

News Update on Religion and Church in China November 28, 2014 – February 24, 2015

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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 2015, No. 1, pp. 3-24) covered the period September 13 – December 9, 2014.

November 28, 2014:

Newly adopted revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region” includes clauses against extremism

According to a report issued by the Xinjiang Bureau of Religious Affairs, the revised version of the regulations adopted by the People’s Congress of Xinjiang on November 28 contains 18 new paragraphs, including the following passage: “No organization or individual may disseminate extremist religious ideas or participate in extremist religious activities. Religious activities or the name of religion may not be used to interfere in normal production operations, in marriages, burials, or in other ethnic customs and lifestyle habits, in cultural, literary, artistic or sport activities. Marriages that have not yet been registered according to the law, may not be entered into in a religious ceremony. Clothing, jewelry, symbols, and emblems may not be used to make a public display of religious fanaticism or to express extremist thinking.” According to *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*, the revised administrative regulations include provisions concerning the use of the Internet and mobile communications and also prohibit the practice of religion in government agencies, public schools, companies and institutions.

In an interview with *RFA*, Uyghur representatives in exile said that the new provisions constituted a definite curtailing of free speech and of the freedom of religion. Henryk Szadziewski, of the Uyghur Human Rights Project in Washington, D.C., told *RFA* that “the stated aim is to curb Islamic extremism and the threat of terrorism; however, the regulations also restrict customary aspects of Uyghur religious practice.”

The revised administrative regulations went into effect on January 1 of this year (*RFA* Jan. 10, 2015; www.sara.gov.cn Dec. 31, 2014).

November 28 – December 1, 2014:

“First top level forum for the study of popular belief” in Beijing

The forum was organized by the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the Chinese Society for Religious Studies. Lecture titles such as “From feudal superstition to intangible cultural heritage – the process of the legalization of popular belief today” (Wu Zhen, Renmin University) show clearly how much the position of popular belief in China has changed in recent times. A series of lectures dealt with the official management of popular religion, for which there are already a few local models. A further group of lectures dealt with popular belief in minority areas (including the Bon religion in Tibet). In his lecture on Shamanism in today’s China, Se Yin (CASS) spoke of a phenomenon to be looked at in a differentiated way, whose essential parts are to be protected as part of China’s intangible cultural heritage. Two presentations dealt with elements of popular religious beliefs found in two separate Protestant groups in Beijing and in rural North-Jiangsu. A variety of individual studies on various local cults made it clear just how much popular religion is now being researched in the People’s Republic. Lectures on the popular religious veneration of Mao Zedong and of the People’s Liberation Army cast a spotlight on interesting recent developments. Forty scientists attended the conference, including representatives from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, from universities across China and from two Taiwanese universities, as well as representatives of the State Administration (Bureau) for Religious Affairs. It was agreed that the forum will be repeated every two years (see the conference report at www.iwr.cass.cn/xw/201412/t20141223_18035.htm).

December 4, 2014:

State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes data package on Buddhist and Daoist sites on its new online database

The first batch of data was already placed online on April 17, 2014. With this most recent addition, the database now contains information on 16,145 Buddhist and Daoist sites for religious activities registered with the government’s religious authorities in 14 provinces and municipalities. It is planned that the database will be further enlarged in the future. Citing SARA Director Wang Zuo’an, the Chinese news agency *Xinhua* wrote that the publication of the data is meant to help “root out illegal religious activities” in China. Wang Zuo’an had already announced in January of 2012 that China was in the process of building up a national databank of information for religious work, which would include data on religious personnel, sites for religious activities, religious organizations and institutes for religious education of the various religions (*Xinhua* Dec. 26, 2014; www.sara.gov.cn Jan. 9, 2012; April 17, 2014; the database can be found at www.sara.gov.cn/csjbxx/).

For further details, see the “2014 Update on Religions and Churches in the People’s Republic of China” in this issue.

December 4, 2014:

Xinhua: Huge new Confucius Museum in Qufu scheduled to open in 2015

According to a report by the official news agency *Xinhua*, in 2015 a huge new museum complex is to be opened in Qufu (Shandong Province), birthplace of the philosopher Confucius (551–479 B.C.). The 90,000 square meter complex will include a major exhibition center and six other halls. Construc-

tion began in February of 2013, and eventually will involve a total projected investment of 1.6 billion Yuan (260 million US dollars). Equipped with modern technology, the museum will feature more than 100,000 relics and exhibits. UCAN sees this as a further sign of attempts by China to return to its own traditions as a way of counterbalancing the influence of Western religions. Confucianism has once more gained renewed importance in China after President Xi Jinping visited Qufu a year ago with the intention of “sending a message to the nation: to carry forward our traditional culture and to spread Confucian thought.” Following his visit, investors have pumped huge sums into Confucius schools and other related tourist attractions in Qufu. In a report in the *Agence-France Presse (AFP)*, Jyrki Kallio, a researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, has criticized the Confucian concept being propagated under Xi as a romanticized ideal crafted by the Communist Party which is not open to discussion or further interpretations (*AFP* Jan. 14, 2015; *UCAN* Dec. 5, 2014; *Xinhua* Dec. 4, 2014).

December 5, 2014:

***China Daily*: As of January 1, 2015, China plans to use only voluntarily donated organs for transplants**

“China’s long-term dependence on executed prisoners as organ donors” will end in 2015, according to the government newspaper *China Daily*, citing Huang Jiefu, Director of China’s Organ Donation Committee and former Vice-Minister of Health. As of January 1, 2015, only organs coming from volunteer donors would be used for transplants, he said. The National Commission for Health and Family Planning and the Red Cross Society of China launched a nation-wide system of voluntary post-mortem organ donation in 2010, and yet, by the beginning of December 2014, only 7,822 organs had been donated. According to data provided by *China Daily* about 10,000 organs are transplanted annually in China, but each year approximately 300,000 patients are in need of a transplant.

Xie Jiaye, Chairman of the California-based America-China Association for Science & Technology Exchange, welcomed the new rules in an interview with *Radio Free Asia*. He expressed concern, however, that in the face of widespread corruption, manipulation in the allocation of organs and the existence of a black market in organs were unavoidable. The Falun Dafa Information Center described the announcement by the Chinese government as a propaganda ploy to pacify growing international criticism. According to the Center, in recent years tens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been killed in Chinese prisons in order to “harvest” their organs (*China Daily* Dec. 5, 2014; Falun Dafa Information Center Dec. 6, 2014; *Radio Free Asia* Dec. 7, 2014).

December 10, 11 and 15, 2014:

Pope Francis is not scheduled to meet the Dalai Lama – Positive reaction from China

The Dalai Lama, traveling to a meeting of Nobel Peace Prize winners in Rome, confirmed on December 11, that he would not be meeting the Pope on this trip. “This time I will not meet Pope Francis. The Vatican administration says it is not possible because there could be problems,” the Dalai Lama was quoted as saying by the Italian news agency *ANSA*. Nonetheless, he said that he admires the simplicity of the Pope. According to media reports, Vatican spokesman Fr. Federico Lombardi on December 10 emphasized that the Pope would not be meeting any of the Nobel Prize winners. A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Qin Gang, said on December 15 that the ministry had “taken note” that Pope Francis had not met recently with the Dalai Lama, and he expressed the hope that both sides will

increase their joint efforts at improving their relations (ANSA Dec. 11, 2014; *Deutsche Welle* Dec. 12, 2014; www.rthk.hk Dec. 15, 2014). – See also the entry of January 19, 2015.

December 15, 2014:

End of the protests in Hong Kong – Voices from the Churches

On December 15, without major incident, police forces cleared out the last area in Causeway Bay still being held by the protesters of the Occupy Movement and by the students. This marked the end of the protests which had dragged on since September. The previous day, Sunday, PIME missionary Fr. Franco Mella was the main celebrant at an open-air Mass for the protesters. Following the eviction, Alek Chow, Secretary General of the Hong Kong Federation of Students, said that they would continue their civil disobedience in other ways, fighting for true democracy while sticking to the principle of non-violence.

Cardinal John Tong, Bishop of Hong Kong, in “An Urgent Appeal from the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Regarding the Clearance at Admiralty and Causeway Bay Tomorrow,” called on both the police and the protesters to duly respect the rule of law and to avoid conflicts and violence. He urged the Hong Kong government and all other concerned parties, “to resume as soon as possible dialogue on the Electoral Reform” in order to resolve the conflict and polarization between different groups and sectors. He called on the faithful of the diocese to pray for the well-being of Hong Kong society.

The protests had their echo in the traditional Christmas messages of Hong Kong’s religious leaders. In his 2014 Christmas Message, Cardinal Tong said that Hong Kong has always been an accommodating society in which different opinions, voices and expressions were accepted. “Recently, due to various social issues, our Hong Kong, our home, has been torn apart to a certain extent. We can see conflicts and disagreements in the family, in schools, in the office, in various institutions and among friends. For the future of Hong Kong, all those issues have to be resolved, one way or another.” The faithful are obliged to do everything in their power to create a better Hong Kong for the younger generation, wrote the Cardinal.

The Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Hong Kong, Most Rev. Paul Kwong, also began his Christmas message by referring to the recent political events. The city has been “deeply wounded and traumatized,” the Archbishop said, with damage extending beyond the economy, people’s livelihood and the rule of law. He called on everyone to restore broken relationships and to re-establish mutual trust and understanding between individuals and between the government and the public (*AsiaNews* Dec. 11, 15, 2014; *South China Morning Post* Dec. 23, 2014; www.catholic.org.hk/v2/en/pressrelease/urgentappeal10122014.pdf; www.catholic.org.hk/v2/en/pressrelease/xmasmessage2014.pdf).

December 20, 2014:

Xinhua: State subsidies for senior religious personnel in Ningxia

According to the official *Xinhua* news agency, beginning in January 2015, financial support will be provided to senior religious leaders in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Quoting the regional Ethnic Affairs Commission, the news agency said that those who benefit will be the registered imams in mosques, abbots in Buddhist and Daoist temples and “bishops in Christian and Catholic churches” (*sic!*). The support will be in the amount of 400 Yuan per month. Those who hold a leading role in their respective religious organizations at the county, city, regional or national level, are scheduled to receive an additional allowance of 100, 200, 300 or 400 Yuan a month. This plan will first run for one year on a trial basis. The Commission said, however, that any religious leader who breaks the law or who leads il-

legal religious activities would automatically forfeit this government support. Approximately one third of Ningxia's population of 6.5 million people are Muslims (*Xinhua* Dec. 20, 2014).

December 21, 2014 / January 2015:

The Holy See's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, sees Sino-Vatican relations "in a positive phase"

Cardinal Parolin, head of the Vatican Secretariat of State, which is responsible for the Holy See's relations with other states, made his comments on December 2 in an interview with the magazine *Rivista San Francesco*, published in January. The content of his interview, however, had already been made known by the magazine *Vatican Insider* on December 21. In his interview, Cardinal Parolin referred to the state of the dialogue with China and said that "the journey is still long, marked by alternate phases and has not yet come to an end. It will end when God wishes it. I believe that with regard to China we need to adopt a theological vision. We are currently in a positive phase. There have been signs on both sides of the will to continue discussions and to work together to find solutions to the problems that are associated with the presence of the Catholic Church in this vast country. Personally," he added, "I would go as far as to say that prospects look promising" (*Vatican Insider* Dec. 21, 2014; www.sanfrancescopatronoditalia.it).

December 24, 2014:

Wang Zuo'an calls on Christians to resist infiltration by Christianity – Christmas celebrations prohibited in some educational institutions

On the morning of Christmas Eve, Wang Zuo'an, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), visited Beijing's Protestant Chaoyang Church as well as the city's Catholic Cathedral to convey Christmas greetings and to inspect the preparations and security precautions for the Christmas services. In both places, there were meetings with clergy and faithful at which Wang, according to the report on the website of the SARA, expressed among other things the following expectations: Protestants should adhere unswervingly to the Three-Self principle and resolutely resist the foreign infiltration of China by means of Christianity. In the development of theological thought they should "discover the contents of Christian teaching that are in harmony with socialist core values." Catholics, for their part, should continue to hold high the banner of patriotism and love for the Church and should hold on to the principle of autonomy and self-government, Wang said.

The Modern College of Northwest University in Xi'an also weighed in, hanging up banners calling on students to "oppose kitsch Western holidays." The college even made it mandatory for students to watch a three-hour documentary about Confucius on Christmas Eve or students would be deemed absent from class and face punishment, reported the *South China Morning Post*. Even in the Chinese media, such actions were judged to be not very practical as a method for making traditional Chinese festivals more palatable to young people. In the city of Wenzhou, the heads of all schools and kindergartens were asked by the department of education not to allow any Christmas activities on their campuses (*South China Morning Post* Dec. 28, 30, 2014; www.news.sina.com.cn Dec. 25, 2014; www.sara.gov.cn Dec. 25, 2014; www.sn.xinhuanet.com Dec. 25, 2014).

December 24, 2014:

Claiming the prerogative of interpretation: China launches online database on the definition and correct translation of key terms of Chinese culture

Eighty-one key concepts of Chinese culture, including *dao*, *tian* and *ren*, can already be found on the website www.chinesethought.cn in easily understandable Chinese and English. The website is the fruit of the “Project for the Dissemination of Concepts of Chinese Thought and Culture” (中华思想文化术语传播工程, official English title: “Project to Share Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture”). On the objectives of the project the website explains that: “Accurately defining China’s core concepts and better sharing Chinese thought and cultural concepts with the world are [an] important mean[s] to safeguard[] China’s cultural sovereignty, [to] fortify[] the Chinese people’s confidence in their culture, and [to] promot[e] China’s cultural exchanges with other countries.” The website says further that government authorities, social organizations and the media in China should be encouraged to use these terms in their international communications in order to “effectively communicate what China has to say.”

The project was approved by the State Council and coordinated by an inter-ministerial conference, made up of, among others, the Education and Foreign Ministries, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the State Administration of Press, Publications, Radio, Film and Television, the Information Office of the State Council, *Xinhua* news agency and the two Chinese Academies of Sciences and of the Social Sciences. Among the 70 advisory or assisting experts there are also some foreigners, including the German sinologist Wolfgang Kubin (Bonn). According to one report, the initiative for the project was put forward in 2013 and the real beginning of the work dates to the beginning of 2014. This makes the project a child of the era of President Xi Jinping. The ceremony to mark the public launching of the website was held at the Beijing Foreign Languages University on December 24 (*Xinhua* Dec. 24, 2014; www.chinesethought.cn; www.fltrp.com Dec. 25, 2014; March 9, 2015).

“Tian (Heaven): Tian (天) is a sacred and fundamental concept in ancient Chinese philosophy. It has three different meanings. The first is the physical sky or the entirety of nature (not including human society), the operations of which manifest certain laws and order. The second refers to a spiritual being, which possesses an anthropomorphic will and governs everything in the universe. The third denotes the universal law, which is observed by all things and beings, and which is also the basis of human nature, morality, and social and political orders.”

(From the database www.chinesethought.cn)

December 24 and 25, 2014:

Full churches and many baptisms at Christmas services in Catholic churches

From the many reports on Chinese Catholic websites, here are just a few examples:

In the Cathedral of Guangzhou on Christmas Eve (December 24), 10 Masses were celebrated back to back between 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon and 1:00 a.m. of the following morning, Christmas Day. This was done in order to provide the opportunity for a total of nearly 10,000 people – Catholics as well as “brothers and sisters from outside the Church” – to take part in Christmas services. Two hundred volunteers kept order throughout the day and also distributed material to the churchgoers.

In some communities catechumens were also baptized on that occasion, some on Christmas itself (32 in the Diocese of Guangxi, 33 at the Cathedral of Xi'an, 120 in the three churches of the city of Wanzhou), others before or after Christmas (64 at the Cathedral of Shanghai, 80 in Guancun Parish in Jining Diocese, Inner Mongolia, 190 at the Cathedral of Tianjin and 32 at the Cathedral of Taiyuan). In the mountainous region of the Diocese of Zhaotong (Yunnan), where there are only two churches, some Christmas Masses were celebrated either in makeshift rooms or out of doors in the biting cold. There, a total of 30 people were baptized.

Many parishes also invited to an evening of music and entertainment. At one such event in Zhengzhou, as a "special Christmas gift" for Catholic Christians, the Buddhist Abbot Kuanyan, from the Dao'an Temple in Xi'an, led his students in singing a Marian hymn. The Abbot, who had been deeply impressed by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, encouraged the faithful to love their fellow men, the Church, the Mother of God and God Himself (www.chinacath.com Dec. 23, 26, 28 and 30, 2014; Jan. 18, 2015). (Bilder vorhanden)

December 25, 2014:

Authorities announce further regulations on bank accounts of sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education – No use of private accounts

The People's Bank of China and the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) have made the following announcement: All sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education must have entity settlement accounts (in China a distinction is made between bank accounts for organizational entities/units and accounts for private persons); the funds of religious entities may not be placed in private accounts. Within 30 days of its being opened, each account must be reported to the government authority responsible for the registration of the site or institute [generally the religious affairs department]. Banks and religious affairs departments must work together to ensure that each of the sites and institutes participates in a timely manner in an annual audit of its accounts (see text of the "Notice of the People's Bank of China and the State Administration for Religious Affairs for Further Clarification Regarding the Opening of Entity Settlement Accounts by Sites for Religious Activities and Institutes for Religious Education" at www.sara.gov.cn/xwzx/xwj/203311.htm).

The matter of the bank accounts of religious sites was already dealt with in the "Measures for the Supervision and Administration of Financial Affairs of Sites for Religious Activities (For Trial Implementation)" of January 11, 2010 (English translation in *Tripod* XXXI [2011] 161, pp. 67-75; German translation in *China heute* 2012, No. 4, pp. 222-226). In addition, a circular of the People's Bank and the SARA of May 11, 2011, also treated this issue (see *RCTC* 2011, No. 1, p. 24). The government now obviously felt that further clarification was needed.

Asked by *UCAN* for their reaction to the announcement, Catholic bishops and laity alike generally welcomed such a scheme of controls for Church accounts, since such financial oversight would be an added help in preventing corruption within the Church. At the same time, however, some also expressed concern that the scheme could result in further interference in Church finances on the part of the government. Catholic "Yisha" pointed out in *UCAN* that the opening of entity accounts for religious groups have failed in the past in most cases simply because the government would not grant these groups legal registration, preferring instead to register only those groups affiliated with the official religious bodies. Since it is generally not possible for religious communities in Mainland China to acquire the juridical status of a legal person, it has always been difficult to ensure that control over Church finances remains within the Church's hierarchical structures, said Anthony Lam of the Holy

Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong in an interview with *UCAN* (www.china.ucanews.com Jan. 30; Feb. 3, 2015).

December 25, 2014:

New mayor of Taipei calls on police chief to prevent harassment of Falun Gong practitioners

On the day he took office Mayor Kuo Wen-je asked the Police Precinct Chief of Taipei's Xinyi District to better protect the Falun Gong practitioners who regularly demonstrate in front of skyscraper Taipei 101. The mayor threatened the chief with dismissal if one of the practitioners should be beaten up again. Kuo had promised that he would do this as part of his election campaign. As reported in the *Taipei Times*, members of the Concentric Patriotism Association (Aiguo tongxin hui 愛國同心會) – according to the newspaper an extreme nationalist pro-reunification organization – had often attacked Falun Gong supporters verbally and physically (*Taipei Times* Dec. 26, 2014).

December 26, 2014 / March 12, 2015:

Forum “Ten Years ‘Regulations on Religious Affairs’” – Wang Zuo’an: A Revision is in preparation

Since the adoption of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” (*Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli* 宗教事务条例), the government's religious work has moved from “treatment in accordance with policies” on to “administration according to the law,” Liu Yandong, Vice-Chairwoman of the State Council, said at the Forum on December 26. On November 30, 2004, the State Council had issued the “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” the first comprehensive legislation of the People's Republic of China on religious matters to be valid nationwide.

In an interview published on March 12 with the Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po*, Wang Zuo'an said that certain changes to the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” had been made necessary with the passage of time and were in preparation. According to Wang, the proposed changes concern, for example, religion and the Internet as well as the unresolved problems of the real estate holdings of sites for religious activities and their status as legal persons (*Xinhua* Dec. 26, 2014; *Wen Wei Po* March 12, 2015). For further information on the “Regulations,” see: *China heute* 2005, No. 1-2, pp. 25-31 (in German) and *RCTC* 2015, No. 1, p. 11.

December 31, 2014:

Sun Chunlan appointed Head of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China

Sun Chunlan succeeds Ling Jihua, who held the post since September 2012. Ling is one of the highest-ranking politicians to have lost his post in the anti-corruption campaign of President Xi Jinping; disciplinary proceedings against him were officially opened on December 22, 2014. A native of Hebei, Sun Chunlan was previously Party secretary of Fujian (2009–2012) and of Tianjin (2012–2014). The United Front Work Department of the Party has the task of uniting the different social forces. It is also responsible for China's guidelines on religious policy (*South China Morning Post* Dec. 26, 2014; Jan. 5, 2015; *Xinhua* Dec. 22 and 31, 2014).

January 7, 2015:

Hong Kong government announces new proposals for the election of the region's Chief Executive

At the same time, the government made it clear that the candidates would continue to be screened by Beijing. Beijing had promised in August of last year that Hong Kong citizens would be allowed to elect their Chief Executive, but had also decreed that only two or three candidates, after being vetted by a nominating committee, would be permitted to campaign for the office. The document – posted online, so that Hong Kong citizens could express their views – sets forth options for the nomination of candidates and for the composition of the nominating committee. The latter provision triggered fears that the nominating committee could be dominated by supporters of Beijing. The consultation is to be the last stage in forming public opinion before a finalized proposal on electoral reform goes before the Legislative Council. Pro-democracy lawmakers have vowed to vote against the plan unless it revokes the vetting of candidates. Should the final framework fail to pass in Parliament with a two thirds majority, it would mean a delay in the introduction of a public vote to Hong Kong (*AFP* Jan. 7, 2015).

January 8, 2015:

Xinhua condemns attack on *Charlie Hebdo* and calls for the dismantling of cultural misunderstandings

An article of the official Chinese news agency *Xinhua* has sharply condemned the murders of the staff members of the Parisian satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on 7 January. The deadly attack is yet another stark demonstration of the grave threat of terrorism haunting the world, says the article. Nothing justifies violence, on the other hand – the agency continues – there is “a reality that demands basic respect and prudence be exercised in mass communication so as to reduce inter-culture and inter-religion misunderstanding and distrust, which can easily be exploited by terrorists” (*Xinhua* Jan. 8, 2015).

January 9, 2015:

Imam of Hong Kong condemns murders at *Charlie Hebdo*

According to an article in the *South China Morning Post*, Muhammad Arshad, the leading Imam of Hong Kong, said that terrorist acts in the name of religion defame Islam. Muslims would consider the drawings published in the magazine as blasphemy, but believers should respond to insults against the Prophet not with killings, but only with words, thus the Imam. The Muslim community is united in opposing violence, he continued. This meant that no “real Muslim” could support the actions of either the Taliban or of the Islamic State. According to the Imam, “this is not the real teaching of Islam. We condemn all extremism, terrorism and the killing of innocent people.” There are about 250,000 Muslims living in Hong Kong and for years now there has been unusually close cooperation between the Muslim and Jewish communities. The leaders of both communities, Imam Muhammad Arshad and Rabbi Asher Oser, of Hong Kong's Ohel Leah Synagogue, are in close contact with one another, a relationship which began following the events of September 11, 2001. Both of them also take part in Hong Kong's monthly rounds of interfaith dialogues (*South China Morning Post* Jan. 11; Feb. 8, 2015).

January 10, 2015:

People's Congress of Xinjiang bans the wearing of burqas in public places in Urumqi

In the report from *Xinhua*, it is stated that burqas have never been part of the traditional dress of Uyghur women and that wearing them in public is also forbidden in countries such as Belgium or France (*Xinhua* Jan. 10, 2015).

January 15, 2015:

State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes its list of work priorities for 2015

As has become the custom over the past few years, in January the SARA published its work plans for the current year.

First on schedule among the plans for 2015 – as was the case last year – is strengthening the legislation and the enforcement of the law in religious work. This includes a reform of the 2004 “Regulations on Religious Affairs” and the development of new directives for strengthening the management of sites for religious activities. Another focal point is the implementation of provisions already adopted in 2012 for the qualifications of teachers and for the conferment of academic degrees at institutes for religious education. The Protestant Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and the National Catholic Seminary in Beijing are to begin on a trial basis with the formation of M.A. and Ph.D. students [however, all degrees will continue to have validity only within the respective religion].

The prominent problems mentioned in the document for each particular religion have remained the same for years: Action against “chaos” in the administration of Buddhist and Daoist monasteries (including the erection of unauthorized giant statues, religious ceremonies conducted illegally by “fake” monks, etc.) should be continued as before. The campaigns for “civilized incense offerings” and for “the reasonable release of living beings” will be continued. With regard to Islam, especially in Xinjiang, the SARA is convinced that Muslim believers urgently need more reading material about their religion and about religious policy as well as material to counter religious extremism. In addition, Xinjiang should take action according to the law to combat illegal religious activities as well as illegal Koran and Arabic schools.

The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the [official] Chinese Bishops' Conference shall be supported in reliably advancing the self-election and self-consecration of bishops. [This point in the SARA document had been heavily criticized in Catholic media as a setback in the ongoing efforts at furthering better Sino-Vatican understanding; in fact, the sentence repeats verbatim the line from the SARA plans of the previous year.] The Catholic, Buddhist and Daoist official governing bodies are to be “instructed” to hold the national assemblies of representatives of their respective religions which are due to take place every five years. [The Vatican rejects the National Assembly of Chinese Catholic Representatives as the highest Catholic body in China as well as the Patriotic Association.]

As far as the Protestants are concerned, private meeting points will continue to be “regulated” according to the law and “unification work” should be carried out towards a minority of fundamentalist groups. One topic recurring once again in the document is the “construction of theological thinking” and its propagation. Interestingly, in 2015 the “construction of Buddhist thought” is also to be promoted with a conference. According to the SARA plans, the list of key research topics on religious policy includes the handling of folk religion; religion on the Internet; and the important question of the planning and allocation of religious sites in the process of urban planning.

The SARA text on its key activities in 2015 can be found at: www.sara.gov.cn/xxgk/ndgzyd/203405.htm; the Catholic discussion on this topic can be found at: *AsiaNews* Jan. 24, 26, 2015; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Jan. 31, 2015; *UCAN* Jan. 23, 2015; www.china.ucanews.com Jan. 16, 2015. On the SARA agenda for the previous years, see: *China heute* 2014, No. 1, p. 5 (in German).

January 19, 21 and 22, 2015:

Pope greets President Xi and mentions “a date at a certain point” for a meeting with the Dalai Lama – Chinese reactions

On January 19, during the flight back to Rome from his trip to Sri Lanka and the Philippines (January 12 to 19), Pope Francis once again passed through the airspace of the People’s Republic of China and, following Vatican custom, used the occasion as he did on his Korea trip in August last year, to send a telegram of greeting to the head of State, President Xi Jinping. At the press conference during the flight, when asked why he had not received the Dalai Lama in December and how relations stood with China, the Pope said:

“It is the practice, following the protocol of the Secretariat of State, not to receive heads of state or personages of that level when they are in Rome for an international meeting. [...] That is why he [the Dalai Lama] wasn’t received. I saw that some newspapers stated I didn’t receive him for fear of China. That is not true. At the time, this was the reason. He requested an audience and he was given a date at a certain point. He had requested it before, but not for that moment, and we are in contact. The reason was not to refuse him personally or fear of China. Yes, we are open, we want peace with everyone. Where do relations stand? The Chinese government is respectful and we are respectful, and we do things one step at a time, as historically things have been done. We don’t know yet, but they know I am ready both to receive and to go.”

In response to a question about the Pope’s telegram, Hua Chunying, spokeswoman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, according to *Xinhua* said at a press conference on January 21: “We are willing to have constructive dialogue with the Vatican based on relevant principles.” In its report *Xinhua* listed these principles or pre-conditions: abandonment of the “so-called ‘diplomatic ties’” with Taiwan, and an end to interfering in China’s internal affairs in the name of religion. Although the spokeswoman did not refer directly to the Dalai Lama, the State-controlled *Global Times* ran as its headline on January 22, “Potential Pope, Dalai Lama meeting could harm Sino-Vatican ties.” It quoted Xu Yuhua (Fudan University) as saying that the Pope’s two different statements in the same day showed his “ambivalence” toward China (*Global Times* Jan. 22, 2015; *Xinhua* Jan. 21, 2015; www.w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150119_srilanka-filippine-conferenza-stampa.html).

See also the article of December 10, 11 and 15, 2014.

January 19, 2015:

Directive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and State Council calls for more Marxist education at universities

The directive entitled “Views on Further Strengthening and Improving the Ideological Work in Universities under the New Situation” demands that socialism with Chinese characteristics should find access in the textbooks, the teaching and the heads of students. The document sees raising the “ideological quality” of the teaching staff as an important foundation for this process. In the field of ethical education both the “socialist core values” and the virtues of traditional Chinese culture should be taught. The document also speaks of the “infiltration of hostile forces” which must be resisted. According to the

directive, philosophy and the social sciences need to be further reformed and their resources for ideological and political education must be discovered. Special mention is also made of the science of religion, the teaching and research of which needs to be more tightly “managed” (*Xinhua* Jan. 19, 2015).

circa January 19, 2015:

Shanxi Province launches two-month campaign to eradicate “feudal superstition”

The campaign is explicitly directed against *shenpos* 神婆 (“witches,” female mediums/shamans) and Fengshui masters. Around January 19, the Commission for Guiding Cultural and Ethical Progress of Shanxi Province announced the launch of the campaign. According to the announcement, specialized teams are to compile a statistical register of all Fengshui masters, *shenpos* and other persons involved in superstitious activities in the villages, and in particular they are to determine whether any illegal commercial activities are involved. These people should be reported and the competent authorities must then administer corrective punishment. Parallel to that action, “science” is to be propagated among the population in the country with the help of volunteers, as well as through assemblies and lectures. Catholics in Shanxi told *UCAN* that they have the suspicion that the campaign was designed to target government workers, among whom use of fortune-tellers remains widespread, with officials increasingly going to pray at temples for forgiveness amid the current crackdown on corruption (*Shanxi ribao*, according to www.fjnet.com Jan. 19, 2015; *UCAN* Jan. 22, 2015; *Xinhua* Jan. 20, 21, 2015).

January 22, 2015:

Religious leaders in Hong Kong issue Joint Declaration on Climate Change

In a joint statement, the leaders of the “Colloquium of Six Religious Leaders of Hong Kong” – Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, Daoists and Confucians – issued a warning to governments around the world about climate change and its consequences for mankind and for nature. They are calling for a worldwide consensus on reducing emissions at the upcoming UN climate talks in Paris at the end of this year (*Sunday Examiner* Feb. 7, 2015; *UCAN* Jan. 23, 2015).

January 23 – March 5, 2015:

Debate surrounding interviews with Chinese “underground” bishops on the Holy See’s dialogue with China

Gianni Valente, a journalist with the Vatican news agency *Fides*, published a series of interviews in the magazine *Vatican Insider* with three Chinese bishops who had been appointed by the Pope but who remain unacknowledged by the Chinese government. They are: Wei Jingyi, Bishop of Qiqihar (interview published on 23 January), Han Zhihai, Bishop of Lanzhou (interview published on February 4) and Xie Tingzhe, Bishop of Urumqi (interview published on 24 February). Valente asked all three bishops whether they feel that the negotiations between the Vatican and China run the risk of too many concessions on the part of the Holy See. He also wanted their opinion on how the faithful would react to talks between the Holy See and Beijing and how they felt that the current problems might be resolved. The three bishops responded in very different ways, but all three unanimously agreed in expressing the view that dialogue with the government is essential. Bishop Wei and Bishop Han were convinced that most believers, including most of those in the underground, would ultimately favor rapprochement with the government. All three were able to imagine various kinds of solutions to the problems of the

National Assembly of Chinese Catholic Representatives, the Patriotic Association and the appointment of bishops. In their responses, all three emphasized the need for the unity of all the bishops with the Pope.

Following the publication of the first two interviews, Joseph Cardinal Zen, Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, entered the discussion on February 17 with an article published in *AsiaNews*. In his article he wrote that it was naive to assume that the underground bishops could speak freely. Moreover, he said, Valente had as much as put words into the mouths of the bishops just by the way in which he had formulated his questions to them. With regard to talks with Beijing, the cardinal warned once again against “the temptation to reach a conclusion at any cost.”

Two days later, the Chinese priest Fr. Paul Han Qingping responded to the cardinal’s criticism with a sharply worded retort in *Vatican Insider*. The priest, who welcomed the positions taken by Bishop Wei and Bishop Han, protested against what he considered the false impression caused by statements such as those of Cardinal Zen that the clergy and laity in China are immature and still need people from outside to speak up for them. He wrote that Cardinal Zen seems to think he is in charge of managing the affairs of the Church in China and with his voice he drowns out the voices of the bishops and laity in Mainland China.

Finally, Bishop Wei Jingyi wrote in an opinion dated February 20 and published in *Vatican Insider* on March 5: “I have the duty to speak as a bishop and I must speak according to my conscience.”

Quoting a Church observer in China, *UCAN* wrote on February 27: “It is apparent that two different lines have appeared within Rome and the Church outside of China over China-Vatican relations” (*AsiaNews* Feb. 17, 19, 2015; *UCAN* Feb. 27, 2015; *Vatican Insider* Jan. 23; Feb. 4, 19 and 24; March 5, 2015. The interviews with the three Bishops can be found online at the website www.vaticaninsider.lastampa.it).

January 27 / February 2, 2015:

Media reports of disciplinary proceedings against cadres in Tibet and Xinjiang, including allegations in connection with the Dalai Lama and the pilgrimage to Mecca

According to the government controlled *Global Times*, 15 officials in the Tibet Autonomous Region were prosecuted during 2014 for violations of party discipline and political discipline. An investigation was initiated against “several” officials involved in the illegal underground organization for Tibetan independence, who were accused of passing secret information to the “Dalai Lama clique” or of supporting activities that were a threat to national security, the newspaper said.

Citing the state run newspaper the *Legal Daily*, the *South China Morning Post* reported that during the year 2014, in Xinjiang Province, 355 party members were investigated for violations of party discipline and that further unspecified penalties were handed down to 333 of them. Among those punished were 32 officials who were accused of bribery in connection with the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, including the former director of the Office of Pilgrims’ Affairs (*Global Times* Jan. 27, 2015; *South China Morning Post* Feb. 2, 2015).

January 29, 2015:

Education Minister warns against “Western values” in textbooks

According to *Xinhua*, at a forum for the improvement of ideological work in institutes of higher education, Education Minister Yuan Guiren challenged the universities to “never let textbooks promoting Western values appear in our classes.” The universities must strengthen management of the use of text-

books and materials adopted directly from abroad, he added. In addition, care must be taken that no remarks ever be allowed during classes that slander the leadership of the Communist Party of China, smear socialism or violate the country's Constitution, the minister said.

Johnny Erling wrote in *Die Welt* that certain professors already have been denounced on websites known to be close to the Party as representatives of Western values. Erling also reported that a revised edition of senior middle school textbooks which appeared in 2014 once again teaches “Catchword Marxism,” such as “the downfall of the bourgeoisie and the victory of the proletariat are inevitable.” Even the old idea of class struggle which had been written off politically after Mao's death has been reintroduced into the textbooks, Erling noted (*South China Morning Post* Jan. 20, 2015; *Die Welt* Feb. 5, 2015; *Xinhua* Jan. 19, 29 and 30.; Feb. 12, 2015).

According to earlier reports, since March of 2013, Chinese universities may no longer teach “universal values” such as freedom of the press and civil rights (see *RCTC* 2013, No. 4, p. 4).

January 29 – 31, 2015:

During a visit to Baoding, Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the Political Consultative Conference, urges Baoding Catholics to resist foreign infiltration

According to *Xinhua*, the high-level inspection tour had one focus on “religious work.” Yu visited churches and temples in the City of Baoding (Hebei Province). During his visit, he exhorted “Catholic circles” to adhere to the principle of independence and to “withstand the infiltration of overseas-based forces to ensure that the leadership of religious organizations is firmly in the hands of people who love the country as well as their religion.” The *Xinhua* report did not make mention of any other religions. The Bishop of Baoding, Su Zhimin, has been missing since 1997. Relatives of the bishop who tried to meet Yu Zhengsheng during his visit in Baoding in order to ask for the bishop's release were detained for three days in a guesthouse. Already on September 23, 2014, senior officials from the Communist Party's United Front Work Department had paid a visit to the Cathedral of Baoding. Also during 2014, three underground priests of the Diocese of Baoding were released after years of imprisonment (*Xinhua* Jan. 31, 2015; www.china.ucanews.com Jan. 31, 2015; see also: *RCTC* 2014, No. 4, pp. 12-13 and 21; 2015, No. 1, p. 10).

January 30, 2015:

Officials inform relatives of the death of detained Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang of Yixian (Hebei) – Official confirmation still lacking



Bischof Cosmas Shi Enxiang,
Oct. 10, 1990. Photo: DR – EDA.

The bishop's relatives were informed of his death, but were not told exactly when he died or the cause of his death, the bishop's great-niece told *UCAN* on January 31. Later, authorities in Baoding denied knowing anything about the bishop's death. The 94 year old bishop, who was not recognized by the government and had been imprisoned before, was arrested for the last time in Beijing on April 13, 2001. Since then, he has been held for 14 years without charge at an unknown location (*UCAN* Feb. 2, 2015; www.china.ucanews.com Jan. 31, 2015). For more information, see the article in *China heute* 2015, No. 1, pp. 4-5 (in German).

February 2, 2015:

Two members of the “Church of the Almighty God” executed for murder

Zhang Fan and her father Zhang Lidong were executed in Shandong, after the Supreme People’s Court confirmed their death sentences imposed by a court in Yantai on October 11. Father and daughter were charged with murder and with undermining the implementation of the law by a cult. According to Chinese media reports, the two, together with three other people, had killed a woman on May 28, 2014 in a McDonald’s restaurant in Zhaoyuan, after she had refused to give them her phone number.

On December 10, 2014, two other followers of the “Church of the Almighty God,” Zhang Shuzhi and Geng Yuqin, were sentenced in Liaoning to prison terms of seven and four years respectively. According to *Xinhua*, they were “core members” of the group. In mid-August of 2014, the Ministry of Public Security reported that nearly 1,000 suspected members of the “illegal cult” of the “Church of the Almighty God” had been taken into custody in June (*AFP* Feb. 2, 2015; *Xinhua* Dec. 10, 2014; Feb. 2, 2015; see: *RCTC* 2014, No. 4, p. 15).

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.

February 4, 2015:

Wenzhou City has 8,579 registered sites for the practice of popular belief

This means that in Wenzhou (Zhejiang Province) there are significantly more popular religion sites registered than sites of the “five major religions,” of which there are 3,961. These numbers were given in a report by the local Bureau for Religious and Ethnic Affairs about the adoption of the city’s 2013–2020 plan for sites for religious and popular belief activities. The report, which appeared on February 2 on the SARA website, referred to Wenzhou as “one of China’s great religious cities.” It said that the 2013–2020 plan, based on statistical and other research, deals with the distribution of sites for religious and popular belief activities and their inclusion in urban planning by setting aside reserved space in new residential areas and in the remodeling of the old town.

In early January of 2015, the city government of Wenzhou adopted two directives for the registration and allocation of registration numbers to sites used for popular religion. At the provincial level, the government of Zhejiang on September 22, 2014 adopted “Views on strengthening the management of popular belief affairs.” The province is in the process of preparing a legal provision for the registration of popular religion sites (www.sara.gov.cn Oct. 4; Dec. 29, 2014; Jan. 7; Feb. 4, 2015).

February 12, 2015:

Christian Solidarity Worldwide: During 2014 more than 400 crosses were dismantled in Zhejiang – The trend seems to be decreasing

The organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) published an interactive “timeline” on February 12 illustrating the problem of Protestant and Catholic church-tower crosses and church buildings demolished by the authorities in Zhejiang Province during the year 2014. It contains notices of demo-

lition, demolition actions and other actions by the authorities as well as reactions among Christians such as their petitions and protests, each with a link to the relevant media reports. According to the organization, more than 400 crosses were removed, demolished, modified or covered up in Zhejiang during 2014. 35 churches and church-owned buildings were either partially or wholly destroyed. More than 100 people were arrested, detained or summoned in connection with these incidents and 38 were beaten up and/or injured. As *UCAN* was able to determine, the CSW timeline shows that the highest number of incidents occurred between April and July 2014. One Catholic source told *UCAN* that the campaign seemed to be waning, although the situation is still very sensitive and the government is now regulating the permissible dimensions of crosses on church buildings (www.csw.org.uk/zhejiangtimeline; www.china.ucanews.com March 3, 2015; *UCAN* Feb. 13, 2015).

For more about the problem of cross and church demolitions in Zhejiang, see: *China heute* 2014, No. 2, pp. 72-75, 91-93; No. 3, pp. 143-145, 165-170 (in German).

February 15, 2015:

Pope Francis greets the people of East Asia for Lunar New Year

At the end of the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said: "I address a wish for serenity and peace to all the men and women who, in the Far East and in various parts of the world, are preparing to celebrate the Lunar New Year. This celebration offers them a propitious occasion to rediscover and live fraternity in an intense way. It is a precious bond of family life and the foundation of social life. May this annual return to the roots of the person and of the family help those Peoples to build a society characterized by interpersonal relationships, respect, justice and charity" (www.w2.vatican.va Feb. 15, 2015).

February 19, 2015:

Chinese New Year – In 2015 the start of the “Year of the Goat” also marks the beginning of the Church’s annual Lenten season

The eve of the Chinese New Year (February 18) fell on Ash Wednesday this year. In order to allow Catholic Christians in East Asia to celebrate this important family festival, the bishops in the various countries – as is usual in such cases – granted the faithful a dispensation from the usual obligation to fast and to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Taiwan called on the faithful to substitute the day's usual fast and abstinence with deeds of charity. Throughout Mainland China local parish congregations organized visits to elderly people, to those living alone, to the sick and to the needy in their communities (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Feb. 28.; March 7, 2015).

February 24, 2015:

Radio Free Asia: County governments in Qinghai prevent Tibetan monks under the age of 19 from returning to their monasteries

According to a report from *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*, authorities in two counties of the Haixi (Tsonub) Mongol and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in China's northwestern Qinghai Province have blocked young Tibetan monks who were home visiting their families for the Lunar New Year from returning to their monasteries. *RFA* learned that authorities held meetings with parents in the two counties on February 23 and told them that their children, who had been studying in distant monasteries, would not be allowed to return to their monasteries after the Lunar New Year, but would instead have to continue

their education as lay students in ordinary local schools. In particular, young monks under the age of 19 seem to be the ones targeted by the measures.

In a similar move, the authorities in Driru (Biru) County in Nagqu Prefecture, located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, announced in October of 2014 that all monks under the age of 12 were to be sent back from the monasteries to their families – reported *RFA*. Also in Jomga County in the neighboring Prefecture of Chamdo, according to an *RFA* report of October 24, 2014, families were told to bring home any of their family members who were studying in monasteries in Qinghai and Sichuan – especially in the large Buddhist study centers of Larung Gar in Serthar County and Yachen Gar in Palyul County in the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province. *RFA* believes that these measures are aimed at limiting the size of the monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism (*RFA* Oct. 24, 2014; Feb. 24, 2015).

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