

News Update on Religion and Church in China July 2012 to September 2012

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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” (2012, No. 3, pp. 3-23) covered the period March 22 – June 29, 2012.

June 30, 2012:

Cardinal John Tong appointed to Presidency of Synod of Bishops

Pope Benedict XVI has appointed Cardinal John Tong, Bishop of Hong Kong, to the Presidency of the Synod of Bishops, which is to take place in Rome from October 7–28. The three-man Presidency of the Synod will have one representative each from Asia, the Americas, and Africa. In addition to Cardinal John Tong, Mexican Cardinal Francisco Robles Ortega (Archbishop of Guadalajara) and Congolese Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya (Archbishop of Kinshasa) will share in the leadership of the Synod. The theme of the Synod of Bishops is “The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith” (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* July 7; *Vatican Radio* June 30).

July 1, 2012:

Protest march in Hong Kong 15 years after return to China

About 900 Christians assembled in Hong Kong’s Victoria Park for a prayer meeting prior to the big protest march of Hong Kong’s population marking the 15th anniversary of the return of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China. “It is 15 years since the soil of Hong Kong returned to China, but the hearts of the people did not return with it,” said Fr. Stephen Chan Moon-hung in his address to the crowd. Fr. Chan is the spiritual director of the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, which organized the prayer service. While those present were praying, tens of thousands of people from every sector of society streamed into the park in preparation for the march to the government offices (there were 63,000 according to police estimates, 400,000 according to the organizers). The protest was intended as an expression of the population’s malcontent with the appointment of Leung Chun-ying as the new Chief Executive of Hong Kong; the still unresolved death of the civil

rights activist Li Wangyang (see also *RCTC* 2012, No. 3, p. 19); frustration over the rising property prices and rents; the perceived meddling of Beijing in local affairs and the ever widening income gap and gagging of freedom of expression. The prayer service ended with an invocation by the Rev. Po Kam-cheong, General Secretary of the Hong Kong Council of Christian Churches, and by the other 16 priests and ministers who set off with the crowd on its march through the city streets. That morning, China's President Hu Jintao had taken part in the official July 1st ceremonies during which Leung was formally inaugurated as Chief Executive of Hong Kong (*AsiaNews* July 2; *South China Morning Post* July 2; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* July 7).

July 3, 2012:

China Daily reports planned public stock offering of Buddhist Putuoshan

The Putuo Mountain Tourism Development Co. Ltd. plans to raise around RMB 750 million (US\$ 118 million) on the domestic capital market. *China Daily* said that it had obtained this information from an official of the Putuo Mountain Scenic Management Committee, which is affiliated with the city government of Zhoushan (Zhejiang Province). The Putuo Mountain Tourism Development Co. Ltd. is a subsidiary company under the Putuo Mountain Scenic Management Committee. Putuo Mountain is one of Chinese Buddhism's four Holy Mountains and the site of numerous temples and monasteries. According to *China Daily*, the Emei Shan Tourism Co. Ltd. which is managing the tourist facilities at another renowned Buddhist mountain, Emeishan, has already been listed on the local stock exchange in Shenzhen since 1997; public listings had been planned in 2009 for the Shaolin Temple in Henan and in 2013 for the Famen Temple in Shaanxi, but those offerings were later withdrawn. The article lists a series of criticisms leveled at the commercialization of religious sites. An official with the State Administration for Religious Affairs, Liu Wei, according to the article said in June that such plans violate the legitimate rights of religious circles. And one attorney quoted by *China Daily* had pointed out that according to the "Regulations on Religious Affairs" the properties of religious organizations are protected by law and therefore cannot be claimed as assets by firms listed on the stock exchange (*China Daily* July 3; *Xinhua* July 6).

July 3, 2012:

Vatican warns of consequences of planned episcopal consecration without papal mandate in Harbin

A statement issued by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples emphasizes that the appointment of bishops by the Pope is not a political but a purely religious matter which safeguards the unity of the Church. The consecration of a bishop in Harbin is being planned unilaterally and "will create confusion and divisions among the Catholic community in China." The document warns Fr. Yue Fusheng that "for his possible illegitimate ordination he will be subjected to the effects of the penalty incurred for violation of the norm of canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law [meaning automatic excommunication]." The bishops performing such an illegitimate consecration will also incur "serious canonical penalties prescribed by the law of the Church [...]" The government has been informed that the planned consecration does not have the approval of the Holy Father and that such an event would contradict the wishes expressed by both Church and government for signs of dialogue, the statement said (for the text of the document see www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=31847&lan=eng).

July 4, 2012:

State Administration for Religious Affairs rejects Vatican statement

According to a spokesman for the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the Vatican has “rudely and unreasonably” made public threats in its statement on the planned episcopal consecration in Harbin. He claimed that it was Vatican threats of excommunication in the 1950s which forced the Chinese Church to set out on the path of independently electing and consecrating its own bishops. According to the spokesman this has led to the healthy development of the Chinese Church and is an implementation of religious freedom. He added that for a long time now, both the clergy and the faithful have wanted Fr. Yue Fusheng to be made a bishop. The Vatican should come to its senses and refrain from making threats which have no effect whatsoever on China’s priests and laity. “We are ready to discuss all kinds of problems with the Vatican, including the consecration of bishops, but until a bilateral agreement is reached we will continue – as before – to adhere to our practice of unilaterally electing and consecrating bishops ...” (*Xinhua* July 4; for the German translation of the statement see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, pp. 163-164).

July 4, 2012:

Amnesty International: 3 Years after crackdown on unrest in Urumqi many members of Uighur families are still unaccounted for

According to Amnesty International, 19 families have made public the names of their family members who are still unaccounted for. It is thought, however, that the actual number of those still missing is far higher and that most of the families of those missing are just keeping quiet for fear of reprisals. The July 5th Uighur protests in Urumqi, sparked by the deaths in Southern China of two Uighur migrant workers, turned bloody and 197 people, mostly Han Chinese, were killed. The mass arrests after the riots led to the “arbitrary detention of hundreds if not thousands of people,” of whom according to Amnesty dozens have never been heard from again. At the time of the arrests, the youngest of those still missing was 16 years old. Wang Mingshan, head of the Department of Public Security in Urumqi, is supposed to have said that he has been asked by as many as 300 families for help in locating missing relatives (Amnesty International July 4).

July 6, 2012:

Episcopal consecration without papal mandate of Yue Fusheng in Harbin

Fr. Joseph Yue Fusheng (born 1964) has been ordained a bishop by Bishop Fang Xinyao of Linyi. Co-consecrators were Bishops Meng Qinglu (Hohhot), Pei Junmin (Shenyang), Wang Renlei (Xuzhou), and Yang Yongqiang (Coadjutor Bishop of Zhoucun). All of the consecrating bishops are recognized by Rome (Bishop Wang had only been recognized in May 2012 some time after his consecration). Two other bishops who had been invited to the ordination, Bishops Li Shan (Beijing) and Qu Ailin (Changsha), excused themselves on the grounds of illness. According to *AsiaNews*, it was initially not known whether the consecrating bishops (as in former cases) were to some extent acting under pressure. According to *UCAN*, Bishop Pei Junmin, who one year before had been protected by the priests and

faithful of his diocese from participating in an illegitimate episcopal consecration, was called to Beijing for a meeting at the end of June, and after that nothing had been heard of him until the day of the consecration. The consecration in Harbin took place under strict security measures. Fr. Yue Fusheng was elected bishop in 1999 and his election was confirmed by a diocesan assembly in May of 2012. He is a national level vice-chairman of the Patriotic Association.



After the consecration in Harbin, left Bischof Yue, right Bischof Fang Xingyao.

Photo: www.catholicchurchinchina.org.

AsiaNews reports that among the faithful of Harbin there has been a year-long resistance against the illegitimate consecration of Yue Fusheng. The news agency also reported that high ranking government officials prior to the consecration had asked underground Bishop Wei Jingyi of Qiqihar to convince Rome to agree to Yue Fusheng's episcopal consecration. Zhao Hongchun, appointed Apostolic Administrator of Harbin by Rome, and his assistant were temporarily taken into custody during Yue Fusheng's episcopal consecration (*AsiaNews* July 4, 6; *UCAN* July 3, 6; *Vatican Insider* July 6; www.catholicchurchinchina.org July 5, 6).

July 7, 2012:

Fr. Ma Daqin consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai before announcing his resignation from the Patriotic Association



Shanghai: Faithful kiss the ring of Auxiliary Bishop Ma Daqin following his consecration.
Photo: *UCAN*.

On May 30, 2012, the 44-year-old Shanghai priest Fr. Thaddeus Ma Daqin was elected by a diocesan assembly as the new Bishop Coadjutor of Shanghai after he had already been appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese by Rome. According to *UCAN*, when it became known in the days leading up to the consecration that Bishop Zhan Silu (Mindong), who is not recognized by Rome, would be among the consecrators, there was general unrest and disappointment among the priests and faithful of the diocese. Following an assembly of priests and sisters of the diocese on July 2, 96-year-old Bishop Jin Luxian informed them that they would be free to follow their consciences in deciding whether or not to attend. On July 4 *UCAN* reported that according to sources in the Vatican, negotiations about the

consecration were underway and that it was hoped that the illegitimate bishops present would refrain from the gesture of laying hands on the new bishop.

On July 7 there were six bishops present. Aside from Bishop Zhan, all of them are recognized by both Rome and the government. Only a dozen of the more than 80 priests from the official part of the Diocese of Shanghai took part in the ceremony. The principal consecrator was Bishop Jin Luxian, assisted by Bishops Xu Honggen (Suzhou) and Shen Bin (Haimen). The other bishops, besides Bishop Zhan Silu Bishop Cai Bingrui (Xiamen) and Bishop Li Suguang (Nanchang), did not lay hands on the new bishop. Instead of the laying on of hands, Bishop Ma exchanged an embrace with each of them. In expressing his thanks to the congregation (among them government representatives), Bishop Ma ended his address with the words: "In the light of the teaching of our Mother Church" the task of the bishop is to concentrate his energies on pastoral care and evangelization and so "it will no longer be convenient for me to be a member of the Patriotic Association." The approximately 1,000 member congregation reacted to this announcement with prolonged applause.

The following morning Bishop Ma did not appear in the Cathedral for his Mass of installation. That evening the priests and faithful were informed in a text message (allegedly coming from him) that he had decided, with the permission of Bishop Jin, to withdraw for a period of reflection. From then until today (press deadline for this issue) he has been forced to reside at the diocesan Major Seminary on Sheshan Mountain and has not been allowed to exercise his office as bishop. On July 11 the official bodies of the Chinese Catholic Church announced an investigation into the ordination (see below).

When both official and underground communities are taken together, the Diocese of Shanghai has more than 100 priests and 150,000 faithful. The official Ordinary of the diocese is 94-year-old underground Bishop Fan Zhongliang SJ, who has been sick for years. Therefore, the Holy See has appointed Bishop Jin Luxian SJ, leader of the official part of the diocese, as Coadjutor and Bishop Ma as Auxiliary. Back in 2005 Bishop Joseph Xing Wenzhi had been consecrated as Auxiliary Bishop for the diocese, but he has not been seen in public since December of 2011 (*AsiaNews* July 9; Aug. 22; *South China Morning Post* July 10; *UCAN* July 4, 5, 7, 9; Aug. 21; *Vatican Insider* July 7, 9; see *RCTC* 2012, No. 3, p. 16; see also entries July 11 and Sept. 2012).

Between July 7 and September 29, 2012:

Ten Tibetans set themselves on fire – 51 self-immolations since 2011

Nine men and one woman between the ages of 17 and 27 have set themselves on fire. Among them were three teenagers. All ten died as a result of their burns. Four of the ten were monks, three of them from the Kirti Monastery in Ngaba. The others were lay people or former monks. Seven of the self-immolations took place in the Ngaba (Chinese Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, one each in the vicinity of Lhasa, in Gansu, and in Qinghai. According to statistics of the Tibet Bureau in Geneva and of the International Campaign for Tibet (from which the above figures were taken) 52 Tibetans have set themselves on fire in the Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China since February of 2009 (51 of them since March 16, 2011) demanding freedom for Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama.

During the same time frame there were also reports of numerous arrests of Tibetan monks. The Ngaba Prefecture was once again the focal point. According to the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, a.o. a high-ranking monk from Ngaba, Yonten Gyatso, was sentenced on June 18 to seven years' imprisonment for having passed on information about one of the self-immolations. At the beginning of September, two monks of the Kirti Monastery, 19 and 17 years old, were condemned to eleven and eight years in prison, apparently also in connection with a self-immolation, and the surveillance of the Kirti Monastery by armed police units was reinforced.

That Tibetan intellectuals (writers, singers, film makers, etc.) are being especially hard hit by the reprisals on the part of the Chinese authorities is demonstrated by an August 2 documentary put together by the Dalai Lama's Tibet Bureau in Geneva. According to the information displayed, since 2008 at least 24 intellectuals have been condemned to prison sentences ranging from a few months to life for having freely expressed their opinion, twelve were released from prison in critical condition after having been severely tortured, and 37 are being held in unknown locations.

According to a September 28 report by the Tibetan Government in Exile, in a resolution on the situation in Tibet, a special assembly of exiled Tibetans in Dharamsala expressed "grave concern about the tragic self-immolations" and urged Tibetans in Tibet "not to take drastic actions." The special assembly declared further that the "self-immolations by Tibetans is the highest form of non-violent action" and called on the Chinese leadership to put an end to its hard line policies in Tibet.

The Chinese news agency *Xinhua* blamed the Dalai Lama for the ongoing series of self-immolations. On July 19 *Xinhua* wrote: "In the Buddhists' eyes, the Dalai Lama is their spiritual leader, if he reminds the followers of the [Buddhist] doctrine [not to kill], the self-immolation tragedy will definitely end" (*Xinhua* July 18, 19; www.tibet.net Sept. 28; lists on: www.tibetoffice.ch and www.savetibet.org; for numerous other reports in the media, see: *TibetInfoNet News Digest* at www.tibetinfonet.net).

July 8, 2012:

AsiaNews reports on involvement of religious sisters in Taiwan against domestic violence

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Taiwan have by means of their association known as Good Shepherd Social Welfare Services mobilized themselves to protect women who are victims of domestic violence. The numbers in Taiwan are very high. In 2008 alone, 75,438 cases of domestic violence against women were reported to authorities. In 2009 the number rose to 83,728 and in 2010 to 98,720. The association has opened a house in which battered women and their children can find refuge and offers them help and support in every stage of the process from the police report to the subsequent legal protection of victims. Their children are also looked after in an appropriate manner. Recently a documentary film with the title "A quiet life" (*Ping'an hao rizi*) has been produced, which describes the journey of six of these women on their way to a new life (*AsiaNews* July 8).

July 10, 2012:

Vatican Communiqué confirms excommunication of Bishop Yue following his consecration without papal mandate

The communiqué confirms that Bishop Yue Fusheng has incurred the sanctions laid down by canon 1382 of the Code of Canon Law for having accepted to be consecrated bishop without the required papal mandate and that "the bishops who took part in the illicit episcopal ordination and have exposed themselves to the sanctions laid down by the law of the Church, must give an account to the Holy See of their participation in that religious ceremony." The communiqué calls on all Catholics in China to defend and safeguard that which pertains to the doctrine and tradition of the Church and expresses the hope that the Chinese government authorities will not encourage gestures that will obstruct ongoing dialogue. It states that the consecration of Bishop Ma Daqin is a welcome development, but the presence of a bishop not in communion with the Holy Father at the ordination of Bishop Ma was nevertheless inappropriate (*Vatican Information Service* July 10).

July 11, 2012:

Official Church bodies' spokesman rejects Vatican criticism of episcopal consecration in Harbin

A spokesman for the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the official Chinese Bishops' Conference has declared that the Vatican communiqué on the episcopal ordination of Yue Fusheng has been very detrimental to the unity of the Chinese Church. He recalled the merits of Yue Fusheng and that Yue had been elected bishop by the diocesan assembly. He also made reference to the urgent need to fill vacant episcopal sees. He added that Chinese bishops have the same authority as all the bishops of the Universal Church (www.catholicchurchinchina.org July 11; for the German translation of the communiqué see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, p. 165).

July 11 / August 17, 2012:

Patriotic Association and official Bishops' Conference announce investigation into episcopal ordination in Shanghai – interrogations follow, superior general of the diocesan congregation of sisters removed from office

The procedures followed in the coadjutor bishop's ordination in Shanghai "are suspected to have violated seriously the BCCCC's regulations with regard to bishops' election and ordination," a July 11 statement issued by the speaker of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) said. It announced that both organizations have launched an investigation. *UCAN* learned from Church sources in Shanghai that five of the participating bishops were summoned to Beijing to report on the ordination. More than 100 priests and sisters of the diocese, who had not taken part in the ordination, as well as the other priests involved in the ceremony, were interrogated by government officials prior to the completion of the investigation around July 20. Results of the investigation were not immediately made public.

Without giving reasons, Shanghai Church bodies announced on August 17 that the superior general of the diocesan congregation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Sr. Liu Shujing, had been removed from office. *UCAN* reports that during the repeated interrogations by government officials Sister Liu allegedly had proven herself to be "uncooperative" (*UCAN* July 11, 20; Aug. 21; www.catholicchurchinchina.org July 11; for the German translation of the statement see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, p. 165; see also the entries of July 7 and Sept. 2012).

July 14, 2012:

Social welfare foundation created in Diocese of Xianxian

On July 14 in the Diocese of Xianxian (Cangzhou), Hebei Province, a diocesan charitable foundation was officially launched. The foundation will be particularly active in three areas: education, help for those in need, and missionary work. The chairman is Bishop Li Liangui (www.xinde.org July 21).

July 18, 2012:

UNAIDS reports huge increase in spending by China in fight against AIDS

As can be seen in a United Nations report from UNAIDS, China's spending in the fight against AIDS has quadrupled from US\$ 124 million in 2007 to US\$ 530 million in 2011. China is now one of the five countries investing most heavily in AIDS research. In 2011 there were 346,000 registered cases of HIV/Aids. It is estimated, however, that there are actually about 780,000 persons infected with the disease (*South China Morning Post* July 19).

July 19, 2012:

UN Special Rapporteur calls on China not to repatriate North Korean refugees

Marzuki Darusman, UN Special Rapporteur for North Korea, said in an interview with South Korea's *Yonhap* news agency that the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees from China to North Korea violates international law.

It is thought that there are tens of thousands of North Koreans currently living clandestinely in China, but China considers them economic migrants and not refugees (*Yonhap* July 19).

July 29, 2012:

New rules published for charitable foundations

The Ministry for Civil Affairs has issued legal provisions with the title: "Some regulations to standardize the conduct of charitable foundations (trial implementation)" 关于规范基金会行为的若干规定(试行). These regulations require that charitable foundations issue regular reports on their financial situation and that they streamline their internal administration. Following the inauguration of each and every welfare project, every charity must issue regular reports, at least on a quarterly basis, of incoming donations and expenditures for the project. Violations of the regulations will lead to the charitable foundation being disqualified during the annual review or the foundation can incur administrative sanctions. The ordinance especially underlines the fact that foundations are not allowed to be involved in any profit-oriented activities. There has been increasing public concern about the conduct of some charitable foundations after a number of scandals involving misappropriation of funds came to the public's attention. This has led the government to try to increase transparency as well as its control over the activities of the now more than 2,500 registered charitable foundations. The Chinese Red Cross, particularly affected by the scandals, has promised that within 3–5 years it will establish a well-functioning, transparent, and normative system of management, information, and monitoring and by so doing will protect the rights of donors and of the general public to information (*Xinhua* July 29; Aug. 2; see *RCTC* 2011, No. 2, p. 96).

July 30, 2012:

US Report: Taiwan must do more to protect rights of Catholic foreign workers

On July 30 the U.S. Department of State issued its 2011 International Report on Religious Freedom documenting the condition of religious freedom in almost 200 countries and regions. The report charges that during 2011 there has been a “significant deterioration” of religious freedom in the People’s Republic of China.

Taiwan is also mentioned in the report since Taiwanese law does not guarantee a day off to allow foreign domestic workers to go to church. “An estimated 80,000 foreign workers in Taiwan are Catholic and, in the absence of a guaranteed day off, were not able to fulfill their religious duties.” The report adds that Taiwan’s Council of Labor Affairs is currently examining this topic. In fact, there is already draft legislation under consideration (*Taiwanese Central News Agency* Aug. 5; www.state.gov).

July 31, 2012:

Xinhua: Number of mass protests in China on the increase

According to a July 31 report in *Xinhua*, the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection has announced that the number of mass protests related to environmental concerns has been rising by an annual average rate of 30% as more people become aware of environmental risks. Xu Zhen, Director of the Zhejiang Province Bureau of Environmental Protection, reports that his office receives from 50,000 to 60,000 petitions a year. Residents often do not trust the information provided by local governments or promises made by local officials. In addition, the local population is very often not involved in the decision making process when projects or industrial facilities could have a negative impact on the health of the local population.

According to the *South China Morning Post* the total number of mass protests in China has increased from 80,000 in 2005 to 180,000 in 2010. Most of the protests involve environmental problems, land grabbing, and labor disputes (*South China Morning Post* Jan. 27; *Xinhua* July 31).

August/September 2012:

Both official and underground bishops publish pastoral letters for the “Year of Faith”

Pope Benedict XVI has announced a worldwide “Year of Faith” beginning October 11, 2012. In preparation for this special year, a number of Catholic bishops in China have written pastoral letters to the faithful of their dioceses. Among them are: Bishops Li Jingfeng (Fengxiang), Yang Xiangtai (Handan), Jia Zhiguo (Zhengding), Gan Junqiu (Guangzhou), Li Jiantang together with his Coadjutor Meng Ningyou (Taiyuan), as well as the Bishop of Xuanhua. Other dioceses have either held introductory programs, studied the Holy Father’s introductory letter “Porta Fidei” (Door of Faith), or have planned special programs to be held during the course of the year (*Fides* Aug. 29; Sept. 7, 27; Oct. 1).

August 1, 2012:

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation on planned cooperation with China for the “promotion of religious tourism”

A Chinese delegation led by a councilor of the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad has paid a visit to the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, according to a report from the Corporation's managing director Mir Shahjahan Khetran. The members of the delegation said that people in China know almost nothing of the scenic beauty of Pakistan or the fact that there are in Pakistan “many sites of religious importance for Buddhists.” During a press conference on September 27 Mir Shahjahan Khetran referred, among other things, to the [Buddhist] heritage of the antique Gandhara as a potential attraction for Chinese tourists (*The News website* Aug. 2; www.nation.com.pk Sept. 27).

August 11, 2012:

Taiwan: Buddhist nun presides at first same-sex wedding

In a Buddhist monastery in Guanyin in Taoyuan County near Taipei, Yu Ya-ting and Huang Mei-yu were married with the blessings of the Buddhist nun Shih Chao-hwei (Shi Zhaohui). They were the first lesbian couple to be married in Taiwan. After their mutual promise of fidelity they exchanged Buddhist prayer beads. The parents of the two women did not come for the ceremony. According to the nun Shih Chao-hwei there are from a Buddhist point of view no reservations regarding homosexuality.

The wedding ceremony gained considerable attention in the media. In an open letter to President Ma Ying-jeou (Ma Yingjiu), Yu Ya-ting and Huang Mei-yu requested civil recognition of their wedding. Already in 2003, Taiwan's cabinet had prepared the draft of a law to recognize the marriage of same-sex partners and to allow homosexual couples to adopt children. Since then a new bill has been introduced. There are also demands for the legal recognition of same-sex marriages in other Asian countries. Vietnam is currently considering the legalization of such marriages while in Nepal hundreds have taken to the streets to march for the inclusion of same-sex marriage in the new constitution. Japan's Tokyo Disneyland informally allows such weddings. In Malaysia, however, same-sex couples can be punished by up to 20 years in prison. In Indonesia they can be sentenced to flogging with up to one hundred strokes of the cane.

Willi Boehi

From Mid-August 2012:

China repatriates thousands of Kachin refugees into Myanmar conflict zone

A spokesman for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared in Geneva on September 7 that the UN refugee agency is very concerned about reports and estimates that approximately 5,000 ethnic Kachin refugees, including many children, have been sent back since mid-August and are now living in makeshift camps.



The couple with the Buddhist nun Shih Chao-hwei after their wedding.
Photo: UCAN.

In June of 2011, following a 17-year truce, new battles once again broke out between the Burmese army and the Kachin Independence Army. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), in the process the Burmese army staged massive attacks on the civil population causing an estimated 75,000 people to flee, including 7,000 to 10,000 who fled over the border into the neighboring Chinese Province of Yunnan. Although the Chinese authorities, according to HRW, had tolerated the refugees who have arrived since June 2011, they had not, however, given them humanitarian aid and have not allowed the UN and other international aid agencies to have access to the more than a dozen refugee camps in Yunnan Province. In contrast, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in an August 26 statement to the *New York Times* that the people were returning because the fighting had stopped, and that many of those coming from Myanmar had not been real refugees. According to the statement of the Ministry, China had devoted a large amount of human resources, money, and other materials to supply humanitarian aid to the refugees. However, *UCAN* reported in late June that, according to Fr. Aung Dan, director of the Karuna Banmaw Social Service in Kachin State, the humanitarian aid that did reach the refugees in Yunnan came mainly from Karuna and other private organizations.



Kachin refugees in Nongdao, Yunnan.
Photo: *UCAN*.

The Kachin (Jinghpaw, Chinese Jingpo) are the largest ethnic group in northern Myanmar's Kachin State. The Kachin are for the most part Christians, with the two largest groups being the Baptists and the Catholics. In China there is also a Jingpo population, recognized as an ethnic minority (*Human Rights Watch* June 26; Aug. 24; *New York Times* Aug. 25; *UCAN* June 26; Aug. 17, 23; Sept. 11, 13; www.unhcr.org Sept. 7).

August 17–23, 2012:

State Administration for Religious Affairs launches first nationwide “Week of Religious Charity”

The campaign follows a document published February 16 by the State Administration of Religious Affairs titled “Opinions on encouraging religious groups to carry out charitable activities and the regulation of the same.” The purpose of the document was to promote the “healthy and orderly development” of religious charitable works. During the “Week of Religious Charity,” there was a central event in Wuhan on August 17 as well as numerous local activities (see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, pp. 140-141 [in German]; *UCAN* Sept. 18; www.sara.gov.cn Aug. 1; Sept. 17, 28; for the German translation of the “Opinions” see *China heute* 2012, No. 2, pp. 98-102).

August 18/19, 2012:

Muslims in China celebrate Eid al-Fitr to end Ramadan – Government of Xinjiang denies imposing limits on fasting



Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr in the Mosque of Zhengzhou in Henan. Photo: *Xinhua*.

According to the state news agency *Xinhua*, “due to different religious sects,” the feast of breaking the fast (Eid al-Fitr) began in Qinghai Province on August 18, while in other highly Muslim-populated regions (including Xinjiang and Ningxia) it began on August 19. The local authorities in Xinjiang declared Eid al-Fitr a three-day public holiday “to give Muslim residents enough time to attend religious services and visit relatives.” In the Ningxia Autonomous Region they even allowed four days off. *Xinhua* reported that at the Dongguan Mosque in Xining (Qinghai Province) more than 150,000 Muslims gathered, the prayer rugs “outside the mosque stretched along the road for miles.”

As in previous years, the *AFP* and other media reported that restrictions had been placed on the fasting in Xinjiang. According to an *AFP* report, on local government websites Communist Party members, government employees, and students were forbidden to participate in the religious activities of Ramadan. The *Global Times* reported that a spokesperson for the Xinjiang government denied the *AFP* report. He said that “the authorities do encourage residents to eat properly for study and work purposes,” but would not force people to eat during Ramadan (*AFP* Aug. 1; *Global Times* Aug. 3, 8; *Xinhua* Aug. 18, 19).

August 22, 2012:

Death of Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi, SJ (1923–2012)

The former Bishop of the Diocese of Kaohsiung (Gaoxiang) died in Taiwan following a lengthy illness. More than 5,000 faithful and representatives of all sectors of society took part in the funeral celebrations (see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, pp. 149-150 [in German]).

August 23, 2012:

Bishop Cheng Shih-kuang (1915–2012) dies

At the age of 97, Taiwan’s oldest bishop was formerly bishop of Tainan Diocese. He had been known for his tireless commitment for the building-up of an indigenous Church (see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, p. 150 [in German]).

August 30, 2012:

Xinde reports on “Love Kitchen” for the homeless in a Catholic parish

In a report in the Catholic newspaper *Xinde*, author Wang Chongxi tells how each Sunday beggars used to gather before the church doors of the Catholic parish of Donghe in Baotou City (Inner Mongolia). Some churchgoers would give small sums of money as alms to the beggars but others ignored them.



A poster invites “the elderly who live alone and our brothers and sisters who live from begging” to a lunch each Sunday (right).
Photo: www.xinde.org.

Then, in the beginning of 2012, galvanized into action by a sermon which the pastor had just given, some members of the parish came up with the idea of inviting the homeless people to a decent meal. So many parishioners volunteered for this “Love Kitchen” that they are now able to organize five different teams which take turns each Sunday preparing a substantial noon meal. They even give careful thought to planning variety and nutrition. The members of the parish contribute to provide the money for the meals. Since then, the parish has also begun to offer its guests laundry service, haircuts, and decent used clothing. The article goes on to introduce some of the homeless, many of whom have spent their lives on the streets, unable to work because of disabilities. Previously, these people had experienced only contempt, but here, for the first time, they really feel at home, *Xinde* commented (*Xinde* Aug. 30).

August 31 – September 6, 2012:

Chinese Islamic culture presented in Istanbul

The cultural presentation included recitations from the Qur’an, Chinese Islamic songs and dances, an exhibition, and a symposium. The week-long “2012 China-Turkey Islamic Culture Expo and Performances” was part of the official program planned for the observance of the “Year of Chinese Culture” in Turkey, organized jointly by Turkey’s Department of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) and the Chinese State Administration for Religious Affairs.

Mehmet Paçacı, Diyanet’s Director General for External Relations, said at the symposium that cooperation between Chinese and Turkish Muslims has developed rapidly in recent years. In 2011 the Turkish and Chinese Administrations for Religious Affairs signed an agreement to cooperate in religious matters such as Islamic education, the printing of Qur’ans, and student exchange programs. A report in *Xinhua* says that Paçacı told the symposium that Western society is closed to Muslim culture, with no historic mosques and no rich Muslim culture. According to Paçacı, China, on the other hand, has done a good job of integrating Muslims into Chinese society where they are free to live and practice their religion.

A report of *Public Radio International* pointed out that people in Turkey are particularly sensitive to the situation of the Uyghur Muslims in China, whom they see as blood brothers, part of the Turkish family of peoples. However, according to Turkey analyst Hugh Pope, “China’s economic power will always move Turkey more than the human rights of their Uyghur brothers” (*Anatolia News Agency* Aug. 31; Sept. 6; *Xinhua* Aug. 22, 30; Sept. 1, 7; www.pri.org Sept. 6).

September 2012:

New academic year sees 486 seminarians and 213 women religious studying in Mainland China's theology schools

These numbers refer to the students in the nine major seminaries of the official Catholic Church. The 10th seminary in Shanghai is not included since it has been closed until further notice (see following entry). According to statistics provided by the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies, during 2012 80 new candidates have entered the major seminary (in 2011 there were 79, Shanghai included). Overall, the number of seminarians has fallen sharply in recent years.

Seminary	Graduates 2012	New Students 2012
Beijing (National)	11	13
Beijing (Diocesan)	none	2
Pixian (Sichuan)	none	2
Jilin	5	12
Shenyang	none	13
Shijiazhuang	20	26
Taiyuan	16	none
Wuhan	none	none
Xi'an	11	12
TOTAL	63	80

This year 213 nuns are taking part in the theological study programs offered for them at major seminaries. Almost half of them (102) are studying at the major seminary of Shaanxi, the others are at the seminaries of Shanxi, Shenyang, and Hebei. In six of the seven seminaries that have admitted new students, the academic year was preceded (as it is in all state schools) by 5–7 days of military exercises (*Fides* Sept. 19; www.xinde.org Sept. 18).



Military drill for the seminarians of the Major Seminary in Shijiazhuang. Photo: www.xinde.org.

September 2012:

Diocese of Shanghai: Seminaries to remain closed until further notice – obligatory “study classes” for all priests and nuns

According to a communiqué published by Shanghai's Bishop Jin Luxian, the beginning of the academic year at both the Major Seminary on Sheshan Mountain and at the diocese's minor seminary would be postponed until further notice due to the current situation. Shanghai's major seminary is of importance also for other regions since it provides priestly formation for the seminarians of Shanghai and five neighboring provinces. Between September 10 and 26, the more than 80 priests and 80 religious sisters of the diocese, divided into three groups, were required to take part in obligatory three-day “study classes” at the Shanghai Institute for Socialism on topics such as the religious theory of the Communist Party, legislation governing religion and religious policy, the “self leadership” of the Chinese Church, etc. Participants have said that at the end of the course all had to write an exam on what they had learned, with the results of that

exam to be forwarded to the diocese in the form of recommendations for future assignments (*UCAN* Aug. 21; Oct. 4, 5. See also the entries for July 7 and 11, 2012).

September 1, 2012:

Party appoints new head of United Front Work Department which oversees religious affairs



Ling Jihua (middle left, in conversation with SARA director Wang Zuo'an) inspects the offices of the SARA. Photo: www.sara.gov.cn.

56-year-old Ling Jihua has been appointed to succeed Du Qinglin as head of the United Front Work Department. A native of Shanxi, Ling was previously director of the General Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. His transfer to the new post is considered to be a demotion. The Party's United Front Work Department, which is intended to unite various social forces, is also responsible for the guidance of religious policy. On September 19, Ling visited the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) in order to "inspect and guide" its work. Among other things, he had the Director, Wang Zuo'an, present a report, he inspected offices and formulated a speech on the "five demands" on the

work of the SARA, which include first and foremost increased research and promotion of the Marxist understanding of religion, but also an improvement in the level of the management of religious affairs and the mechanisms of religious work. *UCAN* has reported that Chinese Catholics do not expect that this change in personnel will produce any fundamental changes to the Party's policy towards the Catholic Church (*UCAN* Sept. 6; news.xinhuanet.com Sept. 1; www.nyt.com Sept. 3; www.sara.gov.cn Sept. 19).

September 8, 2012:

Hongkong: Following mass protests, new subject for national curriculum is put on hold



Protesters in Hong Kong on September 6, 2012. Photo: *Kung Kao Po*.

After mass protests, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying announced on September 8 that the three-year deadline for establishing a new school subject on "national and moral education" will be scrapped. Instead, the schools would have the full freedom to work out when and how they want to introduce the subject into the curriculum. Some described the turnaround as a "victory for civil society," others did not really see any change in policy resulting from the statement. On July 29, about 90,000 people, including many students, teachers, and parents, took to the streets to protest against the introduction into

Hong Kong schools of the controversial new compulsory program and its related textbook. According to critics, the textbook *China Model – National Conditions Teaching Handbook*, in which the achievements of the Communist Party are praised, is an attempt on the part of Beijing to brainwash the young people of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong diocesan Justice and Peace Commission and the Hong Kong Christian Institute co-organized the protest march. In July, Hong Kong's Catholic sponsored schools

announced that they would not be introducing the subject as part of the next academic year. The Anglican and Lutheran sponsored schools also announced that they would not be introducing the subject. The three churches administer approximately 30% of Hong Kong's schools. On September 1, shortly before the start of the new school year, there were new protests in which until September 8, 286,000 people, including many students, took to the streets to march to the government offices. Hong Kong's Cardinal Zen Ze-kun joined the protest and expressed his support for a group of students who had begun a hunger strike. On September 11 the students of many Hong Kong universities stayed away from classes in a one day strike.

On September 3 the Hong Kong diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, the Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs, the Christians for Hong Kong Society, and the Youth Group of the Hong Kong Christian Council issued a joint statement in protest against the introduction of the subject of "national education" (*AsiaNews* Sept. 10; *ENInews* July 30; *South China Morning Post* July 18, 19; Aug. 1; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Aug. 4; Sept. 8, 15; *UCAN* July 19, 31; Sept. 7, 10).

September 13, 2012:

Catholic Church in Hong Kong publishes proposals to the new territorial government

Following the formation of the new government in Hong Kong, on September 13 the Diocese of Hong Kong sent a letter to the government, which was subsequently published on September 21 and 22 in different newspapers as an open letter. The letter reminded the government of previous promises by members of the government and called on the government to respect human rights and the rule of law. It also proposed an extensive list of measures to help improve living conditions, especially for the poor and for families in Hong Kong. The letter also criticized the government's plans to increase the proportion of women in the labor force since such plans would continue to adversely affect family life. It is also pointed out that it is especially important to significantly improve the situation of young families since they are still barely able to find affordable housing due to rapidly rising prices for land, houses, and apartments. The diocese urged the government to enact as soon as possible family-friendly programs to strengthen the cohesion of families, improve their financial situation, and effectively deal with problems such as domestic abuse, violence, and drug addiction. The letter brought up one further important topic, namely, the need for government measures to counteract the ever widening income gap between the rich and the poor. It proposed a reform of land and housing policies, to provide better job opportunities for low-income people, to grant a federal income supplement for those who work but still do not earn enough and therefore live in poverty, as well as an improvement of retirement and old age protection policies.

The letter also calls on the government to work together with religious groups and NGOs in achieving improved living conditions for the population of Hong Kong (*UCAN* Sept. 21; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Sept. 22).

September 14, 2012:

In "historic step," Protestant pastor files for judicial review of administrative measures taken against Beijing house church

The Reverend Jin Tianming, pastor of the Protestant Shouwang Church, filed a legal brief with the government in Beijing requesting an "administrative reconsideration" (a kind of legal challenge for which there is a specific law in China) of the actions taken against it by the Beijing Municipal Public Security

Bureau. In his application Jin demands that these actions – which he specifies as him being subjected to house arrest without proper legal documents since April 9, 2011; the government putting pressure on landlords and real estate firms which eventually made it impossible for the Shouwang Church to use spaces that it had first rented and then later purchased for its church services; as well as arrests and other measures taken against pastors, elders, and members of his congregation – be acknowledged as violations of the law and be stopped immediately. The Beijing municipal government rejected the claim saying that the material submitted by Jin in its filing was not sufficient to prove the existence of the incidents for which administrative reconsideration had been requested. Both documents were made public by the US-based organization China Aid. China Aid has said that the organization has been cooperating with house church leaders and Christian lawyers since 2004/2005 in developing strategies to use China's legal system in defense of the rights of Christians. China Aid described the lawsuit of the Shouwang Church as a “historical step.” With ca. 1,000 members, the Shouwang Church is among the most well-known of Beijing's Protestant house churches. On April 10, 2011, 169 members of the group were temporarily arrested while trying to hold religious services in the open air. Since then the church has been trying to continue its open air services. Pastor Jin wrote in his application that since April 2011 Shouwang members have been detained more than 1,600 times in 90 different police stations for up to 48 hours and that more than 60 members of the church have been forced due to pressure from the authorities to either move or to quit their jobs (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 21; www.chinaaid.org Sept. 20, 30 [English]; Sept. 18, 30 [Chinese]; see *China heute* 2011, No. 2, p. 72 [in German]).

September 14, 2012:

Blaze destroys village church – Catholics suspect arson and lodge complaint with authorities



The burned out remains of the church of Caibang.
Photo: www.xinde.org.

The Catholic church in the village of Caibang, Xiantao City (Hubei Province), rebuilt in 1993, has been completely destroyed by fire. The church was the last building standing in the village. All the inhabitants of the village had already been resettled to clear the ground for a development project. The pastor of the 800 faithful strong parish, Fr. Zhang Wei of the Diocese of Hanyang, told the Catholic newspaper *Xinde (Faith)* that when they went to the local authorities their complaint

was met with complete indifference. Fr. Zhang suspects that the cause of the blaze was arson. He said that the parish was “willing to transfer the church elsewhere in order to allow the construction of the industrial area. Unfortunately there was no concrete project for the new location of the church, because some local officials and employees of the office of demolition, in order to obtain more personal economic interests, continued to modify the agreement for the church.” Together with the faithful, Fr. Zhang Wei called on the local Bureau for Religious Affairs and the police of the City of Xiantao to take steps to find those responsible for the fire. They also expressed outrage at the indifference of the local authorities and demanded the return of Church property.

While there have been various conflicts between Catholic communities and real estate developers, the present case is particularly noteworthy because of the open and detailed reporting in *Xinde* on the alleged misconduct of the local authorities (*Fides* Sept. 18; *UCAN* Sept. 17; www.xinde.org Sept. 18).

September 14, 2012:

***Fides*: Jesuits intend to found university in Hong Kong**

The Jesuits in Hong Kong have officially presented to the authorities in Hong Kong a request for the establishment of their own university. The suggestion came from former students of one of the Jesuit administered Wah Yan Colleges. A commission, under the guidance of Fr. Ron Anton SJ, who has long been active in Beijing, has been working on the project proposal for some years now. *Fides* quotes Fr. Anton as saying: “The work for the foundation of the university is in progress and is very intense. We have already signed a cooperation agreement with 21 universities in Asia, America, and Europe, and negotiations with another 4 or 5 are in progress.” According to plans, the university is to open in 2014 and will initially accept 3,000 students in the humanities, natural and social sciences (including theology and religious studies). It is expected that one third of the students will come from Hong Kong, one third from Mainland China, and one third from other countries. HK\$ 400 million will be needed to launch the university (*Fides* Sept. 14; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Oct. 13-19, 2011; www.wykontario.org).

September 15, 2012:

Government spokesman: China is against the defamation of Islam

“We are against any actions that denigrate the reputation of Islam or injure the feelings of Muslims,” said Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei. “We believe that the dignity of a religion should not be defamed.” China promotes dialogue and communication between different civilizations and religions, Hong Lei said. He expressed the hope that the lives and property of diplomats and diplomatic facilities will be protected. Hong made his statement in connection with the worldwide protests by Muslims against the anti-Islamic movie “Innocence of Muslims” which was produced in America (*Xinhua* Sept. 16).

September 16, 23, 2012:

Statement of Chinese Islamic Association on the movie “Innocence of Muslims” – protests in Hong Kong

In a statement published on the website of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the Chinese Islamic Association, an official umbrella organization for Muslims in China, said that the film slanders Islam and insults the Prophet Muhammad. The Chinese Islamic Association is extremely shocked and deeply condemns this film, the statement said. It demanded the immediate global halt to any presentation of the film and an apology from the film’s producers to Muslims around the world. At the same time, the statement called on China’s Muslims to hold fast to the peaceful and compassionate spirit of Islam and to preserve religious peace and social order. On September 23 three to five thousand Muslims staged a generally peaceful protest against the film in Hong Kong (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 24; www.sara.gov.cn Sept. 17).

September 25, 2012:

Protestant bodies announce theological exchange campaign to strengthen theological thinking

The two national Protestant bodies in China have announced the creation of a special team to spread the results of the project “construction of theological thinking” (formulated in 1998) more rapidly and extensively among pastors and faithful volunteers at the grass roots level. The “team for the spread and development of theological thinking” was officially launched on September 25, 2012, at the Friendship Hotel in Beijing. Along with representatives of the official Protestant governing bodies, the China Christian Council and the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the event was also attended by several officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, p. 141 [in German]; *Xinhua* Sept. 25; www.ccctspm.org Aug. 29; Sept. 26, 29; www.sara.gov.cn Sept. 25).

September 29, 2012:

Beatification of Fr. Gabriele Allegra OFM, translator of the Bible into Chinese

Father Gabriele Maria Allegra OFM (1907–1976) has been formally declared blessed in his Sicilian hometown of Acireale, Catania, by Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Together with his team of Franciscan biblical scholars at the Studium Biblicum in Hong Kong, Fr. Allegra in 1968 presented the first complete Catholic Bible translation into Chinese. The Studium Biblicum version is still recognized today in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, and Singapore as the standard Catholic translation that is closest to the original text. Fr. Allegra is the first blessed of the Diocese of Hong Kong (*AsiaNews* Aug. 31; *Fides* Sept. 3; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Sept. 22; *UCAN* Aug. 30; see *China heute* 2012, No. 3, pp. 145-146 [in German]).

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