

News Update on Religion and Church in China June 28 – October 2, 2019

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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 2019, No. 3, pp. 3-21) covered the period March 26 – June 28, 2019.

Politics, Human Rights

June 30, 2019:

China’s Communist Party reports over 90 million members

By the end of 2018, China’s Communist Party had 90.59 million members. In 2018, it recruited 2.06 million new members, 72,000 more than in the previous year. Of these, 44.9% had at least a junior college (大专) degree, 80% were 35 years or younger. According to *Xinhua*, these figures were published on June 30 in a report by the Organization Department of the party’s Central Committee. On the party’s membership structure, the report states that more than a third of party members were born in the 1980s and 1990s, and nearly half have at least a junior college degree. 27.2% of the party members are women, 7.3% belong to ethnic minorities. 35.3% are farmers and workers, 15.5% professional and technical personnel, 10.8% business and management personnel (*Xinhua* June 30).

July 8, 2019:

Letter from UN ambassadors from 22 states calls on China to end arbitrary detention in Xinjiang – Letter from Saudi Arabia and 36 other states supports China’s Xinjiang policy

In a July 8 letter to the President of the UN Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN ambassadors from 18 European countries, as well as from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan expressed concern about the “arbitrary detention in large-scale places of detention, as well as widespread surveillance and restrictions,” particularly targeting Uighurs and other Muslim and minority groups in Xinjiang. They called on China to end the practice and allow meaningful access to Xinjiang for international observers.

The letter was published on July 10. The semi-official *Global Times* rejected it sharply on July 11. A kind of counter-letter from 37 states to the UN supported China's policy. According to *Reuters*, who saw the letter on July 12, the 37 states wrote: "Faced with the grave challenge of terrorism and extremism, China has undertaken a series of counter-terrorism and deradicalization measures in Xinjiang, including setting up vocational education and training centers." They further said that security had returned to Xinjiang and the fundamental human rights of people of all ethnic groups had been safeguarded. The letter was signed by Saudi Arabia, Russia, many African countries, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba, Belarus, Myanmar, the Philippines, Syria, Pakistan, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. According to an analysis by *CNN*, almost half of the signatory states have a majority Muslim population; it said that this reflects China's great influence on these states (*CNN* July 17; globaltimes.cn July 11; nytimes.com July 10; *Reuters* July 12; letter of the 22 ambassadors at www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/190708_joint_statement_xinjiang.pdf).

July 21 and August 16, 2019:

China publishes two White Papers on Xinjiang: one on "Historical Matters" and the other on "Vocational Training Centers"

Chapter I of the White Paper on "Historical Matters Concerning Xinjiang" is dedicated to the topic "Xinjiang Has Long Been an Inseparable Part of Chinese Territory." Chapter VII points out that the Uighurs historically adhered to various religions (including Buddhism) and that Islam was "not a voluntary choice made by the common people, but a result of religious wars and imposition by the ruling class, though this fact does not undermine our respect for the Muslims' right to their beliefs."

The White Paper "Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang" claims, among other things, that "The only criterion for education at the centers is whether the trainee has been convicted of unlawful or criminal acts involving terrorism and religious extremism. It has nothing to do with their region, ethnicity or religion."

Already in March of this year China published the White Paper "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang" (see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, p. 4). The text of the new White Papers can be found at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201907/22/WS5d34f718a310d830564002eb_1.html and at http://english.scio.gov.cn/2019-08/16/content_75106484.htm.

August 14, 2019:

Civil rights attorney Gao Zhisheng has been missing for more than two years, his wife says on *Radio Free Asia*

According to his wife Geng He, who now resides in the United States, Gao Zhisheng has been reported missing from his home in Shaanxi since August 13, 2017. She said that she still has no idea where he is. Gao Zhisheng had been advocating for the rights of people in politically sensitive cases, for example in defending Falun Gong practitioners and in suing the authorities for their carrying out of enforced family planning. The authorities closed down his law firm in 2005. In December 2006, he was given a suspended sentence of three years in prison for incitement of subversion of state power and was placed on probation for five years. While he was on probation, he was taken into custody several times. He reported in 2007 that he had been tortured during a period of detention. He disappeared in January of 2009, re-appeared for a month in March of 2010 and then disappeared from view once again. In December of 2011, the state media reported that he had been jailed for three years for violation of his probation terms. On August 14, 2014, he was released from jail, according to reports in very poor health

and living under house arrest afterwards, until his renewed disappearance in 2017. Gao Zhisheng is a Christian (rfa.org Aug. 14; see: *RCTC* 2014, No. 4, p. 12).

Religious Studies

July 10 and September 24, 2019:

Lecture series on the major project “Religious Risks in the Conduct of ‘One Belt One Road’” by the National Social Science Foundation in Beijing

In lecture No. 15 of the series, Lü Jianfu (Shaanxi Normal University) addressed questions on the origin of Buddhism and its spread to China on July 10. According to Lü, there are two points of view regarding the acceptance of Buddhism by the Chinese: one view is that there was a natural affinity between Buddhism and Chinese thought; the other view is that Mahayana Buddhism was able to spread in China as a result of an “emptiness,” since the country at the time of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States (770–221 BC) was lacking any “mainstream culture and religion.”

Lecture No. 16 on September 24 dealt with the subject of Pakistan. Among other things, the speaker Wang Nan, board member of the Chinese Association for Asian and African Studies, answered questions about Islamic extremism and the spread of Christianity in Pakistan.

Both lectures took place at the Institute for World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The lecture series began in 2015 (iwr.cass.cn July 12; Sept. 25).

From July 13, 2019:

Animated film about the mythological figure Ne Zha turns out to be a blockbuster in China

The film is a free adaptation of the myth of Ne Zha, a demon with superhuman powers who is born as the child of human parents. As Maik Rudolph wrote in *China Radio International*, the myth can be found in Chinese and Indian narratives, as well as in Daoism and Buddhism. The figure of Ne Zha appears in many classics of Chinese literature, including the *Journey to the West* and *The Investiture of the Gods*. The portrayal of Ne Zha has always fluctuated but the figure is extremely popular, Rudolph explained, and since the late 1970s, there have been various cartoon adaptations of the material. – Ne Zha is also revered as a guardian deity in Chinese folk religion.

Director Jiaozi's film has turned out to be China's most popular animated film of all time. By the end of August, it had grossed 4.68 billion yuan (around € 596.1 million). In the US and Canada, where the film has been running since late August, it has met with considerably less success. The *Global Times* attributed this to cultural differences and wrote that the film Ne Zha, “the core value of which [is] ‘I am the only master of my destiny,’ may have difficulty touching the hearts of those who believe in God” (german.cri.cn Aug. 15; beta.blickpunktfilm.de Sept. 3; globaltimes.cn Oct. 11).

Religious Policy

July 10, 2019:

Authorities in Xingtai City, Hebei Province, announce to the public a new telephone hotline for the reporting of illegal religious activities

Xingtai City's United Front together with the city's Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau announced the opening of the new hotline. The hotline was also referred to in a new legal norm, entitled "Measures of Xingtai City for Rewarding the Reporting of Illegal Religious Activities (For Trial Implementation)" 邢台市举报非法宗教活动奖励办法(试行). According to these "Measures," the following illegal activities should be reported: distribution of unauthorized religious publications, unauthorized operation or construction of religious sites, organization of religious activities or acceptance of religious donations by non-religious organizations or sites. In addition, "unauthorized, arbitrary [i.e. not state-approved] organization of religious training or Hajj activities, and arbitrary organization of religious education courses for minors by whatever organization or individual" should be reported to the authorities. Anonymity of callers is assured, with the reward being offered ranging from 100 to 500 Yuan or more.

In March of this year, the City of Guangzhou announced a similar legislation but one that offered much higher rewards. There are also similar hotlines available in China for denunciations on many other topics (UCAN July 18; the text of the announcement can be found at: www.xingtai.gov.cn/zwgk/zwtd/gsgg/201907/t20190709_537068.html, of the "Measures" at: www.ainanhe.com/thread-1071-1-1.html; for the legislation in Guangzhou see RCTC 2019, No. 2, p. 6).

According to Yang Fenggang's *Atlas of Religion in China*, measured in terms of the number of registered religious sites, the Catholic Church and Islam are the two most widely held religions in the area administered by Xingtai City.

July 22, 2019:

Government ban on Falun Gong now twenty years old

Various international media recalled the ban on the meditation movement Falun Gong issued twenty years ago. On April 25, 1999, over 10,000 Falun Gong followers silently demonstrated for thirteen hours in front of Zhongnanhai, the seat of the party and the central government, to gain recognition for their movement. On July 19, 1999, the Central Committee of China's Communist Party formally announced that party members were forbidden from practicing Falun Gong – reportedly there were many party members among the supporters of Falun Gong. Then, just three days later, on July 22, 1999, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security banned the Falun Gong movement outright (see *China heute* 1999, Nos. 3 & 4, pp. 66-72, 83-85 [in German]). There then began a crackdown on the movement as well as continued persecution of its supporters by the authorities. Nevertheless, according to a 2017 poll by Freedom House cited by UCAN, 7 to 20 million people in China are still said to be practitioners of Falun Gong (UCAN July 19).

August 2019:

New high school textbooks emphasize “Chinese values” – Reported removal from textbooks of references to religious concepts in Western literature

The Chinese Ministry of Education has for the first time published uniform textbooks for the subjects of politics, history and Chinese language nationwide, *China Daily* reported on August 28. The new textbooks emphasize more strongly the traditional values and the revolutionary history of China, according to *China Daily*. The paper also reported that the editor-in-chief of the new history textbook told its reporter that the new textbooks teach students a strong sense of national sovereignty and emphasize that Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan and the islands in the South China Sea are inseparable parts of China. Citing media reports, *UCAN* said on August 8, that beginning with the new school year, the books will be used in the first grade of the senior middle school in Beijing, Tianjin, Liaoning, Shanghai, Shandong and Hainan. By 2022, all senior middle school students in China are to use them.

In a textbook used by the 6th grade, religious references such as the words “God” and “Bible” have been deleted from Chinese translations of foreign classics of world literature – *UCAN* said on August 8 quoting other media reports. For example, in the volume which was edited by the People’s Education Press, in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale “The Little Match Girl,” the sentence “When a star falls, a soul goes up to God” has been changed to “When a star falls, a human goes.” According to the same source, Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* and the short story “Vanka” by Anton Chekhov have been similarly censored (*bitterwinter.org* May 26; *China Daily* Aug. 28; *UCAN* Aug. 8).

August 27, 2019:

“Measures for the Administration of Religious Organizations (Draft for Solicitation of Comments)” published

The new Regulations on Religious Affairs, in force since February 1, 2018, assign to the religious organizations 宗教团体 (currently this refers to the official umbrella association of the five recognized religions) a key role in the state management of religious affairs. This key role is laid out more in detail in the draft new legislation. Here are just two references to the content of the document which has not yet been officially adopted:

1. Religious organizations in the sense of the new legal norm are “voluntarily [*sic!*] formed [自愿组成] by religious citizens,” they are “a bridge and bond” that unites and connects party and state with the religious circles and citizens (§ 2). So far, the indication that the organization is voluntary is to be found only in the statutes of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. It is not found in the statutes of the official associations of the other four religions.

2. The political principles to which religious organizations must adhere include the “principle of independence, autonomy and self-government” (§ 5). So far, this principle has only been included in the statutes of the umbrella organizations of Catholics (Patriotic Association and Bishops’ Conference), Protestants and Muslims. Now, with the new legal norm, this principle will be further generalized. Both points are certainly noteworthy in view of the ongoing Sino-Vatican negotiations.

The deadline for submitting opinions on the draft legislation was September 27, 2019. The text of the 宗教团体管理办法 (征求意见稿) can be found at www.moj.gov.cn/news/content/2019-08/28/zlk_3230430.html, and an unofficial translation can be found at www.chinalawtranslate.com/religious-group-draft.

October 1, 2019:

The People's Republic of China celebrates its 70th anniversary – China's religions to take part in the celebrations

Party and state spared no efforts in the 70th anniversary celebrations to mark the founding of the state. Through their umbrella organizations, the five state recognized religions were also called upon to join in the celebrations. For more details, see the article in *China heute* 2019, No. 3, p. 140 (in German).

Buddhism

July 1, 2019:

Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) releases notice on the installation of abbots and the inauguration of statues and stupas

The document says that waste, lavishness and blind competition are destroying the image of Buddhism in Chinese society. It then explains the religious significance of ceremonies: the purpose of inauguration is to give statues of the Buddha or of bodhisattvas as well as stupas (pagodas) their sacred character and to introduce believers to the spiritual world of compassion and wisdom they embody. Inaugurations should not serve as a stage for the local economy, and Buddhist religious personnel should not perform religious inaugurations of non-Buddhist sites or for items such as watches or cars. The installation of abbots and the inauguration of statues or stupas should be simple and should not include red carpets, drums and pipes or convoys of luxury cars. No Buddhists or CBA religious personnel from other provinces should be invited to such ceremonies, and apart from representatives of the United Front and religious authorities, no party or government cadres should be invited. The document "Notice on the Standardization of the Buddhist Activities of Installation of Abbots and Inauguration of Statues and Stupas" (关于规范升座、开光等佛事活动的通知) can be found at www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=506&id=40433, a German translation will appear in *China heute* 2019, No. 4.

July and August 2019:

Reports of re-education of monks and nuns expelled from Yachen Gar monastery and of demolition of sections of the monastery complex

According to reports by the US-based radio broadcaster *Radio Free Asia* (RFA), since May of 2019, some 3,500 monks and nuns have been expelled by the authorities from the Yachen Gar monastic center in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Kardze (Ganzi) in Sichuan Province – especially those who originally come from other provinces (see *RCTC* 2019, No. 3, p. 8). The exact number of monks and nuns expelled is unclear. On July 1, RFA reported that many of the deportees would be required to undergo political re-education after their forced return to their towns of origin. According to the organization Free Tibet, in a detention center in Jomda (Jiangda) County in the Tibet Autonomous Region, about 70 nuns from Yachen Gar were required to undergo a two- to three-month patriotic re-education where they had to wear lay clothes, to praise the People's Republic of China and to denounce the Dalai Lama. Following their re-education, they would no longer be allowed to join any other monastery, the organization said.

Free Tibet reported that an instruction was issued on August 10, 2019, according to which 3,500 dwellings in Yachen Gar (mostly small huts built by the nuns and monks themselves) were to be demolished; the demolitions were scheduled to begin two days later. On September 30, Free Tibet published satellite imagery to show that nearly half of Yachen Gar's area had been cleared of buildings. According to one source at *RFA*, the number of monks and nuns in the complex is to be limited to 4,700.

Yachen Gar is a monastery and study complex associated with the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, where some 10,000 nuns and monks are said to have lived until a few years ago, including many Han Chinese. In past years there have been repeated expulsions of monks and nuns from the complex (freetibet.org July 8; Aug. 24; Sept. 30; rfa.org July 1, 27).

September 9, 2019:

International Network of Engaged Buddhists publishes statement on Hong Kong

In the statement, the Buddhists express concern about the suffering of Hong Kong's people who are facing violence on a daily basis [in connection with the ongoing protests]. They also express their concern about the structural causes of such violence. They express their determination to engage compassionately, holistically and in a non-violent fashion in Hong Kong and to try to end violence on both sides through their network of contacts. "We look forward to the Buddhist monasteries and groups in Hong Kong to provide humanitarian assistance beyond political positions," the statement said. The Buddhists also want to contribute to longer-term solutions to the problems in Hong Kong and express their willingness to work with other partners.

According to its own data, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists with members from 25 countries, founded in 1989 by the Thai sociologist and activist Sulak Sivaraksa, was given the goal of networking with committed Buddhists worldwide to encourage them to address global issues (buddhistdoor.net Sept. 9).

Islam

September 21, 2019:

New York Times (NYT) on a secret 2018 political guideline on "Islam work" and the abolition of government standards for *halal* foods

An article by *New York Times* writer Steven Lee Myers deals with increasing restrictions on certain aspects of Islamic life in the People's Republic, especially in Ningxia, Inner Mongolia and Henan (the specific situation in Xinjiang is not discussed). In the article, Myers refers to an internal document – Document (2018) No. 24 issued by the Office of the Party's Central Committee and the Office of the State Council on April 19, 2018 titled "Views on Reinforcing and Improving Islam Work in the New Situation" (关于加强和改进新形势下伊斯兰教工作的意见) – parts of which, as he says, have been seen by the *NYT*. According to Myers, this document warns of the "Arabization" of Islamic sites, fashions and rituals in China and especially of the influence of Saudi Arabia. It forbids the use of the Islamic financial system, thus Myers. It prohibits mosques and other private Islamic organizations from organizing kindergarten or after-school programs, and forbids Arabic language schools from teaching religion or sending students abroad, Myers further says. Already in June of 2018, *Bitter Winter* and *Radio Free Asia* had reported on this document, the existence of which is also confirmed by references to it in reports on websites of some local authorities.

Myers also writes that the authorities of several provinces no longer issue *halal* certificates to food producers and restaurants. In fact, as early as December 2018, the *Global Times* reported that the Gansu and Shaanxi provinces had abolished their governmental *halal* identification standards, which had only been introduced a few years ago according to the *Global Times*, mainly with a view to export sales; it said that more provinces would soon be following suit in ending government *halal* certification. These standards have been “based on the rules of Islam and foreign identification methods,” while future *halal* identification will “have no set standards but will follow and respect local ethnic customs,” a Gansu official told the newspaper (globaltimes.cn December 17, 20, 2018; *NYT* Sept. 21; rfa.org June 22, 2018; zh.bitterwinter.org June 5, 2018; zjsmzw.gov.cn May 15, 2018).

Certain scholars had warned in Chinese media for a long time about so-called “pan-*halal* tendencies.” The Marxist researcher Xi Wuyi had called for a separation of state and religion in this area (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, pp. 10-11; 2018, No. 1, p. 9; No. 2, pp. 11-12).

Orthodox Church

August 3, 2019:

In Hong Kong, the Sunday Octoechos has been published in Chinese

The publication of this major liturgical book, which can be used for public worship and private prayer, was aimed at making liturgical texts available for Chinese-speaking faithful. This edition of the Octoechos, which is based on the Chinese text translated by the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission in the 19th century, has been substantially edited to meet today’s standards of Chinese liturgical language. It contains eight volumes of the Octoechos, with 36 pages in each volume, with parallel English and Chinese texts, liturgical commentaries and a short appendix of Chinese vocal chanting (mospat.ru Aug. 3).

Protestantism

Middle of July, 2019:

Access to Bible App WeDevote blocked

WeDevote 微读圣经, which is the most popular Bible application (app) in China with 10 million installations, was closed down in mid-July. Government censors blocked Chinese access to WeDevote’s website and scrubbed the app from most domestic app stores. WeDevote had entered the market in June of 2013 after a development phase of three years and quickly became the market leader. With its slick design, respect for copyrights, and curated Bible reading plans and devotionals, WeDevote stands far above other Bible apps for smartphones and tablets available in China. The small production team working with Levi Fan had to shut down the company in Beijing and cease distribution in response to pressure from the government in 2015. Foreseeing that this might happen, a branch company in Hong Kong had already been created, to which all rights to the app had been transferred. WeDevote could continue to be installed and updated in mainland China until the summer of this year. Now that is no longer possible. However, the program can still be used offline and shared privately via links. Levi Fan, the app’s creator, now lives in the USA (June Cheng in: *World Magazine*, edition of Oct. 12 [world.wng.org Sept. 26]).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

July 17–30, 2019:

Delegation of Young Volunteers from the United Methodist Church visits China

At the invitation of the Chinese Christian Council, a United States delegation from the United Methodist Church visited churches and church-related institutions such as the YMCA and Amity Foundation in Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing. The group of young volunteers, twelve in number, all between the ages of 18 and 35, saw their journey as leadership training for their future assumption of responsibilities in their church. The trip was organized and chaired by Rev. David Newhouse and his wife Christy. Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, President of the United Methodist Church's Department of Ecumenical Relations, also accompanied the group, in order to cement the institutional relationships between the denomination and its Chinese partners. At the Christian Council headquarters in Shanghai, the Methodist delegation was received by Pastor Lin Manhong, who is responsible for theological education. In Beijing, the group attended a service in the large Haidian Church in the university district (ccctspm.org July 19; *UM News* Aug. 16).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

October 2019:

International Bible Conference Canceled

The National Theological Seminar of the China Christian Council, which has its headquarters in Nanjing, had originally planned a conference to mark the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Union Version of the Bible, a Chinese translation of the English Revised Version. The conference was suddenly canceled in October without any official reason being given. A complete Chinese translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts is still in the works.

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

From June 28 / July 2 until September 1, 2019:

Longgang Parish in Wenzhou Diocese launches 24-hour Eucharistic Adoration – and distributes free “hot weather tea”



Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Longgang parish church. Photo: xinde.org.

The worshipers of the Longgang Parish, a congregation of 10,000 Catholics, have always had a great veneration for the sacrament of the altar, and in the small Blessed Sacrament chapel there are almost always people praying – according to a report in the Catholic newspaper *Xinde (Faith)*. The parish leader, Mr. Zhou Xiong, took initiative to begin the practice of perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. He drummed up enthusiasm for the idea in 13 different areas of the parish, lists were drawn up to determine who would take which shift, and group leaders were chosen. On June 28, 2019, the parish began holding the ancient practice of Perpetual Adoration. The hours from midnight to four o'clock a.m. are normally taken by married couples, so that

nobody has to be on the road alone at night. Those spending time before the Blessed Sacrament report having had profound experiences through their close communion with Christ in adoration and the positive effects their adoration has had on their family life. One Catholic woman, who had brought her son to adoration several times, told *Xinde* that he had overcome his gaming addiction and had become a good student.

For several years now and so also this year, volunteers of the parish in the subtropical Longgang distribute free “hot weather tea” to passers-by during the hot season. Because the Catholic church is located in the Street in Front of the Station, people are constantly passing by, including many manual laborers, such as transport workers, porters and rickshaw drivers, who are happy to accept the offer. In this year’s action, which lasted from July 2 to September 1, 76 parish volunteers took part in the service. Every day, five people heated water with traditional Chinese medicinal ingredients beginning in the early morning. Ten to 18 fifty-liter pots of tea were served daily. The costs were covered by the Yawei Charity of the parish and by donations. The volunteers see the action as an opportunity to live their faith in everyday life and to make their faith visible to the people of the neighborhood – the report says (*Xinde* 2019, No. 28 [July 30]; No. 30 [Aug. 20]).

July 16–25, 2019:

Visit of a delegation with 5 Chinese bishops to Belgium and Germany

The delegation included Bishops Fang Xinyao (Linyi Diocese, Shandong Province), Shen Bin (Haimen Diocese, Jiangsu Province), Xu Honggen (Suzhou Diocese, Jiangsu Province), Du Jiang (Bameng Diocese, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) and Chen Gong’ao (Nanchong Diocese, Sichuan Province). Bishop Fang is also chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), Bishop Shen is Vice-Chairman of the CCPA and of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference. Invited by Cardinal De Kesel, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, and Auxiliary Bishop Steinhäuser of the Archdiocese of Cologne, the visit was organized by the Verbiest Institute in Leuven in cooperation with the China-Zentrum e.V. in Sankt Augustin, Germany.

The bishops began their visit in Belgium. On July 16 they concelebrated Mass in the Cathedral of Antwerp Diocese. Among other places in Belgium, they visited St. Egidio Center, the Theological Faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven, the Verbiest Institute and the Chinese College at Leuven. There were also many discussions. For example, the five bishops met with Cardinal De Kesel and Msgr. Herman Cosijns, Secretary General of the Belgian Bishops’ Conference, and conducted detailed discussions on the function of the respective Bishops’ Conferences in China and in Belgium.

On July 20, the delegation continued on to Germany. They concelebrated at the Sunday High Mass in Cologne cathedral with Auxiliary Bishop Steinhäuser. In addition to further discussions with Auxiliary Bishop Steinhäuser and other representatives of the Archdiocese of Cologne, the Chinese bishops conducted numerous other discussions during visits to the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach, the China-Zentrum and the Monumenta Serica Institute in Sankt Augustin, as well as to the Catholic aid organizations Misereor, Missio and the Pontifical Children’s Mission in Aachen. During their discussions, they also addressed concrete topics such as future cooperation in the face of new legal developments in China (*Verbiest Update* No. 48, July; own information).

July 21–27, 2019:

“Special training” course for priests from Mindong at the Central Institute for Socialism in Beijing

According to a report on the website of the official Catholic governing bodies, thirty-three priests from various parishes of the Diocese of Mindong in Fujian Province have participated in a “special training course for Catholic Church work of Fujian (Ningde).” *AsiaNews* added the information that many priests in the Diocese of Mindong, mostly from the underground, had refused to sign the declaration of support for the principle of independence of the Church called for by the authorities. However, “a few dozen” had signed, and the political training was apparently intended for them. The course was organized by the Central Institute for Socialism and the United Front Department of Fujian. At the beginning of the training course, representatives of these two bodies urged the participants to hold fast to the core socialist values, to the love of land and Church, to Sinicization and to the adaptation to socialism. The participants were also urged to work actively for the “independent, autonomous and democratic administration of the Church.” At the end of the course, Bishop Zhan Silu spoke to the participants (*AsiaNews* Aug. 14; chinacatholic.cn July 30).

In December of 2018, answering a request by the Pope, the ordinary bishop of Mindong, Guo Xijin (whom the government did not recognize), gave up his position and accepted the role of Auxiliary Bishop subordinate to Bishop Zhan Silu, who had been illegitimately ordained but was later recognized by the Pope. Despite that, however, Bishop Guo Xijin was still refused recognition by the government. In May, he finally withdrew his request for official recognition (see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 11-12, 16; No. 3, p. 13).

August 2019:

Authorities prohibit many dioceses from holding summer camps for young people

Traditionally, many dioceses and parishes carry out summer camps with religious instruction for Catholic children and adolescents every year during the summer holidays. As *UCAN* writes, the authorities are increasingly banning these summer camps in recent years, and in some places the Church has been forced to give them up altogether. Some of the dioceses and parishes manage to hold the courses in remote places without any publicity. For example, *UCAN* reports that originally two summer courses were planned in a northern Chinese diocese; the first was allowed to take place because Church staff had invited the faithful privately, by word of mouth. When the diocese publicly advertised a call for participation in the second course, it was banned. In another northern Chinese diocese, the summer program was quietly transferred from a large city parish to a smaller parish in the country. One Church source told *UCAN* that some dioceses had decided not to declare the courses as lessons, but to say that “the parishes organize summer activities for children whose working parents cannot supervise them adequately during the holidays.” The source explained that the government does not allow the Church to hold activities for children which involve any form of education, even if the Church applies for it under state regulations (*UCAN* Aug. 6). See also the entry From September 2019.

End of August 2019:

Ongoing education for Church correspondents organized by the Church in various places in China



At the course for correspondents in Zhejiang, a professional explains the correct use of the camera. Photo: xinde.org.

to write about the history of the parishes and to interview older believers in order to preserve their testimony of faith.

From August 19-23, the Catholic Church in Zhejiang Province held a training course for 50 priests, Sisters and other correspondents from the four dioceses of the province. Spirituality as well as writing and photographic techniques were on the program, and various communications experts not belonging to the Church were also invited to contribute.

The 5th training and exchange meeting of the Diocese of Jinan (Shandong) took place on August 22 in Huzhuang attended by 23 correspondents. After an introductory talk by the bishop, two Catholics spoke on the topics of journalistic photography and writing.

The exact details of a correspondent's job were not described in the *Xinde* report. Usually, those who write for diocesan papers or ecclesiastical WeChat official accounts are volunteers. *Xinde* also gets most of its information from volunteer writers (*Xinde* 2019, No. 33 [Sept. 10], xinde.org Aug. 27, 29).

In order to promote the “Evangelization through writings” (文字福传) and to adapt Church reporting to the needs of the times, training courses for Church “correspondents” (通讯员) were held in several places, according to a report by *Xinde*.

On August 28, the Diocese of Tangshan (Hebei) organized its sixth exchange on this topic, which was attended by nearly 40 correspondents from 13 parishes. Speakers included the Bishop as well as the Vicar General Fr. Ren Dahai, who invited participants

From September 2019:

Minors now also prohibited from entering churches in the Province of Liaoning

According to a report by *UCAN*, in recent years the authorities have been gradually reducing attendance at church by minors all across the country. The ban, however, has not been imposed everywhere, although in Henan, Jiangxi and now also in Liaoning Province it is being strictly enforced. (During the same period there have also been reports from Liaoning of the closure by the authorities of underground churches and meeting places.)

One person from the Diocese of Liaoning told *UCAN* that in his parish, which is part of the official church, minors are forbidden to set foot in the parish church as of the beginning of September this year, with the result that there are no longer young altar boys at Sunday Mass. Previously, local officials of the United Front pretty much “closed one eye,” but now since the arrival of the inspection team (督察组), the orders of the Central Committee would be strictly followed, the source said.

In general, those interviewed by *UCAN* expressed great concern about the effects of such measures on the transmission of the faith to the children of the next generation and on priestly vocations. One Catholic identified only as Paul also said it feels as if the government were “cooking frogs in warm water,” that is, restrictions are introduced gradually, so that once a person becomes accustomed to one

such restrictive measure, the next one comes along, and little by little the living space of the Church becomes narrower and narrower (china.ucanews.com Sept. 24; *UCAN* Sept. 10, 26).

August 26, 2019:

Authorities demand the demolition of the “Gate of Heaven” at Dong’ergou Shrine, Taiyuan Diocese

According to a *UCAN* report, the government has issued orders to Bishop Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan (Shanxi) to demolish the free-standing three-story gate at the Marian pilgrimage site at Dong’ergou within 5 days. The gate stands at the end of the Stations of the Cross behind which is the plateau of the Mount of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows with its open-air altar and church. In October of last year, the statues on the gate and some other statues at the site had already been removed. The bishop was still attempting to negotiate with the authorities about being allowed to keep the gate, the report said. Bishop Meng is said to have called on all diocesan priests this year to come to Dong’ergou for the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary on the 15th of September. Although the authorities blocked roads, over 10,000 worshipers took part in this year’s pilgrimage, more than usual, *UCAN* said. Reportedly, the “Gate of Heaven” was initially built with the permission of the local authorities (originally as a single story structure), but last year the Central Inspection Team decided that the gate was too close to the expressway and too prominently visible (*AsiaNews* Sept. 16; china.ucanews.com following a report of rfa.org Sept. 18; *UCAN* Sept. 20)

Sino-Vatican Relations

August 16, 2019:

UCAN: Self-appointed underground Chinese bishop in Shanghai plans to ordain bishops without Vatican permission

According to *UCAN*, a priest, Fr. Zhang Tongli, was supposedly ordained a bishop in 1999 by the then coadjutor bishop of Henan, Zhang Changfeng, under special permits granted by Pope John Paul II to the Chinese underground Church. However, Pope Benedict XVI revoked this privilege in a letter to the Chinese Church in 2007. The Vatican does not recognize Fr. Zhang as bishop and forbade him to head a diocese, *UCAN* said. Zhang Tongli now told *UCAN* that several priests had told him that he had the right as a bishop to consecrate other bishops because the latest Sino-Vatican Agreement had betrayed the faith. He could no longer refuse [to consecrate], Zhang said.

According to *UCAN*, in the Chinese underground Church there are five or six bishops consecrated “privately” (that is, without the consent of the Pope), including Paul Dong Guanhua of the Diocese of Zhengding (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 1, p. 13; No. 2, p. 13). The Curia must also find a solution for these bishops, *UCAN* said (china.ucanews.com Aug. 16; *UCAN* Aug. 16).

August 26, 2019:

First episcopal ordination following the provisional Sino-Vatican Agreement in the Diocese of Jining (Inner Mongolia)

Fr. Antonius Yao Shun, born in 1965, has been ordained a bishop by Bishop Meng Qinglu of Hohhot. Bishops Du Jiang of Bameng, Li Jing of Ningxia and Meng Ningyou of Taiyuan were co-consecrators.

During the ceremony, the Letter of Approval of the Chinese Bishops' Conference was read, stating: "According to the tradition of Episcopal ordination of the Holy Church and the regulations of the Chinese Bishops' Conference, the bishop of the diocese was elected. After examination, the election has been found valid and is hereby officially approved. The Pope has already consented to this candidate." (根据圣教会选举主教的传统和中国天主教主教团的规定, 当选了教区主教. 经审核, 选举有效, 现予以正式批准. 此人选已经教宗同意.) The last sentence concerning the consent (not appointment) of the Pope was not included in the original formula of the official document of approval of the Chinese Bishops' Conference, and was obviously reintroduced as a result of the Sino-Vatican Agreement.

Bishop Yao studied at the National Seminary in Beijing, where he later taught, and was ordained a priest in 1991. From 1994 to 1998, he earned a Master's Degree in Liturgy at St. John's University in the United States. In 2010 he was appointed vicar general of the Diocese of Jining; according to *UCAN*, he was already at that time appointed bishop by the Pope. On April 9, 2019, he was elected bishop following the official Chinese procedure. *UCAN* reports that the Diocese of Jining (Ulanqab, Wumeng) has 70,000 Catholics. *Xinde*, however, gives the number as about 100,000, i.e., about half of all the Catholics in Inner Mongolia. Since the death of Bishop Liu Shigong in 2017, the See has been vacant (*AsiaNews* Aug. 26; *china.ucanews* Aug. 26; *xinde.org* Aug. 26; *UCAN* Aug. 26; see: *RCTC* 2019, No. 3, p. 14).

August 28, 2019:

Fr. Stephan Xu Hongwei ordained coadjutor bishop of Hanzhong Diocese (Shaanxi)

Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming, chairman of the Chinese Bishops' Conference, was the principal consecrator. The ordination mass was concelebrated by the 85-year-old Bishop Yu Runshen of Hanzhong, as well as by Bishops Yang Xiaoting of Yan'an, Dang Mingyan of Xi'an, Wu Qijing of Zhouzhi, Han Yingjin of Sanyuan, Tong Changping of Weinan and by Coadjutor Bishop Wang Xiaoxun of Ankang (all from Shaanxi Province). The Letter of Approval read out at the consecration, which took place under strict security, contained the same new formula regarding the Pope's consent as the letter read at the episcopal ordination in Jining two days earlier.

Bishop Xu Hongwei was born in 1975. He studied at the Seminary in Xi'an and was ordained a priest in 2002. From 2004–2008 he completed a degree in Pastoral Theology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, after which he served for two years in the Diocese of Vancouver. On April 11, 2019, he was elected bishop according to the official Chinese procedure. However, he is said to have been appointed bishop by the Pope already before the provisional Sino-Vatican Agreement. The Diocese of Hanzhong has close to 20,000 Catholics, 27 priests, eight Sisters, one seminarian and 21 churches (*AsiaNews* Aug. 28; *UCAN* Aug. 28).

End of August 2019:

Comments on the first two episcopal consecrations following the Provisional Agreement between China and the Vatican

Official media of both the Vatican and the People's Republic of China have rated the episcopal ordinations in Jining and Hanzhong positively. *Vatican News* cited comments by the head of the Press Office of the Holy See, Matteo Bruni, who confirmed for each of the two newly ordained bishops that he "received the Papal Mandate" and that his ordination "took place in the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China signed in Beijing on 22nd September 2018." After almost a year, "the deal is bearing fruit," *Vatican News* commented. On Bishop Yao,

Vatican News further reported: “In a unanimous decision he was named bishop of the diocese of Jining last April by the representatives of the diocese in a meeting led by Bishop Meng Qinglu. Among the representatives, the predominant component was made up of priests flanked by some lay and religious representatives. After careful evaluation, Yao Shun received the apostolic mandate and nomination by the Pope.” Thus, at least as far as the diocesan electoral meeting is concerned, the official Chinese system for electing bishops has found some kind of confirmation by the Vatican spokesman (he did not mention the role of the Chinese Bishops’ Conference).

The English-language *Global Times*, which is directed principally at a foreign readership, seems to have been the only Chinese state media to report on the ordinations. In addition to citing some positive opinions of foreign experts, the *Global Times* quoted, among others, Bishop Meng Qinglu as saying that the mandate of Pope Francis was mentioned during the ceremony. Bishop Shen Bin, vice chairman of both the Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference, told the *Global Times* that Bishop Yao’s ordination was a good start for China to elect and consecrate more bishops, providing as it did a successful example of such a process.

In a sense, the process was not new in itself (for in the last decades, many bishops had been officially elected and consecrated after papal appointment), but on both sides this time the procedure demanded by the other side (election or papal appointment/consent) was officially mentioned. According to *UCAN*, 20 other bishop candidates have been approved by the Pope [some of them many years ago], but have not yet been consecrated because approval from the Chinese side is still pending (*Global Times* Aug. 27, 28; *UCAN* Aug. 26; Sept. 11; *Vatican News* Aug. 28).

September 22, 2019:

Anniversary of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops – Underground Bishop Wei Jingyi: “no reservations, no doubts”

On the occasion of the anniversary of the signing of the agreement, *Vatican Insider* published an interview with Bishop Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar (Heilongjiang Province), who is not recognized by the government and who has previously spoken positively about the dialogue between Rome and Beijing. The danger of a split between the Chinese Church and the universal Church has been reduced by the agreement, according to Bishop Wei. He said that he has no reservations, no doubts about the agreement. Some find it difficult to adapt to the new situation due to bitter past experience, Wei explained. The bishop said that the underground Church had arisen to preserve the integrity of the faith. But now the pope is appointing the new bishops, they are all in full communion with the pope; that changes everything and makes it possible to follow the motto “love the country and the Church,” Bishop Wei claimed, adding that even the principle of independence can now also be reinterpreted.

Anthony Lam of the Holy Spirit Study Centre told the *South China Morning Post* that Bishop Wei’s comments reflected his personal faith. In Lam’s view, they show “his readiness to put himself in the hands of God including giving up his position [as bishop]” (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 24; *Vatican Insider* Sept. 22).

Hong Kong

July to October 2019:

The protests continue, with violent clashes between demonstrators and police

For these events and the reactions of religious communities in Hong Kong, see the Informationen, Dokumentation and Themen sections of *China heute* 2019, No. 3, pp. 141-142, 163-164, 165-169 (article by Anthony Lam) (in German).

July 5, 2019:

UCAN: Translation of the subtitles of the musical about Saint Joseph Freinademetz SVD have been completed in several languages

The musical “St. Joseph Freinademetz – The First Saint to Ever Serve in Hong Kong,” has been recognized by several international film awards such as the Gabriel Award and the Denali Award. The musical which tells the story of the China missionary Saint Joseph Freinademetz SVD, is originally sung in Cantonese. The Divine Word Missionary, who is also known for his statement, “Love is the only language that everyone understands,” mastered many languages and dialects. Therefore, it was also important for the production team to translate the subtitles into as many languages as possible. In addition, the title song of the musical was recorded in 20 different languages.

The video of the musical with German subtitles was uploaded on September 25 on the official Youtube channel of the musical. It is also freely available there with subtitles in other languages: www.youtube.com/channel/UCSAAaIa6lRWIq77UEyGMm82w (UCAN July 5).

Macau

June 29, 2019:

Macau: New seminary built

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has officially established the “Redemptoris Mater” College in Macau for the formation of priests for the evangelization in Asia, entrusting it to the Neocatechumenal Way. The College was established by decree signed by Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of “Propaganda Fide,” on June 29, after the audience with Pope Francis. The “Redemptoris Mater College for Asia” was scheduled to begin classes in September with a first group of students from different nations of the world. According to the statutes, the college is directly under the authority of Propaganda Fide, but according to *Fides* will maintain contact with the local bishop. The college will have the status of a seminary. In an interview with *Fides*, Cardinal Filoni stressed that the College was a response to the invitation of Pope John Paul II, who at the beginning of the new millennium called Asia an important continent for evangelization. Macau has historically represented the door for the mission of the Church in the East, Filoni said (*AsiaNews* July 29; *Fides* July 29).

October 2, 2019:

Macau Diocese angry as government projected images of the Chinese flag and national emblem onto the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral



Glowing red, the emblem of the People's Republic of China appears on the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral in Macau. Photo: UCAN.

In a statement, chancellor of the Diocese of Macau, Rev. Cyril Jerome Law, Jr., criticized the “mapping show” on the facade of the ruins of the church of St. Paul to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The display was sponsored by the Tourist Office of the Macao Government Tourism Office on three consecutive days beginning September 29. During the show symbols of the People's Republic of China, such as the national flag and the state emblem, were projected onto the ruins. The facade of St. Paul is not only a trademark of the city, but also has a rich historical and religious significance. “Although the facade was no longer church property, it remained a symbol of the Catholic faith in Macau,” the statement said. Many Christians of different nationalities expressed their irritation at the propaganda display. Future mapping shows would do well to be related to the religious context of the monument, thus Fr. Law's statement (*AsiaNews* Oct. 3; *UCAN* Oct. 4)

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Note: Since the beginning of October 2019, unfortunately, the website china.ucanews.com can no longer be accessed.