

News Update on Religion and Church in China April 3 – June 29, 2014

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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 2014, No. 2, pp. 3-16) covered the period December 1, 2013 – March 19, 2014.

April 3, 2014:

Xinhua: Buddhist temple in Hangzhou forms “anti-terror” unit

The new “anti-terror” squad consists of 20 Lingyin-Temple monks and about 20 security guards, all equipped with shields, batons and pepper spray. Members of the unit are being trained by the local police. More than 10,000 tourists and believers visit the temple each day. According to an April 3 *Xinhua* report, this is the first such unit to be formed in a Buddhist temple.

April 24 and 25, 2014:

Authorities in Wenzhou (Zhejiang) demolish the “Stations of the Cross” and the house of an underground Catholic

On April 25, the statues and images of the outdoor Stations of the Cross on Longgangshan Hill in Liushi, Yueqing County (Wenzhou) were either hauled away or bricked up so they could not be seen. All of the remaining religious symbols on the shrine property were destroyed. On April 24, authorities demolished the house of a lay Catholic man, which they claimed served the underground Church as an illegal religious meeting place (*UCAN* April 30). See also the entry below for April 28, 2014; for background information see *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 72-75 (in German).

April 28, 2014:

Authorities pull down the Protestant Sanjiang Church in Zhejiang

A month of negotiations with the authorities preceded the demolition of Sanjiang Church in Yongjia County (Wenzhou). At times as many as 3,000 of the faithful took turns guarding the church building. The church had been registered with the authorities.



Excavators tear down the side walls of the Sanjiang Church.
Foto: CERF.

the roofs and towers of Christian churches. According to a list provided by the US-based ChinaAid organization, between January 1, 2014 and the end of June 2014, 132 churches (13 of them Catholic) either had annexes or their church buildings demolished, or had their crosses removed, or had received a demolition notice for either buildings or crosses. In 90 of the 132 cases listed, crosses were removed (or, in some cases, covered). Many of the churches concerned were registered with the government.



On May 30, 2014, authorities remove cross from Dongyang Church in Wenzhou.
Foto: ChinaAid (June 6, 2014).

consisting of Bishop Zhu Weifang, 18 priests and 400 lay representatives from all parishes of the diocese, applauded – a report on the website of the Catholic newspaper *Xinde* said.

Religious sites of other religions, especially small temples for Chinese popular religion, were also affected by the “Three remodelings, one demolition” (http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_c260784101011fjf.html; www.ccctspm.org May 12; www.chinaaid.org/2014/05/china-aid-receives-compilation-of-64.html; www.chinacatholic.org July 1).

For details see information article and documentation in *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 72-75 and 91-93 (in German).

The demolition of Sanjiang Church took place in the context of the operation “Three remodelings, one demolition” launched by the government of Zhejiang Province. Lasting from 2013 to 2015, this operation aims at remodeling old residential areas, old factory areas and villages within cities, and at demolishing illegal buildings in the entire province. Since April 2014 (and even in a few cases during the months before) authorities ordered numerous “illegal” religious buildings and parts of buildings in Zhejiang to be pulled down. They also ordered the removal of many crosses from

Even bodies and representatives of the official churches felt compelled to take a stand against these actions. On April 26, Pastor Chen Yilu, head of the official Protestant National Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing, published a blog commentary on the demolition of the cross of Sanjiang Church. On May 12, the official governing bodies of the Protestant church, Chinese Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement, published “Answers to questions of part of the believers regarding churches, crosses etc. within the operation “Three remodelings, one demolition.”” While asking the local Christian communities to cooperate with the authorities, the statement of the two bodies also called for an immediate stop to the removal of crosses which do not exceed the size given in the approved construction plan and do not jeopardize safety. During a solemn Mass in the Cathedral of Wenzhou on May 30, Father Zhong Jinxing called the recent demolitions of crosses in the province the most serious attack on religion by the State since the beginning of reform and opening. He asked the government to respect Christian belief and to stop the demolitions. The congregation, consisting of

April 30, 2014:

Notice of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs regulating the intake of orphans and foundlings by religious organizations

The measure regulates the taking in by religious organizations of orphans and foundlings. Among other things, the new rules concern the physical accommodations, which must meet the national standards on fire-protection and hygiene regulations. In addition, supervision, care, education and training should be ensured and the rights and interests of children are to be safeguarded. Collaboration between agencies and orphanages is to be improved and intensified, and orphans and foundlings are to be provided with a basic livelihood from the state in accordance with local standards. However, the new rules only apply to homes that are run by nationally recognized and registered religious organizations. While social activities for orphans and foundlings in such organizations are being legalized and promoted, the situation of those homes run by the unofficial Church has seriously deteriorated. Since the unofficial Church does not belong to the legally registered religious communities, neither the unofficial Church nor its affiliated organizations may run homes for orphans or foundlings. Those homes of this nature which do already exist are to be closed. Another regulation states that the children taken in by religious organizations should not be forced to accept their religious beliefs. This provision, too, and its formulation, which is very much in need of interpretation, are problematic (www.mca.gov.cn/article/zwgk/fvfg/shflhshsw/201405/20140500631165.shtml; *China Daily* online May 6; *Xinhua* May 5). – A German translation of this new document can be found in *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 81-83. *Jan Kwee*

May 6, 2014:

First Blue Book on National Security warns of infiltration by religion

Religious infiltration is threatening the identity of socialist belief, notes the Blue Book with the English title *Annual Report on China's National Security Studies (2014)*. It was compiled by the Center for International Strategy and Security Studies of the University of International Relations and was published under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Religious infiltration of China by hostile western forces is now assuming ever more diverse forms and a larger scale, it is both provocative and deceptive, the Blue Book states (here presented according to a report in the Beijing newspaper *Xinjingbao*). According to the Blue Book, the forces of foreign religious infiltration have already stretched their tentacles into all areas of Chinese society. As an example, the report points out that all of the terrorist attacks in China during the year 2013 had been carried out by religious extremists. "Religious infiltration represents an extremely serious threat to ideological security in today's China and is a serious threat to Chinese national security," claims the Blue Book (epaper.bjnews.com.cn/html/2014-05/07/content_510389.htm?div=-1&news; see also: *People's Daily Online* May 8; *UCAN* May 7).

May 8, 2014:

Official Church election of a bishop in the Diocese of Chengdu (Sichuan Province)

In the second round of voting, Fr. Tang Yuange, born in 1963, was elected bishop-candidate by a vote of 39 to 8. The electoral college was composed of 21 priests, 3 deacons and 23 sisters, seminarians

and lay people. Present at the election were Bishop Luo Xuebin of Yibin and Bishop Chen Gong'ao of Nanchong, the two Vatican-approved bishops in Sichuan. Government representatives were also present. The approval of the official state-sanctioned Bishops' Conference (the next step in the official procedure) has not yet been given. According to *UCAN*, it was unclear whether the Vatican would agree to Fr. Tang's ordination as a bishop. The news agency pointed out that this first election of a bishop in the official Church since Pope Francis took office will be a key test of relations between Beijing and the Vatican. The episcopal see of Chengdu has been vacant since 1998. Fr. Li Zhigang had already been elected bishop-candidate in 2011, but he died shortly afterwards (*UCAN* May 9; www.sctzj.com May 9).

May 15, 2014:

***Xinhua*: Symposium in Urumqi calls on Muslims to resist religious extremism and terrorism**

The symposium in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Autonomous Region, was organized by the Chinese Islamic Association. Wang Zuo'an, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, said in his speech to the symposium that religious extremism has nothing to do with Islam, but "maliciously distorts and kidnaps the religion." According to him, terrorism is neither an ethnic problem nor the problem of a particular religion, but an enemy of human civilization.

In recent months there have been a series of attacks, which according to the Chinese authorities were carried out by Uygur separatists. In the most serious attack on a marketplace in Urumqi on May 22, forty-three people, including four of the attackers, lost their lives and more than 90 were wounded (*New York Times* May 23; *Xinhua* May 5).

May 18–19, 2014:

In Shenyang (China), Catholics from South Korea invite their North Korean counterparts to the Mass with Pope Francis in Seoul

A representative of the Korean Bishops' Conference has announced that South Korea is inviting Catholic faithful from North Korea to take part in the Mass to be celebrated in Seoul by Pope Francis on August 18. According to the Vatican news agency *Fides*, the invitation was extended during the course of an encounter between Catholics from North and South Korea in Shenyang, China. Pope Francis is to visit South Korea from August 14–18.

According to *Vatican Insider*, "informed observers" were speculating that the Pope might possibly make a stopover in Beijing while on the way to Seoul (*Fides* May 26; *Vatican Insider* June 6).

May 21 / 24, 2014

Pope Francis calls for prayers for Catholics in China

At the end of the general audience in St. Peter's Square on May 21, quoting his predecessor, the Pope said: "On 24 May we celebrate the liturgical memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary Help of Christians, venerated with great devotion at the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. I ask all the faithful to pray that, under the protection of the Mater Auxiliatrice, Catholics in China may continue to believe, to hope and

to love and that they may be, in every circumstance, a leaven of harmonious coexistence among their fellow citizens” (www.vatican.va May 21). The day of prayer for the Church in China was observed in China itself and throughout the world.

May 26, 2014:

National Protestant governing bodies publish seven regulations for theological seminaries

The seven regulations, published for “trial implementation,” concern faculty and academic degrees in theological seminaries. By publishing these documents, the China Christian Council and the National Three-Self Patriotic Movement fulfilled requirements fixed in two guidelines of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, which took effect on 1 January 2013, namely the “Measures for the Recognition of the Status, Titles and Appointment of Teaching Personnel at Institutes for Religious Education” and the “Measures for the Awarding of Academic Degrees by Institutes for Religious Education” (www.ccctspm.org/news/ccctspm/2014/526/14526770.html; see: *RCTC* 2013, No. 1, p. 10).

May 28, 2014:

Woman slain in McDonald’s franchise in Shandong by persons identified as members of the “Church of the Almighty God”

As reported in the Chinese state media, six people in the restaurant in the city of Zhaoyuan brutally beat to death a 37 year old woman by the name of Wu Shuoyan when she refused to give them her phone number. The attack began after a female member of the group called out that the 37 year old woman was an evil spirit, the reports said. Excerpts of the incident – apparently captured on video with a cell-phone – were shown on Chinese television. Local police said on May 31 that the six people, including a father and his three children (two of them adults), are followers of the “heretical sect” of the “Church of the Almighty God.” The Hong Kong newspaper *South China Morning Post*, which had spoken with a relative of the victim and with witnesses to the incident, reported that on June 3 the victim’s family held a commemoration service in front of the restaurant on the seventh day after her death (a traditional day of mourning in Chinese culture) and burnt traditional paper offerings. In an open letter dated June 6, the governing bodies of the official Protestant church condemned the “insane crime” and called on Christians to be vigilant against the “heretical organization.” The party newspaper *People’s Daily* spoke of the incident as a “typical case of cult killing.” According to the newspaper, there are approximately 14 different cult organizations operating in China at this time. The *New York Times* reported that, following the murder, all of the media, local authorities and schools began to warn people of the dangers posed by evil cults (*Nanfang zhoumo* June 5; *New York Times* June 17; *People’s Daily Online* June 5; *South China Morning Post* June 4; *Xinhua* May 31; www.ccctspm.org/news/ccctspm/2014/66/1466769.html).

Founded in the 1990s, the “Church of the Almighty God” (also known as the “Doctrine of the Eastern Lightning”) proclaims Almighty God or Second Christ, a reincarnation of Christ in the form of a Chinese woman, whose antithesis is the “great red dragon” which the group identifies with the Chinese Communist Party. For years the sect has been trying to win over members from among the faithful of the various Christian communities.

May 30, 2014:

Administrator of the Diocese of Yujiang abducted by government officials

UCAN reported that on May 30, Fr. John Peng Weizhao was “taken away” to an undisclosed location from the home of another priest in Linchuan District of Fuzhou City in Jiangxi Province. Two weeks later his whereabouts were still unknown. Officials of the local Bureau of Religious Affairs in Linchuan claimed that the detention had been an action of the provincial government of Jiangxi. The actual reason for the arrest was not made public. Fr. Peng, who belongs to the non-registered Catholic community in the underground, was appointed by the Holy See in 2012 as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Yujiang, following the resignation of its aged Bishop Zeng Jingmu. In 1985, the official Church merged all five dioceses of Jiangxi Province (including Yujiang) into the Diocese of Jiangxi, whereas the underground Church continues to follow the Vatican’s division of dioceses. *AsiaNews* has reported one Church source in China as saying: “They are trying to eliminate all the candidates for the episcopate in the underground Church” (*AsiaNews* June 11; *UCAN* Sept. 9).

June 4, 2014:

Hong Kong: Record numbers take part in candlelight vigil for victims of Tian’anmen Square in 1989



Cardinal Joseph Zen during the candlelight vigil before the rally. Foto: Kathrin Harms.

The event’s organizer, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, estimated that about 180,000 people took part in Hong Kong’s commemoration of the victims of the massacre of Tian’anmen Square, which occurred 25 years ago. The police estimated the crowd at about 99,500. Before the rally, Christians gathered for a prayer vigil organized by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese. For details see information article in *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 75-76 (in German). *Katharina Feith*

June 8, 2014:

South China Morning Post: Beijing and Vatican prepare to resume talks

According to the newspaper, which cited “a person close to the Holy See,” the Vatican is now waiting for confirmation by Beijing as to the time and place of the talks. If formal talks are indeed held, these would be the first between Beijing and the Vatican since 2010, the newspaper said. It quoted Bishop Fang Xinyao, Chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, as saying that now is an ideal time to resume a relationship with the Vatican (*South China Morning Post* June 8).

June 10, 2014:

Inspector for party discipline accuses the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences of being infiltrated by foreign powers

As reported by the *South China Morning Post*, Zhang Yingwei made his charges on June 10 when he oversaw a visit by representatives of the Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). A report of his charges appeared on the website of the CASS, but was soon removed. Zhang is reported to have said during the visit that the Academy has ideological problems. These include using academic research as a cover for other purposes, using the Internet to promote theories that play into the hands of foreign powers and allowing inappropriate foreign influence in sensitive issues. He also spoke of "illegal collusion" between experts from the CASS and foreign interests in sensitive times and urged greater political awareness among the scientists of the Academy. Zhang said that no exceptions will be made for anyone (*South China Morning Post* June 15).

June 10, 2014:

Council of State's "White Paper" emphasizes Beijing's control over Hong Kong

The Information Office of the Council of State has issued a "White Paper" reminding Hong Kong that it is under the control of Beijing. "China's central government has comprehensive jurisdiction over all local administrative regions, including the HKSAR [Hong Kong Special Administrative Region]. The high degree of autonomy of HKSAR is not an inherent power, but one that comes solely from the authorization by the central leadership. The high degree of autonomy of the HKSAR is not full autonomy, nor a decentralized power. It is the power to run local affairs as authorized by the central leadership. The high degree of autonomy of HKSAR is subject to the level of the central leadership's authorization," says the document. The "White Paper" met with considerable criticism in Hong Kong and has, according to commentators, spurred popular participation in the unofficial referendum on the election of Hong Kong's Chief Executive, which was held between June 20 and June 29 (see below) (*South China Morning Post* June 11, 18.; *UCAN* June 13.). The English text of the document "The Practice of the 'One Country, Two Systems' Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" can be found at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-06/10/content_17576281.htm.

June 11, 2014:

Memorandum of Understanding signed on the establishment of a Center for Orthodox Culture at the Shanghai Foreign Studies University

The memorandum of understanding was signed in Shanghai by Prof. Cao Deming, Rector of the University, and Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov) of the Moscow Patriarchate's Council for Culture. The future tasks of the Center will include, among other things, the publication of a Sino-Russian Bible dictionary as well as a dictionary of Orthodox terms (*pravoslavie.ru* June 16).

Mid-June 2014:

National Security Council said to have ordered a review of all NGOs with foreign background

According to a notice of the city government of Yuncheng (Shanxi Province), which sources say appeared in mid-June on a local news portal, the National Security Council has ordered a review of the foreign-based non-governmental organizations operating in the country and their relations with Chinese partners. The review was to last from May to the end of July 2014 and was intended to “further strengthen the administration of standards.” *Agence France-Presse* reported that links to the original posting appeared to have been quickly taken down but several other Chinese news sites posted screenshots of the notice. There has been no confirmation of such an action from official sources. The newly created National Security Council, which is headed by President Xi Jinping, met for the first time on April 16, 2014 (*AFP* June 20; *UCAN* May 7).

June 18, 2014:

UCAN: After two years, Bishop Ma Daqin of Shanghai still under house arrest

Government officials told priests and sisters of the Diocese of Shanghai, who were taking part in a “learning” class during the month of June, that Bishop Ma needs to continue his “repentance and reflection.” One course member told *UCAN* that this meant that Bishop Ma would not be allowed out to take over the leadership of the diocese. Bishop Ma is under de facto house arrest since he announced his resignation from the Patriotic Association immediately following his episcopal consecration on July 7, 2012.

Citing a “source close to the Holy See,” Reuters reported in March that the Chinese government had privately signaled that it might possibly appoint Bishop Ma Ordinary (Local Bishop) of Shanghai and release two long-imprisoned bishops. However, Liu Bainian, influential Honorary Chairman of the Patriotic Association, told Reuters that [with his resignation] Ma had “deceived the bishops and cheated the government as well as the public. How can you then take on the responsibility for such a large diocese as Shanghai?” According to Liu, Ma had obviously been under the influence of foreigners (*Reuters* March 31; *UCAN* June 18).

June 20 to 29, 2014:

780,000 take part in unofficial referendum on the election of Hong Kong’s Chief Executive

Almost 10% of Hong Kong’s people – significantly more than expected – took part in the survey organized by the pro-democracy group “Occupy Central.” Participants could choose between three different options for the process of nomination by the people of candidates for the post of Chief Executive. The first direct election of the Chief Executive is scheduled to take place in 2017, but many residents of Hong Kong fear that the nomination of candidates is going to be determined by Beijing. Beijing has characterized the Hong Kong referendum, which is not legally binding, as an “illegal farce.”

Hong Kong permanent residents were able to cast their vote online or at any one of 15 polling stations, three of which were set up in Catholic parishes. One polling station was set up under the auspices of the Protestant Hong Kong Christian Council. The retired Hong Kong bishop, 82 year old Cardinal Joseph

Zen, encouraged participation in the referendum on June 7 by setting out on a seven-day walk around the Hong Kong territory, accompanied by 200 people. On July 2, Hong Kong's current Bishop, Cardinal John Tong, told *KNA*: "According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, democracy is a high value, which we as Church must defend" (*AsiaNews* June 9; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* June 28; *Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur KNA* July 3; *South China Morning Post* June 22, 24; *UCAN* June 13, 30; *Xinhua* June 20, 24).

June 25, 2014:

Interfax: China's oldest Orthodox church at Wuhan could become Sino-Russian cultural center



The St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. Foto: OCP.

At the first session of a joint working group for trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation between Russia's Volga Federal District and the Chinese upper and middle Yangzi River region in the city of Chongqing in February 2014 the decision was taken to cooperate in restoring the historic St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Wuhan, built in 1893. The Cathedral had been expropriated following the 1950s and was used as a warehouse. On May 27, 1998, the church was registered as historical monument protected at the city level. At a second meeting in the Volga-Yangzi format, Volga's representative Mikhail

Babich said: "Once the church is restored, it could be used as a base for opening a Russian-Chinese cultural center hosting both the church-museum part introducing Russia's spiritual culture, and a permanent place dedicated to the history of Russian-Chinese regional ties" (*Interfax* June 25).

June 26, 2014:

25 adherents of the "Church of the Almighty God" sentenced to prison in Ningxia

The members of the sect were tried on charges of distributing materials of the "Church of the Almighty God" in public, of disrupting the social order and of undermining China's laws and regulations. They were sentenced by the Xiji County People's Court to prison terms ranging from three and a half to eight years (*Xinhua* June 27). See also the entry for May 28, 2014 (above).

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