

News Update on Religion and Church in China June 12 – October 5, 2017

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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 2017, No. 3, pp. 3-21) covered the period March 28 – July 7, 2017.

General – Politics, Human Rights

July 13, 2017:

Death of the Chinese Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo



Memorial Mass for Liu Xiaobo in the Holy Cross Church in Hong Kong. Photo: UCAN.

Chinese dissident and Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo died of cancer at the age of 61 years in a hospital in Shenyang. At the time of his death, Liu Xiaobo was serving a long prison sentence, handed down on December 25, 2009, because of his critical writings. He was due for release in 2020. As co-author of the so-called “Charter 08,” Liu was accused and convicted of the crime of “subversion of state power.” In October of 2010 the Norwegian Nobel Prize Committee awarded him the Nobel Peace Prize in appreciation of his “long and non-violent struggle for fundamental-human rights in China” (see *China heute* 2017, No. 3, pp. 144-145 [in German]).

August 18, 2017:

China forces removal of 315 articles from the mainland website of the journal *The China Quarterly*, published by the Cambridge University Press (CUP)

According to the *South China Morning Post*, Tim Pringle of *The China Quarterly*, which is published by the Cambridge University Press, said that the censors in mainland China could be trying to “Kill

a chicken to scare a monkey.” Many of the articles removed have to do with controversial events of China’s modern history such as the great famine of 1959-1961; the Cultural Revolution; the Tian’anmen incident of 1989. The offending articles apparently represent views deemed unacceptable to China’s leadership. Pringle said that the Chinese government had no interest in having their views questioned and wanted above all to avoid any internal discussion on these topics within China itself. In addition to articles dealing with the modern history of the Mainland, the regime also demanded the removal of articles about Hong Kong and Taiwan, such as an article by University of Hong Kong assistant professor Sebastian Veg on “Civic identity in post-handover Hong Kong.”

In their August 18 announcement of the regime’s demand to block content of *The China Quarterly* on their online platform in Mainland China, the editors of the CUP said that in future they and other editors would certainly be receiving more such requests from China to remove material deemed objectionable by the regime. It later became known that the *Journal of Asian Studies*, another journal put out by the CUP, has also been called on to remove certain content on topics sensitive in China. The CUP rejected the demand. In a follow-up statement on August 21, the editors of the CUP wrote that they have only temporarily blocked the articles of *The China Quarterly* in order to gain some time for reflection. The editors make it clear that they are not thinking of changing their publication policies. According to the CUP, “academic freedom is the overriding principle on which the University of Cambridge is based,” so therefore, the press has removed the temporary block which prevented access to the aforementioned 315 articles (*South China Morning Post* Aug. 19, 22; CUP Information for the Media Aug. 18, 21).

September 26, 2017:

Interpol holds its 86th General Assembly in Beijing

President Xi Jinping said at the opening ceremony that China would like to cooperate with the governments and all national and international police organizations, in order to hold high “the banner of cooperation, innovation, rule of law, and win-win situation and strengthen cooperation in police affairs and security.” – The Mercator Institute for China studies (MERICS) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) confirm that China’s participation in the global security industry has been increasing noticeably. This is all part of a global strategy designed to make China a global player in security matters and is furthermore designed to combine with China’s economic and business interests in areas such as the Middle East. Meng Hongwei, China’s Vice-Minister for Public Security, is the current President of Interpol. According to *Xinhua* (September 27), the cooperation of the Chinese with Interpol has been a resounding success. *Xinhua* quotes Tim Morris of Interpol as saying that China is making an outstanding contribution to Interpol. Precisely at the level of criminal investigation, China contributes large amounts of data, and also has access to the 17 databases of this organization made up of 190 countries. Human Rights Watch, however, points out that this greater connectedness could also provide the conditions for China to make arbitrary use of Interpol’s mechanisms, something which could lead to the detection and arrest of political adversaries of China. The *South China Morning Post* reported in this context that China would now be making more and more use of the so-called “red notices,” a form of international arrest warrant (*China Global Security Tracker* Oct. 4; *Xinhua* Sept. 11, 26, 27; Oct. 8; *Renmin ribao* Sept. 27; *South China Morning Post* Sept. 25; MERICS China Monitor No. 36 “China in der internationalen Polizei- und Justizzusammenarbeit” Sept. 14).

Religious Policy

July 5 / October 9, 2017:

Senior cadres expelled from party for, among other things, “superstitious activities”

On July 5, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the Chinese Communist Party announced that Wang Yingcheng, former President of the People's Insurance Group of China Ltd., one of the largest state-owned insurance companies, has been expelled from the party and stripped of his office after being accused of violating party discipline and of corruption. According to the CCDI, Wang had lost his faith in communism and was practicing “superstitious activities.”

On October 9, the CCDI announced the expulsion from the party of He Ting, the former police chief of Chongqing. In addition to charges of wastefulness and abuse of office, he too was accused with involvement in “superstitious activities.” A number of other party members have already been expelled due to similar accusations since the beginning of Xi Jinping's “anti-corruption campaign” (*chinadaily.com.cn* Oct. 10; *South China Morning Post* Oct. 9; *Xinhua* July 5; Oct. 8).

July 15, 2017:

Writing in the party journal *Qiushi* on “religious work,” Wang Zuo'an states that party members may not believe in religion

The article of Wang Zuo'an, director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), aimed at religious authorities and their employees at all levels, bore the title: “To Properly Carry Out Religious Work, It Is Necessary to Emphasize Politics.” He exhorted them to abide by official policies in their work. According to Wang, the broad masses of cadres working within religious affairs departments must have a solid political awareness that closely matches that of the Party's Central Committee. In important matters and important decisions concerning religious policy, they should report to the Central Committee but should not make arbitrary decisions or publicly make known their personal opinions. While they are to creatively implement the policies of the central leadership depending on the local situation, they are not simply to do whatever they wish using a specific local context as a pretext. Wang calls for high vigilance in view of the fact that in recent years among the high-ranking cadres punished for disciplinary and legal reasons, there were those who “do not believe in Marxism, but in religion.” According to Wang, party members and cadres must not only hold fast to the principles of Marxist atheism, they must also propagate these principles, especially among young people.

According to *Global Times* (which is under the auspices of *Renmin ribao*), Su Wei, a professor at the party school in Chongqing, said that the prohibition of religious faith will be permanent for all party members. He added that, however, its enforcement in the Ningxia Autonomous Region of the Hui, in Xinjiang of the Uighur Autonomous Region and in the Autonomous Region of Tibet would probably require more effort [than elsewhere] (*globaltimes.cn* July 18; *Qiushi* July 15 according to *www.sara.gov.cn/old/ldxx/wza/ldjh/398923.htm* and BBC Monitoring).

July 26, 2017:

***Xinhua*: Police in Zhejiang Province arrest 18 members of the “Church of the Almighty God”**

According to *Xinhua*, a police officer in the County of Changxing said that most of those arrested had exhibited signs of depression. In addition, the cult leader exercised spiritual control over them and had manipulated them into donating large sums of 10,000 Yuan or more, he said. Eight of the suspects have now been “reeducated” and have renounced their cult beliefs, according to the report (*Xinhua* July 26).

The “Church of the Almighty God,” founded in the 1990s and 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. For years the sect has been trying to win over members from among the faithful of the various Christian communities. Since it came out all across China towards the end of 2012 with doomsday prophecies, and after a murder in a McDonald’s restaurant in Zhaoyuan in May of 2014, the authorities have been cracking down on the group in a massive fashion.

August 3, 2017:

***Epoch Times*: Falun Gong followers are often released without charge**

The *Epoch Times*, a newspaper sympathetic to the Falun Gong movement, has reported, with reference to the Falun Gong’s website Minghui, that since beginning of 2017 at least 54 Falun Gong practitioners had been released without indictment, after the courts, the public prosecutor or the police had decided not to pursue charges. The *Epoch Times* attributes this to sympathy for Falun Gong among some local authorities. Despite this fact the persecution continues, the *Epoch Times* said, adding that, according to Minghui, 117 Falun Gong followers were given prison sentences in April of 2017 and 78 followers were sentenced to prison in May of 2017 (*Epoch Times* Aug. 3).

September 6, 2017:

Forum on “Chinese Culture and the Sinicization of Religions” held in Beijing

The forum was organized as part of the celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of the Academy of Chinese Culture at the Central Institute of Socialism in Beijing. Among the attendees were the leaders of the national organizations of the five officially recognized religious bodies as well as a number of representatives from academia. According to reports in *Xinhua*, Master Xuecheng, Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, said that in order to achieve thorough sinicization, each religion would have to break through its original cultural background and the original system for the interpretation of its teachings and rebuild a Chinese system of teachings rooted in the soil of Chinese culture. The *Global Times* quoted Bishop Ma Yinglin, Chairman of the official Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference, as stating that the Chinese Catholic Church was in the process of preparing a five-year plan for its sinicization. Shen Guiping, a religious expert at the Central Institute of Socialism, told the *Global Times* that sinicization means sinicizing every aspect of Christianity, including its doctrines, cultural customs, morality and culture.

Articles on the theme of sinicization appear continually in the official journals of the five religions, as well as in academic publications specializing in religious studies. In an article appearing in *Tianfeng*, a publication of the official Protestant bodies, the religious scholar Zhuo Xinping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences associated the sinicization of Christianity with the concept of the “community of destiny of the Chinese nation” (*Global Times* Sept. 7; *Tianfeng* 2017, No. 8, pp. 4-5; *Xinhua* Sept. 6).

September 7, 2017:

Revised “Regulations for Religious Affairs” are announced, effective February 1, 2018

On August 28, 2017, the State Council of the People’s Republic of China adopted a revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” (*Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli* 宗教事物条例). The revised text of the norms was made public on September 7, 2017. On February 1, 2018, the revised regulations will replace the existing version, which was initially adopted in 2004 as the first comprehensive legislative measure governing the State’s interaction with the respective religions of China. The revised version of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” is significantly longer than the previous version. Commentators see greater control over the religions as the main goal of the revision. On September 9, 2017, the “Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations” was convened in Beijing to study the revised document (for more information, see *China heute* 2017, No. 3, pp. 140-143; an English translation can be found at www.chinalawtranslate.com/宗教事务条例-2017/?lang=en section).

September 22, 2017:

Updated State sponsored anti-cult website goes online

The website “China Anti-Cult Network” (*Zhongguo fan xiejiao wang* 中国反邪教网, www.chinafxj.com) was set up by the Office for Prevention and Handling of Cult Issues under the auspices of the State Council. According to the website’s own statement of purpose, its goal is to educate and inform about the nature and danger of cults, to explain the relevant laws and to offer advice and help to victims and their relatives. New features include a search function in which relatives of missing persons can fill out information about those missing, as well as an area where cult-related incidents can be reported. In addition, visitors to the site can participate in the online signature campaign “Say no to cults!” The Anti-Cult Network also runs official WeChat and Weibo accounts. According to a report from *Sixth Tone*, the website had previously been managed by the China Anti-Cult Association (chinafxj.cn Sept. 22; sixthtone.com Sept. 25).

A number of particular religious groups are banned in China as “heretical cults” (*xiejiao*) and are actively persecuted by the forces of order. Many of them are of Christian inspiration, such as the “Church of the Almighty God.” The China Anti-Cult Association came into existence in connection with moves to suppress the Falun Gong movement starting in 1999.

Buddhism

June 26, 2017:

Liuzu Temple signs statement of intent to support newly established “Center for Buddhist Studies” in Göttingen

As reported in the daily newspaper *Göttinger Tageblatt*, Abbot Dayuan of the Liuzu Temple in Zhaoqing (Guangdong Province) has signed a statement of intent to support the recently inaugurated “Center for Buddhist Studies” in Göttingen. Axel Schneider, Director of the “Asian Seminar” and Deputy Director of the Center for Modern East Asian Studies at the University of Göttingen, said that for the past 20 years now Buddhism is once again on the rise in China and that for many Chinese it offers a “stable reference point” in troubled times. According to the Liuzu Temple website, local German dignitaries and representatives from international institutions in 15 different countries were present at the inauguration of the center.

Carsten Krause of the University of Hamburg, where the Liuzu Temple also supports cultural events on the Chan school of Buddhism, spoke of the Chan Buddhists’ determination to adapt to the modern age and therefore also to promote research into Buddhism and its practice in Europe. At present, the Liuzu Temple is also building a Chan Buddhist meditation center in Katlenburg-Lindau, in Germany. The *Göttinger Tageblatt* quoted the Dharma Mistress Wuru as saying that she believed that Germans could learn meditation techniques there, with the aim of living a “healthier, freer and more joyful life.” Quoting Mistress Wuru, the *Tageblatt* said that Buddhism should bring “happiness and joy” to Germany “like the spring breeze” (*Göttinger Tageblatt* June 26; hrzh.org [Website of the Liuzu Temple] June 29).

July 14, 2017:

Tibet Post International: Petition against transformation of the Kumbum Monastery (Ta’ersi) into a tourist attraction

A committee, composed of both monks and lay people, has submitted a petition to the county administration of Rushar (Chinese: Huangzhong) in the City of Xining (Qinghai Province), expressing their opposition to the plans which the government has been developing for the monastery, reports the *Tibet Post International* (Dharamsala). According to the report, the government’s plans include turning the monastery, which is one of the most important monasteries of the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism, into a museum and major tourist attraction, something which would make religious practice very difficult. The petition of the committee, as quoted by *Tibet Post International*, says: “As this historical site gets turned into a business, it will make paying religious homage to this site difficult. For our history, we cannot allow these plans, and we should be able to make homage and visit the monastery as we like” (thetibetpost.com July 14).

August 20, 2017:

Key positions of Larung Gar Buddhist Academy and Monastery are being filled by Party cadres

In the Buddhist Academy of Larung Gar, situated in the County of Sertar, Autonomous Tibetan Prefecture of Kardze (Sichuan Province), where before 2016 approximately 10,000 followers of Tibetan Buddhism lived and studied, senior leadership positions reportedly have been filled by six Party cadres.

res. The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) in Dharamsala reports that the announcement of this shakeup was made public by officials of the Autonomous Kardze Prefecture on August 20, 2017. According to this report, a party committee was established at the Buddhist Academy. The deputy director of the Bureau for Public Security of the Kardze Autonomous Prefecture, Dapka, has been appointed president and party secretary of the academy. The deputy party secretary of the Sertar County, Sonam Choepel, became director of the women's monastery and party secretary of that monastery's management committee. TCHRD writes that the administrations of the academy and the women's monastery have been separated from one another and that their respective number of residents will from now on be limited to 2,000 monks in the academy and 3,000 nuns in the women's monastery. These measures correspond to a June 2016 government directive, which has been made public by Human Rights Watch, containing a multi-phased plan for the "correction and rectification" of the Larung Gar Academy. In the unfolding of this plan, according to Free Tibet, since July of 2016, more than 4,800 persons have been expelled from the academy and about 4,725 housing units have been demolished. By May of 2017, according to the TCHRD, construction of roads and tourists attractions had begun on the land as it was freed up by the expulsions and demolitions.

According to Free Tibet, in Yachen Gar, another large Buddhist educational institution in the Kardze Prefecture, on August 10, 2017, the authorities ordered the demolition of 3,500 dwellings. Free Tibet reports that since 2008 approximately 3,000 to 5,000 persons have been expelled from Yachen Gar (freetibet.org Aug. 24; hrw.org June 9, 2016; TCHRD Aug. 23; see: *RCTC* 2016, No. 4, pp. 3-4).

September 2017:

District Court in Brighton imposes heavy fine on Buddhists after "mercy release" (*Fang Sheng* 放生) of non-native crustaceans

The English daily newspaper *The Guardian* has reported that on September 25, 2017, the District Court in Brighton convicted two London Buddhists, Li Zhixiong and Li Ni, of having released live animals into the environment. The Buddhist ritual of *Fang Sheng* 放生 or "mercy release" of animals has its origins in the 3rd century AD. It is believed that through this ritual a person can merit good Karma by releasing into nature live animals which had been destined for slaughter. In 2015, following the visit of Master Hai Tao, a Buddhist teacher from Taiwan and animal welfare movement activist, a group of about 1,000 Buddhists, assembled in Brighton and performed a mass release of live animals into the English Channel there. According to the Court, the two London Buddhists, in the performance of this *Fang Sheng* ritual, had released 700 crustaceans into the sea at Brighton. These were crustaceans not native to the English Channel which could pose a threat to the resident native species. In reading his opinion, the judge said that it was impossible at present to foresee the impact of such a release on local populations. He then fined the two more than £ 28,000.

Such release actions are not at all uncommon. According to *The Guardian's* sources, in Taiwan alone, some 200 million wild animals are released into the wild in *Fang Sheng* rituals every year. *The Guardian* quotes the Humane Society International (HSI) that this ritual "... has become an industry built on the capture and supply of wild animals." "Mercy release," *The Guardian* reports, has often nothing to do with "mercy," since the animals often are kept under poor conditions and many even die not long after they are released into the wild. In addition, many of the animals released belong to non-native, invasive species, which can endanger native species of that habitat (*The Guardian* Sept. 23, 25).

Daoism

September 24, 2017:

Daoist ritual on football pitch in attempt to bring success to home team

On September 24, in Zhengzhou (Henan Province), shortly before the game between Henan Jianye and Shandong Luneng, 15 Daoist priests in traditional black robes performed a Daoist ceremony in favor of the host team, complete with prayers and burning incense sticks, in front of an altar-like platform decorated in yellow which had been set up on the football pitch. The ceremony, coming on the heels of a three-month long series of defeats, seems to have brought immediate success. It, however, drew a sharp blast of criticism from the Chinese Football Association for using the football pitch for religious activities. According to the *South China Morning Post* and *AsiaNews*, which reported the incident, the club responded with a press release in which it said that they “stand firmly against any superstitious activities” on the pitch and promised to correct the “mistakes.” Although understanding was expressed for fans who wanted to see them stay in the Super League, the club regretfully admitted: “Victory cannot be gained through prayers.”

This was not the first time that a club experiencing a lousy season turned to the gods for help. Last July, Guangzhou R&F repainted their entire stadium gold, including the seats and the walls. Just half a year before, the entire building was painted blue according to the colors of the club. The idea was that by doing so, the stadium’s *fengshui* would be improved. In fact, since the makeover, the team hasn’t lost a single home game, not even against their local archrival Guangzhou Evergrande (*AsiaNews* Sept. 27; *South China Morning Post* Sept. 26; <http://stadiumdb.com>).

Islam

June 12, 2017:

Hui-Muslim in Xinjiang sentenced to two years in prison for operating a WeChat prayer group

On March 10, 2017, the People’s Court of Yili, in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, sentenced Huang Shike, a member of the Muslim Hui nationality, to two years in prison in the second instance for “illegal use of the information network.” The case came to light after the court’s ruling was uploaded on June 12 to the site www.wenshu.court.gov.cn (China Judgements Online), an online database of the Supreme People’s Court. According to the judgment, Huang had founded the WeChat group “Muslim Prayer” in June of 2016, in which he (using sound recordings) prayed together with the participants and once gave instructions for prayer to a participant. More than 100 people, mainly family members and friends, were part of the group. In a different WeChat group which also had more than 100 members, Huang – so the court verdict maintained – once explained what the Qur’an teaches about the meaning of the Festival of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha). The court argued as follows: Huang knew that there were many people in that WeChat groups; that a WeChat group is not a site for religious activities; and that one may not carry out any religious activities in places which are not sites for religious activities. By nevertheless establishing WeChat groups in which he carried out discussion and instruction of religious texts and other illegal religious activities, Huang disturbed the normal administrative order of religious activities, the court said (*AP* Sept. 12; text of the court’s sentence in Chinese and English: <http://wenshu.court.gov.cn/content/content?DocID=6740b8cd-bad8-4fae-b59c-a78c00c7e475>; <https://uyghuramerican.org/article/man-jailed-providing-islamic-instruction-tencent-s-wechat-messaging-service.html>).

September 1 & 2, 2017:

Muslims in China celebrate Eid al-Adha, annual Festival of Sacrifice

As they celebrated Eid al-Adha, the annual Muslim Festival of Sacrifice, China's Muslims saw a wide-spread, and even international, participation at the festival. The website of the official Chinese Islamic Association provides the following numbers: In the mosques of Shanghai, altogether 9,360 worshippers were counted at the Festival's prayers. 4,000 Muslims from China and from abroad, including believers from Indonesia, Turkey, Malaysia and Germany, came to pray at the historic Niujie Mosque in Beijing. More than 10,000 domestic and foreign Muslims gathered at religious sites of Yiwu, a city in the Province of Zhejiang with a large settlement of Muslim businessmen. According to *Xinhua*, Muslims in the northwestern provinces of Ningxia, Xinjiang and Gansu were given five non-working holidays so they could take part in the Festival.

On August 31, the Chinese Islamic Association hosted a reception in Beijing's Xinjiang Mansion Hotel to mark the festival. Among those attending the reception were high-ranking politicians, such as a Politburo member and Second Deputy Prime Minister Liu Yandong, as well as Sun Chunlan, head of the United Front Department of the Communist Party of China. Representatives from embassies of a number of Muslim countries were also present (*chinaislam.net.cn* Sept. 1, 4, 7; *Xinhua* Sept. 1).

September 10, 2017:

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports on large reeducation camps built to eliminate extremism in Xinjiang Province

The above mentioned New York-based human rights organization reports that authorities in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang have, since last April, forcibly detained thousands of Uighurs and members of other Chinese Turkic (Muslim) ethnic groups in "re-education camps," forcing them over the course of months to learn the Chinese language, to recite the text of laws and to chant slogans such as "Religion is harmful!" HRW said this information came from relatives of the detainees. The human rights agency reports that also the state media in Xinjiang Province, such as the *Xinjiang Daily* newspaper, have reported on the camps, referring to them as "training courses for the elimination of extremism" or "training centers for education and transformation." According to *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*, at least 3,600 people are currently being detained in such camps in Ghulja (Chinese Yining) County and in Korla (Ku'erle) City. As reasons for detention, those interviewed by *RFA* cited participation in illegal religious teachings, having foreign connections or having travelled abroad (including unauthorized participation in the Hajj); others detained were suspected of religious fundamentalism, such as men with long beards, or were parents who send their children to illegal underground religious schools. *RFA* said that its own investigations suggest there is a network of reeducation camps throughout Xinjiang, with most of them being in the south of the region. HRW notes that these reeducation camps are similar to the measures taken in Tibet towards the end of 2012. Chen Quanguo, Party Secretary of Xinjiang since August of 2016, who is considered to be a hardliner, had filled the same post in the Autonomous Region of Tibet at the time of the reeducation measures there (HRW Sept. 10; *RFA* Sept. 11, 29).

September 20, 2017:

Last group of pilgrims from the People's Republic returns home from the Hajj

Official statistics of the Chinese Islamic Association, which organizes the annual pilgrimage, indicate that this year more than 12,000 pilgrims from all around the People's Republic of China took part in the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. The government does not allow any other group or travel agency to arrange these trips. Saudi Arabia, the host country, is responsible for deciding the quotas of pilgrims from each country. The official numbers of Hajj pilgrims from the PR China in past years are as follows: for the years 2016, 2015 and 2014, 14,500 pilgrims per year; in 2013, there were 11,800; in 2012, 13,800; in 2011, 13,700; in 2010, 13,000 (chinaislam.net.cn 22.09.; RCTC "News Updates").

Christianity

August 29, 2017:

UCAN reports on growing frequency of bans on religious education of children

Recently, there have been a growing number of disturbing reports that more and more local governments are prohibiting children and adolescents from attending Christian worship services and summer camps. "An emergency notice from the higher authorities strictly forbids all secondary and primary school teachers, students and toddlers to join Catholic or Protestant churches," declared a bulletin sent to all primary schools, adult educational institutes and kindergartens within the school district of the city of Yonglin in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province. A local Catholic woman, who identified herself by her baptismal name of Maria, told *UCAN* that her daughter's teacher had sent parents an audio and written message by way of their chat group asking them not to bring their children to the church. "The teacher indicated the education bureau issued that instruction while adding that an inspection team would launch open and undercover investigations on Sundays to find out how many children went to church." *UCAN* reports that the Ou Hai district in Wenzhou also issued a similar notice that children were not allowed to attend churches. "Minors receiving religious education and formation too early in churches would seriously affect the normal implementation of the education system," the notice said.

In Wuhai in the Diocese of Bameng in Inner Mongolia the authorities banned a summer camp, the same happened in Suqian in the Diocese of Xuzhou in Jiangsu Province, where the priest responsible for the program lodged a formal complaint with the Party Secretary of the city.

According to Chinese media reports, authorities in Changsha, the provincial capital of Hunan Province, organized an "emergency video conference" in June to discuss the stabilization of work in the education system. As part of that, Liang Guochao, head of the Education Bureau, stressed making a "decisive effort to prevent religions infiltrating into schools and to guide students to consciously resist religious cults so as to make the campus a piece of pure land." In July in neighboring Henan Province a document "Separating Education from Religion" was issued giving strict instructions.

It is unclear, with what consistency these policies will be implemented throughout China, since in quite a few other places the churches can generally still organize and run activities such as summer camps, often, however, "low-key" so as not to draw too much attention from the authorities (*UCAN* July 13; Aug. 29; Sept. 25).

Protestantism

September 5–6, 2017:

“The Reformation and the Development of Society” – International forum in Beijing to mark 500th anniversary of Protestant Reformation

The Center for the Study of Christianity at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, in conjunction with Beijing’s two Protestant associations – the Beijing Christian Council and Three-Self Movement Committee – organized a scholarly forum to mark the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Representatives of various governmental bodies as well as high-ranking representatives from different religions such as Islam and Buddhism attended the event. In a total of 25 different presentations, academics from China and abroad took advantage of the occasion to reflect on themes such as the relationship between Church and state, pluralism and sinicization (ccctspm.org September 12).

Isabel Hess-Friemann

September 20, 2017:

Henan Province: First forcible removal by authorities of a cross from a church steeple

The news agency *UCAN* reports that the church which was involved in this incident was Holy Grace Church, a duly registered Protestant church in Tanghe County in the City of Nanyang (Henan). The cross burst into flames while it was being removed from the steeple and a video with images of the burning cross was circulating online. Ying Fuk-tsang of the Divinity School of the Chinese University of Hong Kong told *UCAN* that as far as he knew, this was the first forced removal of a church cross in Henan Province.

UCAN went on to report that in the Diocese of Luoyang (Henan), the Catholic Church in the old town, which belongs to the underground Catholic community, had also been ordered by the authorities to remove its cross (China Aid Sept. 20; *UCAN/La Croix* Sept. 22).

In Zhejiang Province between 2014 and 2016, 1,600 crosses were forcibly dismantled by the authorities from church steeples and roofs. There have also been some reports of crosses being torn down in Jiangxi Province.

Catholic Church

July 8, 2017:

Former Cathedral of Xiamen Diocese now included in UNESCO’s World Heritage list

At its 41st session in Krakow, Poland, the World Heritage Committee voted to add the Chinese island of Gulangyu, belonging to Xiamen in the eastern Chinese province of Fujian, to its list of World Heritage sites. Among the 51 notable sites on the island which merit World Heritage status is the former Catholic Christ the King Cathedral, once the cathedral of the Diocese of Xiamen. The granting of World Heritage status coincides with the 100th anniversary of the Cathedral, which is located in the

center of Gulangyu Island. The church was built in 1917 by the Spanish Dominican Bishop Mamaunel Prat, O.P. Today, the Church of our Lady of the Rosary in the city of Xiamen serves as the cathedral, since most of the diocese's Catholics live there and Gulangyu Island itself is only accessible from the mainland by ferry.

After the Opium War of 1842 and the subsequent Treaty of Nanking, many Western traders settled on the island of Gulangyu. From 1903, Gulangyu was a foreign concession and still has many colonial buildings built in a variety of architectural styles. According to UNESCO, the island has been an "important window for Sino-foreign exchanges." The Franciscans introduced Catholicism to the island as far back as 1313. Xiamen was raised to the status of an Apostolic Vicariate in 1883 (*UCAN* July 18; www.blog.chinareise.com July 12).

July 19, 2017:

Gathering to commemorate 60th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA)

In the Great Hall of the People a commemorative ceremony took place, attended by about 200 people, among whom were the deputy head of the United Front Department of the Communist Party of China, Zhang Yijiong; the director of the State Administration of Religious affairs, Wang Zu'an; the leadership of the Patriotic Association and other Catholic representatives, among whom were numerous bishops, as well as representatives of the four other state recognized religions. Yu Zhengsheng, chairman of the Political Consultative Conference, then welcomed the participants and offered congratulations on behalf of the Central Committee and the State Council. Yu said that with the establishment of the CCPA 60 years ago the Catholic Church of China had officially taken the path of independence, autonomy and self-government, as well as adapting to socialism.

The news agency *UCAN* noted that the ceremony had been rather subdued in format, and that perhaps out of consideration for the ongoing Sino-Vatican talks the term "commemoration" rather than "celebration" had been used.

The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, a so-called mass organization, was founded on August 2, 1957 at the instigation of the Chinese government. Both the CCPA and the Chinese Catholic Bishop's Conference, which was founded in 1980, are subordinate to the National Assembly of Representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church and have the principle of independence [from the Vatican] enshrined in their statutes. None of these three entities are recognized by Rome. Similar official mass organizations exist for the other four State-recognized religions (*AsiaNews* July 24; chinacatholic.cn July 21; *UCAN* July 21; *Xinhua* July 19). A German translation of the actual statutes of the CCPA is available in *China heute* 2017, No. 2, pp. 86-92 and online at www.china-zentrum.de.

August 13, 2017:

Death of Bishop emeritus Silvester Li Jiantang of the Diocese of Taiyuan, Shanxi Province

Bishop Li – recognized by both the Vatican and by the Chinese government – was born on December 23, 1925 and ordained priest in 1956. He spent the years from 1966 to 1980 in a reform-through-labor camp (textile factory). Upon his release he was finally able to return to his diocese where he worked in the parish of Dong'ergou. He was ordained bishop in 1994. From 1996 to



Bishop Silvester Li. Photo: *UCAN*.

2008, Bishop Li belonged to the Board of Directors of the Seminary of Shanxi, serving as its Rector from 2000 to 2001. The seminary was closed in 2012. Bishop Li also founded the minor seminary of Taiyuan as well as the Sisters' convent of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. In 2010, he ordained Fr. Meng Ningyou as his coadjutor bishop (successor). Bishop Li officially retired in 2013.

Bishop Li was laid to rest on August 19 in the Church cemetery in his native village of Dong'ergou. On August 17, Bishop Meng celebrated Bishop Li's Requiem Mass, with Bishop Peter Wu Junwei of Xinjiang (Yuncheng) concelebrating. Approximately 5,000 of the faithful attended the Mass.

The Diocese of Taiyuan has approximately 80,000 Catholics (*AsiaNews* Aug. 14; *www.chinacatholic.org* Aug. 13; *Fides* Oct. 6; *UCAN* Aug. 18).

August 14, 2017:

Death of Bishop Paul Xie Tingzhe of Urumqi



Bishop Xie Tingzhe with Fr. Werenfried van Straaten 1994. Photo: China-Zentrum archives.

The underground Bishop Paul Xie Tingzhe of Urumqi, in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, has died at the age of 86. Although recognized only as a priest by the government, he was nevertheless able to move about relatively freely within China. – Bishop Xie was born on January 2, 1931 in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, and entered the minor seminary of Lanzhou in 1945. In the late 1950s, still a seminarian, he was arrested and interned because he refused to join the Patriotic Association. He spent the years from 1961–1979 in a reform-through-labor farm in Urumqi. Following his release in 1980, he was ordained a priest. He chose to stay in Urumqi to serve the Church there. He was ordained in secret as the Bishop of Urumqi in 1991. In 1994, during a trip abroad, Bishop Xie was able to meet with Pope John Paul II. Bishop Xie had a great missionary spirit and was an active Internet user, where he had his own blog. He also sang Latin songs with young people in his chat group.

After the death of Bishop Xie, the authorities ordered – as reported by *UCAN*, and citing the testimony of one underground Catholic – that the funeral ceremony was to be held within two days of his death and that the ashes were to be buried no later than 30 minutes

after the completion of the cremation. This prevented believers from distant locations from paying their last tribute to their bishop. The authorities only permitted one diocesan priest to preside at the Mass, and one over the burial rite. *UCAN* also reported that two other diocesan priests were not permitted to concelebrate Mass and the 22 other diocesan priests were forbidden even to leave their parishes.

The Diocese of Urumqi numbers about 9,000 Catholics living among a predominantly Muslim population (*AsiaNews* Aug. 14; *Fides* Oct. 6; *UCAN* Aug. 18).

September 2017:

Catholic priest of Shenyang sentenced to 18 months in prison

Father Fei Jisheng, 40, from the official Diocese of Liaoning, was sentenced to 18 months in jail for the alleged theft of donations to a Church-run retirement home in Gaizhou. He had already been arrested on October 18, 2016, while visiting a convent of Sisters in Fushun. The Vicar General Dong Hongchang from Shenyang said at that time, the real reason for Fr. Fei's arrest was the success of his "Apostolic

Classes,” which are considered illegal by the government. Bishop Pei Junmin of Liaoning has tried without success to negotiate with the provincial Bureau for Religious Affairs as well as with the United Front Work Department. The government considers the case sensitive so Fr. Fei was not allowed any visits and the court proceedings against him were held behind closed doors. The case is apparently related to the dismissal of the deputy director of the Catholic nursing home in Gaizhou, Han Weixing, whom Fr. Fei had suspected of corruption. Apparently, Han had denounced Fei to the religious authorities and to the Public Security Bureau for illegal evangelization activities.

One other person, the layman He Xianmin, was sentenced together with Fr. Fei, although he was only given one year’s probation. Together, Fr. Fei and Mr. He Xianmin were ordered by the court to pay to the Catholic Church in Gaizhou a sum of 121,200 Yuan by way of compensation. Fr. Fei has been under surveillance for a long time and had earlier been detained for a month, in June of 2016, on the charge of evangelization activities outside the boundaries of his own diocese.

Fr. Fei’s program, the “Apostolic Classes,” began in 2007 and by now has spread throughout China, especially in the provinces of Liaoning and Hebei. The course is actually a combination of Protestant-style missionary work combined with elements borrowed from the Catholic Charismatic Movement. According to an interview with Bishop Han Yingjin of Sanyuan (*RFA*) in October of 2016, Fr. Fei said that many local priests failed to understand his work, including initially a number of bishops (*AsiaNews* March 29; *UCAN* Oct. 31, 2016; March 27, Sept. 21, Oct. 12; *rfa.org* Oct. 28, 2016).

September 11, 2017:

Kidnapped Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou gives signs of life via WeChat from Beijing hospital

The “underground” bishop of Wenzhou, Bishop Shao Zhumin, not recognized by the government, was taken away by authorities on May 18, 2017, and since then his whereabouts have remained unknown. In a surprising WeChat message on September 11, he wrote to thank everyone for their prayers, particularly for the success of “today’s operation,” and suggested that it now would not be convenient to try to visit him in Beijing. One Church source told *UCAN* that the bishop had undergone an ear operation in the Tongren Hospital in Beijing. In the weeks that followed, there was no further news about his whereabouts. He is under increased pressure from the authorities since he automatically succeeded his predecessor, Bishop Zhu Weifang, as bishop in September of 2016, following Bishop Zhu’s death. In June of 2017, both the German Ambassador in Beijing and the Vatican publicly issued calls for his release (*AsiaNews* Sept. 9; *UCAN* Sept. 12). See: *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 11-12 and 18-19.

September 25, 2017:

Death of Bishop Matthew Hu Xiande of Ningbo

The 83 year old Bishop of Ningbo in Zhejiang Province was recognized by both the Vatican and the Chinese Government. He died in hospital due to cancer. His funeral took place on September 28. Hu Xiande was baptized in 1949 and the following year entered the minor seminary in Ningbo, completing his theological studies at the major seminary in Shanghai. He spent the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in his home town and was able to resume his studies in 1985. That same year, Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, SJ, ordained him to the priesthood. In 2000, Bishop Josef Ma Xuesheng of Zhoucun (Shandong) ordained him Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Ningbo. At the death of his predecessor in 2004 he was installed as the Ordinary of the diocese. The Diocese of Ningbo has approximately 30,000 Catholics and 24 priests (*UCAN* Sept. 26).

Sino-Vatican Relations

July 27, 2017:

Vatican Secretary of State, Pietro Cardinal Parolin, speaks of the emergence of new challenges and a “spirit of healthy realism” with regard to the dialogue with China

Cardinal Parolin, who in his capacity as the Vatican’s “chief diplomat” is involved in the Sino-Vatican negotiations, spoke in an interview with the Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* of the diverse contacts of the Catholic Church with the world of Asia over the centuries (e.g. with China via the Silk Road). He continued:

“Certainly, compared to past times, now new challenges have cropped up that call for unprecedented and creative responses [...]. Specifically, the Catholic Church asks that it is guaranteed the right to freely profess one’s faith for the benefit of everyone and for harmony in society. Catholics wish to live their faith serenely in their respective countries like good citizens [...]. In this framework, I think that the path of dialogue taken up by the governments of some countries of the region should be welcomed, including China. Dialogue in itself is already a positive fact [...]. We face it in a spirit of healthy realism, knowing well that the destiny of humanity is, above all, in the hands of God” (*ilsole24ore.com* July 27).

August 3 and 5, 2017:

Chancellor of Pontifical Academy of Sciences to China’s *Global Times*: “China and the Pope have a very good relation” – Participation in Conference on organ donation in Kunming

“We need to make a distinction between a formal agreement and the real things,” said Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo in an interview with the party-friendly *Global Times*. “The real thing is that at this moment China and Pope have a very good relation[ship].” Bishop Sorondo was taking part in a conference in Kunming on August 5 on the theme of organ donation and organ transplants. Prior to the conference he had been staying in Beijing. The *Global Times* mentioned him in several articles, including one in which he was quoted as saying: “China could be a model we need today to respond to globalization, a model for the dignity and freedom of human being, a model for the eradication of the new kind of slavery – organ trafficking.”

In February of 2017, the invitation extended to representatives of China to a conference in the Vatican on organ trafficking, organized by the Papal Academy of Sciences, unleashed a great deal of criticism outside of China. Human rights organizations accuse China of extracting organs from executed prisoners and imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners. On January 1, 2015, a new regulation came into effect in China, according to which only organs of voluntary donors may be used for transplants (*China Daily* Aug. 7; *cruxnow.com* Aug. 4; *Global Times* Aug. 3, 5; see: *RCTC* 2015, No. 2, p. 5; 2017, No. 2, p. 18).

August 19 / September 1, 2017:

South China Morning Post sees Sino-Vatican relations as deadlocked, *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* interprets interviews

“The Vatican’s efforts to heal a decades-long rift with China appear to have stalled, with each side still unwilling to accept controversial bishops appointed by the other,” wrote the *South China Morning Post*

(SCMP). “Recently, the news we hear is not so good,” Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM, of the Verbiest Institute in Leuven told the SCMP. Normally, Fr. Heyndrickx is positively inclined toward the efforts at dialogue.

The *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* (HKSE) saw Cardinal Parolin’s talk about “new challenges” in his interview of July 27 (see above) as an indicator of difficulties in the relations. The HKSE points out, however, that Bishop Sorondo had been treated “with unusual politeness” by the *Global Times*. Given the fact that Bishop Sorondo is not the Vatican official actually responsible for China, he almost certainly received the key points for his interview from higher up in the Vatican, the HKSE said, adding as its interpretation of these media appearances that “maybe there are two parties running to retrieve a few kites they have flown in the past” (SCMP Sept. 1; SCMP Aug. 19).

August 23, 2017:

Fr. Sergio Ticozzi, PIME, in *AsiaNews* on the doubt and confusion among Chinese Catholics

Fr. Ticozzi, of the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong, spoke about worries that had been expressed in conversations he had during his most recent visit to the Mainland – worries experienced by many persons from both the official as well as the unofficial parts of the Church, who sincerely wish to remain true to the faith. According to Ticozzi, they are worried about the cunning pressure the authorities are exercising through enticements as well as through suppression and even violence in order to control the official part of the Church, as well as about the attempt to eradicate the unofficial Church by mandatory registration. There is also confusion caused by “opportunists and two-faced people” within the Church itself, Ticozzi said. Some priests of the underground Church further had asked him whether it was true that Rome had accepted the government’s policy of the total elimination of the underground Church, and whether it was still necessary to refuse to join the Patriotic Association. Some hoped, perhaps unrealistically, that an agreement between China and the Vatican might possibly put an end to their worries, while others just close themselves off in their little communities, Ticozzi said, concluding that the Church in Mainland China really needs the support of the universal Church (*AsiaNews* Aug. 23; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Sept. 2).

September 28, 2017:

Archbishop Savio Hon, Secretary of the Pontifical Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Propaganda Fide), appointed Nuncio to Greece

During a time when the tensions between China and the Vatican had come to a head, the Hong Kong Salesian priest and theologian Savio Hon Tai-Fai, was called on December 13, 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI to take a role as second in command at the Vatican congregation responsible for the missionary outreach of the Catholic Church, which has jurisdiction over the Church in China. Formerly “Propaganda Fide,” it is now known as the “Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.”

Hon is the first and only Chinese to have been appointed to a leading position in the Roman Curia. When it came to the question of Vatican negotiations with China, Hon tended to lean more to the side of caution. On February 20, 2011, in a talk to Hong Kong Catholics, he argued that the Vatican should not be making too many concessions for the sake of obtaining normalization, because that would introduce the danger of distorting the nature of the Church. In this respect, he was seen as being close to

the position taken by his Salesian confrere Joseph Cardinal Zen Ze-kiun, SDB, retired Archbishop of Hong Kong. *AsiaNews* wrote that Hon has always insisted that the guidelines laid down by Pope Benedict XVI in his letter to the Chinese Church must be followed, a position which, according to *AsiaNews*, has won him sympathy among Mainland Chinese Catholics of the underground who perceive the current Sino-Vatican dialogue as a threat to their survival.

In June of 2016, Archbishop Hon was sent for several months as Apostolic Administrator to the Archdiocese of Agaña (Guam). The journalist Robert Mickens of *La Croix* sees Hon's appointment to the position of Nuncio to Greece as an indication that Pope Francis, in the difficult approaches being made to China, wishes to have around him as his assistants those who can fully support his strategy which has been compared by some to the "Ostpolitik" of Pope John Paul II (*AsiaNews* Aug. 28; *La Croix* Sept. 29; *UCAN* Feb. 21, 2011; Sept. 28).

Early October 2017:

In *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Joseph Shih, SJ, calls for "reciprocal tolerance" between the regime and the Church in China and refers to Ma Daqin as a "Chinese Bishop with a healthy realism"

The interview with Fr. Joseph Shih, SJ, former longtime head of the Chinese department of Radio Vatican, who has once again been living mainly in Shanghai since 2007, appeared in the October number of *La Civiltà Cattolica* – a journal whose articles must first be authorized by the Vatican Secretariat of State prior to publication.

The now 90-year old Jesuit said the fundamental values of socialism, if considered without prejudice, were not incompatible with the Gospel. "The Chinese government is communist. This is something that won't change for a long time. Yet the Church in China has to have some kind of relation with the Chinese government. What relation? Opposition? That would be suicidal. Compromise? No, for it would mean the Church loses her own identity. So the only possible relation is that of reciprocal tolerance," Shih argued. "In fact, if the Holy See were opposed to the Chinese government, the Church in China would be forced to choose between the two and would necessarily choose the Holy See. So the Church would be intolerable in the eyes of the Chinese government. We could ask: but if the Holy See were not opposed to the Chinese government, would the latter tolerate the Church in China? We can only say that the Catholic Church in China exists and functions. This means that tolerance is already experienced in some form."

Fr. Shih also talked about the case of Bishop Ma Daqin of Shanghai, who has been under house arrest and unable to function as bishop since his public withdrawal from the Patriotic Association in 2012. Bishop Ma has since published a statement of remorse and has publicly concelebrated Mass with Zhan Silu, an illegitimate bishop, which, according to Shih, was seen by Western media as a "change of direction" and a "betrayal." But Shih said: "I know Bishop Ma Daqin very well. He has not changed direction, nor has he surrendered; I think rather that he has 'reawakened' [with regard to the relationship between Church and State in China]." "Thaddeus Ma Daqin is a Chinese bishop with a healthy realism" (<https://laciviltacattolica.com/free-article/the-church-and-the-chinese-government-an-interview-with-fr-joseph-shih/>; *UCAN* Oct. 5).

October 2, 2017:

Bishop Shen Bin in the *Vatican Insider*: “In China nobody wants a Church separated from the Pope”



Bishop Shen Bin in Münster, Germany.
Photo: China-Zentrum.

Appointed by the Pope and recognized by the government, Bishop Shen Bin stated: “We have understood long time ago that in China, to carry on, it is convenient not to oppose the government, and sometimes we have to (it is convenient to) distinguish between ecclesial matters, matters of faith on one side, and economic and administrative issues, which in itself do not affect the deposition of faith, on another side.” Regarding the Church he said: “None of us has ever thought about separating or distinguishing ourselves from the universal Church, or to walk on different paths from the one on which the universal Church is walking.” Shen supports the dialogue process between China and the Vatican and describes the faithful in the underground as “brothers in the one Church” (see the text of the interview in [www.lastampa.it/2017/10/02/vaticaninsider/eng/inquiries-and-interviews/shen-bin-](http://www.lastampa.it/2017/10/02/vaticaninsider/eng/inquiries-and-interviews/shen-bin-in-china-nobody-wants-a-church-separated-from-the-pope-3aCQ1jBCy3IXMDzqApCd0I/pagina.html)

[in-china-nobody-wants-a-church-separated-from-the-pope-3aCQ1jBCy3IXMDzqApCd0I/pagina.html](http://www.lastampa.it/2017/10/02/vaticaninsider/eng/inquiries-and-interviews/shen-bin-in-china-nobody-wants-a-church-separated-from-the-pope-3aCQ1jBCy3IXMDzqApCd0I/pagina.html)).

Bishop Shen is one of the Deputy Vice-Chairmen of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, as well as of the official Chinese Bishops’ Conference and, according to *UCAN*, is considered to be the currently most influential man in the official part of the Church.

Gianni Valente of the *Vatican Insider* has already interviewed a whole series of Chinese bishops from the unofficial as well as from the official parts of the Church on the same topic.

October 5, 2017:

Vatican “Foreign Minister” declares commitment to partnership with Taiwan – 75 years of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Republic of China

In a speech at a banquet in Taiwan celebrating the Republic of China’s National Day, Vatican Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher, said the Vatican will remain a committed partner of Taiwan and will support any constructive dialogue in which Taiwan engages other countries on issues of world peace and the ultimate benefit of humanity. Matthew S. M. Lee, Ambassador of the Republic of China to the Holy See, said in his remarks at the banquet that Taiwan appreciates its 75 years of relations with the Vatican; the shared values of freedom of religion and world peace were a sound basis for the future of the bilateral relations (*CNA* Oct. 5 citing focustaiwan.tw June 19).

On October 23, 1942, the Vatican’s *L’Osservatore Romano* had announced the beginnings of diplomatic relations with the government of Chongqing, Chinese capital during the Second World War (see: www.catholic.org.tw/en/Latest/latest045Diplomatic.html).

Hong Kong

July 14, 2017:

Hong Kong: Churches affirm joint translation of the dialogue document “From Conflict to Communion”



Cardinal Tong and Bishop Cheung add their signatures to affirm the Chinese translation of the document “From Conflict to Communion.” Photo: *UCAN*.

In a solemn ceremony Cardinal John Tong of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong and Bishop Cheung Chun-wa of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong have signed an agreement to endorse an ecumenical translation of the document “From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017.” A ceremony and a common prayer service were held on July 14 at the Catholic Cathedral in Hong Kong. Several hundred people took part in the service, including representatives of other Protestant denominations. The document had originally been published as a report of the Lutheran-Roman

Catholic Commission on Unity in 2013. A joint team of translators began work on the document in 2016; the Chinese translation was published in early July of 2017. Two Chinese editions of the text are combined in one single book, one for the Lutheran, the other for the Catholic Church. This double edition was necessary due to traditionally different terms, for example, in the Chinese translations of names. This was the second translation project of the two Hong Kong churches following the translation of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (1999) which was finalized in 2014 (*UCAN* July 20; 2017gemeinsam.de).

July 31 / August 1, 2017:

Change of Bishops in Hong Kong



Cardinal John Tong (left). Photo: John Pontifex.
Bishop Michael Yeung (right). Photo: *UCAN*.

On July 31, 2017, following a three-year extension of his tenure as Bishop of Hong Kong beyond the usual retirement age of 75, John Cardinal Tong officially resigned his office and became “Archbishop Emeritus” on his 78th birthday. Cardinal Tong had been at the helm of the archdiocese for eight years. On August 1, 2017, Coadjutor Bishop Michael Yeung took over the leadership of the Diocese. During Cardinal Tong’s eight years in office, he had to face up to a whole series of political and social challenges. Again and again he expressed his hopes for a good outcome of the Sino-Vatican talks.

Bishop Yeung has good relations with the new head of the Hong Kong Government, Carrie Lam, a practicing Catholic. On August 5, Mrs. Lam participated in the ceremonies marking Bishop Yeung's taking possession of his Cathedral. In a press conference the day following his inauguration, the Bishop declared concern for the poor and abandoned in society as one of his chief priorities. He also stressed that the Church in Hong Kong wishes to serve as a "bridge" between China and the Vatican (*AsiaNews* Aug. 1, 2; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* July 22, 29; Aug. 12; *RCTC* 2017, No. 1, pp. 17-18; *UCAN* July 28). – For additional information, see *China heute* 2017, No. 4, pp. 143-144 [in German].

Taiwan

June 25, 2017:

Taiwan's President thanks Indonesian Muslim migrant workers

On the occasion of the Muslim feast of Eid al-Fitr, the "Breaking the Fast" which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, President Tsai Ing-wen thanked the many Muslim migrant workers from Indonesia – both men and women – for their substantial contribution to the economy of Taiwan and for the cultural enrichment which they brought to Taiwan's civil society. In a video presentation, she highlighted Taiwan's fundamental openness to other cultures and the country's commitment to equal rights for all ethnic groups present in Taiwan. For a long time already, the government has been striving to create a friendlier environment by means of the ongoing *halal* certification of restaurants, the establishment of convenient prayer rooms and by making available suitable public spaces for the celebration of Muslim festivals. In addition, the city of Taipei held its own festival, at which Taipei's Mayor, Ko Wen-je, handed out 600 green envelopes containing good luck gifts of money to the participants.

According to statistics, at the end of June 2017, among the 653,804 migrant workers in Taiwan from the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and elsewhere, Indonesia with its 192,809 women and 60,188 men represents by far the largest contingent.

Willi Boehi

July 12, 2017:

Taiwan: honorary citizenship for Fr. Luis Gutheinz SJ

The Austrian Jesuit received the citizenship of the Republic of China on Taiwan on the initiative of the Government of New Taipei City. Born in Tannheim, Tyrol, in 1933, Fr. Gutheinz has lived in Taiwan since 1961, with some interruptions. From 1974 to 2005 he was Professor of Systematic Theology at the Theological Faculty of Fu-Jen Catholic University in Taipei. He is a bridge builder and has paved the way for the emergence of a Chinese theology. He also achieved great merit in the field of ecumenism and for his work with lepers both in Taiwan and on mainland China. Following a change in the law, foreigners who have made special contributions to Taiwan, can now obtain Taiwanese citizenship without having to give up their nationality of origin (personal correspondence; www.forum-weltkirche.de/de/personen/16641.luis-gutheinz-sj.html).

July 19, 2017:

2017 Summer “Universiade” Games placed under the protection of the Goddess Mazu

Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je and other city representatives, as well as responsible members of the Executive Committee, prayed to the Goddess Mazu on July 19 in the Guandu Temple West of Taipei for a good outcome of the 29th Summer Universiade. The Universiade – world class sports competition for university students – was the largest event of Taipei ever and took place from August 19–30, 2017. Previously, the Mayor had announced that he would eat only vegetarian food for one month, a general practice, if the prayer is one of special concern. In the run up to the Universiade games, police detained a significant number of illegal immigrants, mainly from African countries.

Willi Boehl

July 23, 2017:

Taipei: Protests against an alleged government imposed “incense ban” in Taiwan’s temples

In Taipei, 10,000 people took to the streets spurred on by the rumor of possible “prohibition of incense” in Taiwan’s temples. The rally, in which mainly Daoists and believers in folk religions participated, took place on July 23 in front of the Presidential Office Building, following false reports in the media, according to which the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) was planning to do away with the use of incense. Officials contradicted the report, saying that the intention was to obtain some reduction in the use of incense, but not its total prohibition. Among the demonstrators were representatives of about 100 different temples.

In mid-June, the EPA had presented a policy explaining that, due to current levels of air pollution, it would be a good idea to restrict the use of incense. Li Yinyuan, head of the EPA, said that, on average, every year an estimated 24 tons of incense are burned in Taiwan. In fact, among other goals, the government was hoping to limit the use of cheaply made incense imported from Mainland China and Vietnam. For some time now, several temples have reduced or completely forbidden the use of incense. In August, Minister Li also called on Taiwanese to switch to more environmentally friendly practices during the “Ghost Festival” of September 5th, in which paper money is burned, among other things. During “Ghost Month,” which began this year on August 22, private households as well as corporate locales offer gifts and burn paper money in honor of the ancestors and the deceased (*Taipei Times* Aug. 22; *UCAN* July 26).

September 29, 2017:

Fu Jen Catholic University inaugurates new hospital

The new hospital was inaugurated on September 29. The ceremony began with a Eucharistic Celebration presided over by Archbishop Peter Liu Cheng-chung of Kaohsiung. Cardinal Peter Turkson, Ghanaian Prefect of the newly erected “Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development” preached the homily. He stressed the mission of doctors and the nursing staff to accompany with their care those patients, who would often be classified by contemporary culture as “useless.” Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon, Myanmar, as well as the Vice-President of Taiwan, Chen Chien-jen, a Catholic, also took part in the ceremonies. The work on the new hospital began in 2011. According to

remarks by Fu Jen Catholic University President Vincent Chiang Han-sun, who is himself a doctor, the university's intention is "to become Taiwan's best medical research center."

In 1933, the Divine Word Missionaries in Beijing had taken over the Catholic Fu-Jen University from the Benedictines and worked hard from the beginning to build up a medical school, among other things, due to a significant lack of doctors and nursing staff in all parts of China. Unfortunately, due to various obstacles and the seizing of power by the Communists in 1949, the project could never be completed. It was taken up once again after the re-establishment of Fu Jen Catholic University on Taiwan in 1961. The College of Medicine was finally opened in 1990, followed by further medical departments. For lack of a hospital, practical training in nursing and medicine was difficult, especially since there was no major hospital in the district. During the inauguration ceremonies, the Mayor of New Taipei, Eric Chu, said that the hospital, "in addition to precious and advanced medical research will also offer a great service to serve the surrounding areas of Xinzhuang and Taishan" (*AsiaNews* Sept. 30; on "Das Vorhaben einer Medizinischen Fakultät an der Fu-Jen-Universität in Peking" [The Project of a Medical Faculty at Fu-Jen University in Peking] see the article by Karl Josef Rivinius in *China heute* 2015, No. 4, pp. 249-261 [in German]).

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