in churches continues. Many victims never lodge an accusation because of the power imbalance between accuser and accused. In addition, the churches also tend to cover up everything, which damages the image of the church. In cases of accusations against pastors enjoying a high reputation in their congregations, there was a tendency not to believe the reports of the victims. Tso urged the churches to take action against sexual assault and to train pastors, church leaders and members accordingly. According to *UCAN*, Linda Wong Sau-yung, executive director of RainLily, an advocacy and support group for victims of sexual violence, said at the press conference, that in-church investigations were inadequate. The Protestant churches should collaborate in setting up a fully independent investigation team.

Two months before the study was published, Pastor Ngai Lap-yin of the Brotherly Love Swatow Baptist Church at Tsz Wan Shan was dismissed for sexual offenses against women in his community (*South China Morning Post* June 24, *UCAN* June 29).

August 8-12, 2018:

Big Taizé youth gathering in Hong Kong

Taizé International Meeting of Young Adults with the theme of “Pilgrimage of Trust and Reconciliation” was attended by some 2,700 young people from 40 countries, mostly from Asia but also by young people from other continents. Of the youth who took part, a considerable number arrived from Mainland China. It was the first time that such a meeting had taken place in Hong Kong. In addition to ecumenical prayer services in the Catholic and Anglican cathedrals and other places, there were workshops, exchanges and visits to various religious institutions. The meeting was hosted by the Christian churches of Hong Kong. An estimated one third of the participants were Protestants.

UCAN reports that in 2009 the Taizé Community had distributed one million Bibles in Mainland China as an “expression of friendship” (*Sunday Examiner* Aug 11, 18; *UCAN* Aug. 27; *taize.fr* March 14).

Taiwan

August 11 – September 10, 2018:

Taiwan: Tourism defies ghost month

In an attempt to battle the annual tourism lull during “Ghost Month” – the 7th month of the lunar calendar – this year from August 11 to September 10 tourism companies in Sitou, 150 km southwest of Taipei, have been trying to break existing taboos by putting on a series of evening events.

According to traditional Chinese beliefs, the ghosts of the dead released from the underworld during “ghost month” are free to go about among human beings. Therefore, according to Taiwanese tradition, during this period one should refrain from some activities such as swimming, traveling or taking photos at weddings, noted Tourism Director Wang Yuan-chung of Nantou. For this reason, the hotels have significantly lower occupancy rates during the month. Now, various locations offer nightly events, while the Sitou Pedagogical Center of the National Taiwan University offered a star-watching event on September 9. The Sitou Youth Activity Center projected slideshows in the forest between August 11 and August 29. Wang was appreciative of these creative initiatives to promote travel tourism.

While the taboos of the “ghost month” are gradually dying out in places, the tradition of sacrificing food and paper money in homes and temples remains unbroken in cities and rural areas alike.

Willi Boehi

August 31, 2018:

First execution carried out under Taiwan’s new regime

Thirty-year-old Lee Hung-chi, convicted of murdering his ex-wife and six-year-old daughter, was executed by firing squad in prison on August 31, 2018. After a lengthy moratorium since 2016, this is the first time a death sentence has been carried out under the administration of President Tsai Ing-wen. The judges dismissed Lee’s appeal because he had shown no signs of remorse and had threatened to take revenge on his ex-wife’s family upon completion of the sentence. The panel of judges said that in this case they had acted according to the strictest rules regarding the imposition of the death penalty. Members of the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty protested after the execution was announced, regretting it as a step back for human rights in Taiwan. Other human rights activists wondered whether the government was trying to curry public favor in anticipation of the November 24 election; they said that capital punishment was no solution to the problems in society.

According to polls, about 80 percent of Taiwan's population endorses the use of the death penalty as a means of deterring and preventing crime. Currently, there are 46 persons in prison awaiting execution in Taiwan. There does not seem to be any likelihood that a consensus on this contentious issue can be reached in the near future.

Willi Boehi

September 26, 2018:

Biyun Temple is no longer a shrine of communist propaganda

We reported in the last issue of *RCTC*: “May 29, 2018: *Apple Daily Taiwan*: Buddhist temple in Taiwan defaced, turned into Chinese Communist Party shrine.” The issue was that the Buddhist Biyun Temple in Changhua, Taiwan, owned by contractor Colonel Wei Mingren, Ret., had been transformed by him into a “shrine” for Chinese-Communist propaganda. The nuns who were living there had commissioned Wei to build an extension, and after problems with the settlement of the bill, the facility was awarded to him by a Taiwanese court. However, the extension has been demolished since September 26 by a decision of the Municipality of Ershui, Changhua County. According to the *South China Morning Post*, the magistrate justified his decision by stating that the additions made by Mr. Wei himself and completed in 2016 were illegal because the original 96-year-old Buddhist temple should have been listed as a historical monument, only to be used for its original purpose, that is, Buddhist activities. The Buddhist nuns are saddened by the large-scale demolition work but hope to rebuild their temple later to the size of the extension that had originally been proposed (*RCTC* 2018, No. 3, p. 27; *New York Times* Sept. 19; *South China Morning Post* Sept. 26).

October 2, 2018:

Taiwan: Foreign missionaries can now acquire citizenship

According to a report by *AsiaNews* on October 2, foreign missionaries active in Taiwan can now acquire Taiwanese citizenship without having to give up their original citizenship. So President Tsai Ing-wen told a meeting with senior Catholic missionaries. She stressed that the government had changed the rules on citizenship, benefiting foreigners who contributed to the nation. Catholic priests and nuns, according to the President, have made an important contribution to Taiwan society in health, education and other social services, and have looked after women, the elderly and people with physical and mental disabilities. It was time for Taiwan to repay the missionaries for their decades of service, thus the President (*AsiaNews* Oct. 2).

October 2, 2018:

Signer of the Sino-Vatican Agreement attends reception held by the Taiwanese Embassy in the Vatican

On October 10, on the occasion of the National Day of the Republic of China, the Embassy of the Republic of China to the Vatican had invited to a reception which also Msgr. Antoine Camilleri attended. Camilleri is the Holy See's Under-Secretary for Relations with States and signatory to the “Provisional Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops” of September 22, 2018, between the People's Republic of China and the Vatican. Msgr. Camilleri won the first prize at the annual lottery held during the reception that evening: a flight to Taiwan. According to a statement by *AsiaNews* on October 3, Ambassa-

dor Matthew S. M. Lee said in his address, that the agreement involved religious matters rather than diplomatic issues. He described it as a significant agreement, since the Chinese Communist Party for the first time has now recognized the Pope as the leader of Catholics in China and has broken with its dogma about foreign interference in internal affairs. At the same time, Lee emphasized that Beijing is trying hard to exclude Taiwan from the international community. But with the help of partners around the world, Taiwan intends to resist the “rising autocratic authoritarian power” (*AsiaNews* Oct. 3; *Taiwan News* Oct. 4).

With contributions by Willi Boehi and Jan Kwee

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