

News Update on Religion and Church in China March 26 – June 28, 2019

Compiled by Willi Boehi, Katharina Feith, Isabel Friemann (China InfoStelle),
Jan Kwee, Gregor Weimar SVD and Katharina Wenzel-Teuber
Translated by David Streit SVD

The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2019, No. 2, pp. 3-20) covered the period November 14, 2018 – March 29, 2019.

Politics in General

June 2, 2019:

China breaks its silence over Tian’anmen

AsiaNews said that after a speech at the 18th Asia Security Summit in Singapore (May 31–June 2), General Wei Fenghe, the Chinese defense minister, commented on one participant’s question about the use of military force at Tian’anmen Square 30 years ago. According to *AsiaNews*, this is the first time that Beijing has publicly commented on the events of June 4, 1989. It quotes General Wei as saying that he does not understand why people continue to say that China has not handled the events correctly. “That incident was a political turbulence and the central government took measures to stop the turbulence,” he said. As a result, stable development in China became possible for the next three decades. The *South China Morning Post* added that General Wei used the same principle to justify China’s re-education camps (“vocational training centres”) in Xinjiang.

At the same time, *AsiaNews* reported that the software in the censorship system had been further developed in the run-up to June 4 in order to be able to better control content on the Internet for that day. In addition, mothers of victims and activists of Tian’anmen would continue to be kept under observation. In this context, *UCAN* reported on a conference of Taiwanese scholars and advocates of democracy (May 18–20 in Taiwan) who want to counter China’s increasingly successful use of its so-called “sharp power” (the ability of governments to manipulate public perceptions of certain themes) to influence the presentation and awareness of the Tian’anmen and other events in the world. According to Larry Diamond, a political sociologist from the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and others, it would be a threat to democratic societies if China were to succeed in its manipulation (*AsiaNews* May 22, 30; June 3; *South China Morning Post* June 3; *UCAN* May 24).

Religious Policy

April 18, 2019:

The five recognized religions adopt a call for patriotic activities on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the state

At the 8th session of the “Joint Conference of National Religious Organizations” in Beijing, official religious leaders, for the occasion of the upcoming 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (October 1), adopted a “Joint Initiative for Launching Patriotic Education and Educational Activities Among Religious Circles Under the Main Theme of ‘Strengthening the New Era, Building the Chinese Dream Together.’” Among other things, the religious masses should be guided in establishing a correct picture of history and in strengthening their identification with the great fatherland and the Chinese Communist Party, the Joint Initiative says. Another topic of educational activities should be the observance of laws: there should be no places, people or religions that are outside the law, the religious leaders propose in their joint document. In this context, they also call for adherence to the principle of independence, autonomy and self-government and the [constitutional] principle that “Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.” The sinicization of the religions was another item on the educational program (<http://zytzb.gov.cn> April 19).

May 24, 2019:

The Communist Party’s United Front Department of Hubei reports on the successful propagation of the “Four Enter,” “Eight No’s” and “Three on the Wall” campaigns in religious sites of the Province – This includes “No illegal admission of minors”



Church house with priest’s residence in the Diocese of Sanyuan, Shaanxi Province, 2019. The six round cartouches on the wall of the house contain the 12 socialist core values. Photo: Archives.

According to a report on the website of the Central United Front Department, these actions were launched in 2018 and have now been implemented in 90% of the sites for religious activities in Hubei Province. The “Four Enter” (四进) campaign was already reported in 2018 (see *RCTC* 2018, No. 3, pp. 8-10, 12; No. 4, pp. 6-7). Under this campaign, the national flag, constitution and laws, socialist core values and the outstanding traditional Chinese culture should enter every religious site. According to the report, “Eight No’s” (八无) means that in religious sites there are to be no illegal publications, no superstitious activities, no expensive incense offerings,

no false Buddhist or Daoist monks or nuns, no irregular holding of training courses, no irregular admission of minors (无违规吸纳未成年人), no neglect and no commercial activities. “Three on the Wall” (三上墙) refers to three texts that have to be displayed on the wall in all religious sites; these texts are the “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” “Socialist Core Values,” and “Standards for the Creation of Harmonious Temples, Mosques, and Churches.”

The Xugu Subdistrict of Wuhan City, Hubei Province, held a meeting on April 3 to regulate not only the sites for religious activities but also the ancestral halls (祠堂). According to a report on the local government’s website, during the meeting it was said that all ancestral halls in the subdistrict have to “remove the religious atmosphere, develop traditional culture and create a red cultural front” (chinacatholic.cn May 27; hubei.church.com May 31; m.chinainlam.net May 24; whxinzhou.gov.cn April 4; zytzb.gov.cn May 24).

May 27, 2019:

The Party gathers religious leaders in Confucius’ birthplace to honor “the outstanding traditional culture of China”

On May 27, a five-day course on “Study and Experience of Outstanding Chinese Culture” attended by 100 religious representatives from all over China was opened. Organizer of the course was the Central Unit Front Department (UFD) of the Communist Party of China, the venues included the homes and temples of the philosophers Confucius and Menzius. The opening session was addressed by Wang Zu’an, Vice-Minister of the United Front and Director of the National Religious Affairs Administration, as well as chairpersons or vice-chairmen of the national umbrella organizations of the five religions. According to a report on the UFD website, this was “the country’s first ever collective honor paid to China’s outstanding traditional culture by religious leaders, and it was also a common expression of the high degree of identification and conscious merging with China’s culture.” Among the educational objectives for the religions mentioned in the UFD article are classical virtues such as benevolence, honesty, justice and filial piety, but above all well-known demands of religious policy such as patriotism and adherence to leadership by the party. The principle of the independence of religions and the resolute resistance to foreign infiltration by means of religion were repeatedly emphasized (*Tongzhan xinyu* as reported on lhtzb.cn May 27; Associated Press May 28).

June 19, 2019:

Global Times reports visits by religious leaders to sites of the Communist revolution on the occasion of 70 years of People’s Republic

Islamic representatives from Shaoyang in Hunan Province visited Jinggangshan Mountain, the “cradle of the Chinese revolution,” and then visited Mao’s hometown of Shaoshan, wrote the *Global Times*, a newspaper close to the Party. The paper cited a report by the Chinese Islamic Association that said Muslims should “learn about China’s revolutionary past and cherish the present happy life that was bought with the blood and lives of countless martyrs.” According to the *Global Times*, other Hubei religious representatives also made such “patriotic education tours”: Daoists in April, Buddhists and Christians in June (*Global Times* June 19).

June 25, 2019:

AsiaNews publishes Letter of Commitment issued by the Fujian authorities to be signed by persons in charge of religious sites – No admission of minors, no unauthorized foreign contact

By signing the document, religious leaders must promise, among other things, to keep minors from entering the church; not to organize courses for them and to avoid contact with foreign powers; not to accept appointments from abroad, not to provide accommodation to foreigners and not to travel abroad without permission. In addition, all forms of dissemination of the faith outside approved sites for religious activities (including through the Internet) are prohibited. The document does not seem to be specific to a particular religion.

Fr. Bernardo Cervellera, editor of *AsiaNews*, described the document as a “startling example” of the Chinese government’s policy of isolating priests and bishops from both the official and unofficial Churches from the universal Catholic Church and “chain[ing them] to the party wagon, which, though bestowing a minimum freedom of worship (controlled!), strips them of all momentum of evangelization.” According to Cervellera, this is happening not only in Fujian, but also in Henan, Hubei and Zhejiang (*AsiaNews* June 25).

For the Chinese text and an English translation of the “Letter of Commitment for Responsible Persons and Religious Personnel of Sites for Religious Activities” see www.asianews.it/news-en/Suffocating-the-Chinese-Church-with-independence,-while-applauding-the-China-Vatican-agreement-47373.html.

Folk Religion

April 9, 2019:

Xinhua Daily reports the demolition of more than 5,900 “illegal” shrines to Tudigong

According to the *Xinhua Daily*, 5,911 “illegal” shrines of the earth god Tudigong (土地公) were demolished in the city of Gaoyou in eastern Jiangsu Province between February and March. *BBC Monitoring* talks about this as part of a six-month “local clean-up campaign,” and carries a quote from the *Xinhua Daily* from government official Yan Jianjiang. He said that, basically, the shrines were built illegally and were taking up a large amount of rural farm land and urban public facilities. The *Global Times* mentions in its report that aside from the illegality of the buildings, the cost of maintaining such temples played a role in the decision to demolish them. The paper quoted the deputy mayor of Ganduo, Gaoyou, as saying that a temple could cost as much as 480,000 yuan (about 62,000 euros). He added that the construction and maintenance of such a “luxury temple” would be a great financial burden for the faithful.

Despite these justifications by the government, there was outrage over the demolitions on the part of many Chinese social media users who, according to *BBC Monitoring*, loudly protested that while “foreign” religions were apparently tolerated, their “own” popular religions were suppressed and disregarded (*BBC Monitoring* April 16; *Global Times* April 18; *Xinhua Daily* April 9).

Daoism

April 26–28, 2019:

The team of the project “Modern Construction of a System of Daoist Teachings” begins its work

According to a report posted on the website of the Institute of World Religions (IWR), the project “Modern Construction of a System of Daoist Teachings” (道教教义体系的现代建构) was initiated by the Chinese Daoist Association; it is headed by Lu Guolong, a researcher of the IWR located within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. According to this report, the project working group met for the first time from April 26–28 in Beijing. The working group discussed the compilation of comprehensive interpretations of the Daoist scriptures, the teachings, the rites and a general history of Daoism, which is apparently the task with which the group has been charged. As the report explains, Daoist thinking accumulated throughout history is complex, therefore there is a need for the construction of a new system to adapt Daoism to modern society. Throughout Daoism’s history there have been numerous efforts to systematize Daoist teaching, the report claimed; it will be the task of the project to “comb through” the extensive system and give its teachings an ordered coherence. Daoist doctrine should be reinterpreted, in continuation with Daoist tradition, yet always maintaining an openness to the achievements of modern science, said the report (*Zhongguo minzu bao* May 7 from www.iwr.cass.cn).

June 7–8, 2019:

Representatives of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) attend celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of the “Daoist Church of Italy” – Daoist-Catholic encounters

The CDA’s five-member delegation was headed by CDA Secretary General, Master Zhang Fenglin. It had been invited by Vincenzo di Ieso (Daoist name Master Li Xuanzong), leader of the Chiesa Taoista d’Italia, which was celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Part of the jubilee program (see: <http://daoitaly.org/25--anniversario-della-fondazione.html>) in the morning of June 7 was the “First Catholic-Daoist Seminar in Europe” on the theme of “Religions at the Service of Humanity.” It took place at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy in Naples, which was also co-organizer. In the afternoon, an International Daoist Congress was held. At the Congress, among others, was Feng He, head of the International Department of the CDA, who spoke on the state of preparations of the CDA for the establishment of a World Taoist Federation (世界道教联合会).

The next morning there was a “diplomatic encounter” of the international Daoists with the Archbishop of Naples, Crescenzo Cardinal Sepe, who from 2001 to 2006 was Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. There followed a Daoist liturgy with instruction in the Daoist “Temple of the Great Harmony” in Caserta. During the jubilee program, the Chinese delegation was joined by Karine Martin, Chair of the French Daoist Association, Pedro G. Murcia Casas, Vice-Chairman of the Daoist Association of Spain, and Lee Ziling, Vice Secretary of the “Taoist Mission” of Singapore (corrieredisannicola.it June 12; daoisms.org June 12.; gazzettadinapoli.it June 5; mzb.com.cn June 21). As early as 2017, during the 4th International Daoism Forum in Hubei Province, there was talk of establishing a World Taoist Federation, triggering different reactions; see *China heute* 2017, No. 2, p. 72 (in German).

Buddhism

March 27, 2019:

State Council publishes White Paper “Democratic Reform in Tibet – Sixty Years On”

March 2019 – depending on one’s point of view – saw the 60th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising, the flight of the Dalai Lama and the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese troops, respectively the “democratic reform” of Tibet. On this occasion, the State Council of the PRC once again published a “White Paper” on Tibet. Similar to the Tibet White Paper of the State Council of September 2015, it sets out the official Chinese view of events and achievements since then.

The *South China Morning Post* commented that China’s central government had still stated in the White Paper on the 50th anniversary of 2009 that it “will always keep its door open for the 14th Dalai Lama to return to a patriotic stand.” This is no longer the case in the new White Paper.

Chapter VIII of the new White Paper deals with “Protection of the Freedom of Religious Belief.” It states, among other things, that the “Living Buddha reincarnation” has been respected by the state and further institutionalized by the “Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas of Tibetan Buddhism” of 2007. By 2018, 91 incarnated Living Buddhas had been confirmed, the paper says (White Paper 2019 at http://english.scio.gov.cn/node_8011085.html; *South China Morning Post* March 28; on the Tibet White Papers of April 2015 and September 2015 see *RCTC* 2015, No. 3-4, p. 8, 38).

June 11, 2019:

Radio Free Asia: Thousands of monks and nuns expelled from the Tibetan Buddhist center Yachen Gar

According to Radio Free Asia (RFA), citing unidentified Tibetan sources, in May of 2019 a new wave of expulsions began in the monastic center of Yachen Gar, located in Pelyul County, Kardze (Chin. Ganzi) Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. An estimated 3,500 monks and nuns have since been forced by the authorities to leave the center, RFA reported. The expulsions mainly concerned monks and nuns who are not from Sichuan. 600 Chinese officials have been permanently stationed in the monastery complex, the report said.

According to *Buddhistdoor Global*, the Yachen Gar monastery and educational institute is linked to the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism and was founded in 1985 by Abbot Achuk Rinpoche (d. 2011), one of the highest ranking Nyingma masters in Tibet. Until a few years ago, an estimated 10,000 nuns, monks and lay practitioners are said to have lived there, including many Han Chinese.

As early as 2016 and 2017, expulsions from Yachen Gar were reported. In those years, 4,800 monks and nuns from the Buddhist academy and monastery Larung Gar in Sertar County, also Kardze Prefecture, were expelled and key posts of both institutions were filled with party cadres (*buddhistdoor.net* June 12; *rfa.org* June 11; see *RCTC* 2016, No. 4, pp. 3-4, and 2017, No. 4, pp. 8-9).

June 22, 2019:

Government recognized Panchen Lama is elected Chairman of the Buddhist Association of the Tibet Autonomous Region

As reported by *Xinhua*, the 29-year-old Panchen Lama Gyaltzen Norbu replaces Zhukang Tubdankezhub, who has held this position since 2003. Eighteen others were elected vice presidents. In mid-May

2019, the official Panchen Lama, together with a Chinese Buddhist delegation, traveled abroad for the first time – to Thailand (*Buddhistdoor Global* June 26; *China News Service* June 10 as reported at *BBC Monitoring* June 11; *Xinhua* June 24).

Gyaltzen Norbu was installed by the Chinese state in 1995 as the 11th Panchen Lama; the reincarnation recognized by the Dalai Lama, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, disappeared in 1995 and has not been seen since. The Panchen Lama is the second highest figure in the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama.

Islam

May 7, 2019:

***The Guardian*: More than two dozen mosques in Xinjiang have been completely or partially destroyed since 2016**

The newspaper based its report on an investigation by the *Guardian* and the research network Bellingcat. According to the newspaper, the locations of Xinjiang mosques, which had been identified with the help of former residents, researchers and mapping tools, were checked using satellite imagery. Of the 91 sites analyzed, 31 mosques and two large shrines had suffered significant structural damage between 2016 and 2018, the *Guardian* said. 15 of these mosques and the two shrines appear to have been completely or almost completely razed to the ground. Gate houses, domes or minarets had been removed from the other damaged mosques. According to the *Guardian*, the sites affected by the devastation include the Imam Asim shrine, a popular pilgrimage site, the Jafari Sadiq shrine and the mosque in the center of the old town of Kargilik in southern Xinjiang (*The Guardian* May 7).

June 12, 2019:

Chinese Islamic Association publishes revised rules on the administration of mosques and religious personnel – New code of conduct for imams

The four documents had already been passed “in principle” on January 7, 2019, at a meeting of the Standing Governing Board of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA). The 2006 versions of the “Measures for the Democratic Management of Mosques” (清真寺民主管理办法), the “Measures for the Accreditation of the Status of Islamic Religious Personnel” (伊斯兰教教职人员资格认定办法) and the “Measures for the Appointment of Key Religious Personnel of Sites for Islamic Activities” (伊斯兰教活动场所主要教职人员聘任办法) have been revised (revised texts can be found at www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/xhwx/201906/20-13290.html, www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/xhwx/201906/20-13287.html and www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/xhwx/201906/20-13288.html).

Newly written was a “Code of Conduct for Islamic Religious Personnel” (伊斯兰教教职人员行为守则) (www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/xhwx/201906/20-13289.html). It contains norms of behavior in seven pairs of terms, including “promoting the middle way, resisting extremism.” According to a CIA’s accompanying commentary, the four new documents are a concrete expression of adherence to the sinicization of Islam, which, like the socialist core values, entered into the documents as a new commitment under Xi Jinping (chinaislam.net.cn June 19; *Zhongguo Muslim* 2019, No. 1, pp. 9-10, 12).

Orthodox Church

May 29, 2019:

Meeting of the Russian-Chinese working group for contacts and cooperation in the religious sphere

The Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR) reported that the bilateral meeting took place in Moscow. On the Russian side, Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the DECR, V. Nazarenko, deputy head of the Russian Presidential Directorate for Foreign Policy, several representatives of the Council of Muftis in Russia, Dmitry Petrovsky of the DECR and others took part in the encounter. On the Chinese side, a delegation from the National Religious Affairs Administration led by Wu Guosheng came to the meeting. The delegation included representatives from China's Buddhist, Daoist and Islamic associations. It was the 7th meeting of this working group thus far. The 6th meeting took place on March 23, 2018 in Beijing, the first on June 8, 2011 in Moscow (mospat.ru May 30).

Protestantism

April 8, 2019:

Celebration of the 40th anniversary of the reopening of churches

April 8, 2019 was celebrated as the 40th anniversary of the reopening of Protestant churches in China after the Cultural Revolution. That day in 1979 in Ningbo the first church was allowed to held an official service. During a series of festivities, Pastor Wu Wei, President of the China Christian Council, as well as his deputy, Pastor Shan Weixiang, gave speeches. Mr. Kua Wee Seng, director of United Bible Societies China Partnership, also attended the events. The ordination of 39 local church workers became a highlight of the anniversary.

The Shanghai Christian Council released a book and film celebrating the 40th anniversary of the reopening of churches in co-operation with former chairman, Pastor Shen Xuebin, now vice president of the National Christian Council in charge of foreign relations, and in November 2018 newly elected chairman Ms. Pastor Xu Yulan. The book highlights the steady growth of the communities and the integration of many international denominations into the profile of the city (Shen Xuebin, *Tongxiang Shanghai jidujiaojie jinian gaige kaifang 40 zhounian*, Dec. 2018; Film *Shanghai Jidujiao*, Shanghai TSPM/CC).

The number 40 is of great symbolic significance for the churches in China and is interpreted as the blessing of the Holy Spirit. It stands in relation to the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic, which is also celebrated this year (chinasource.org April 16 according to *China Christian Daily*).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

April 24–26, 2019:

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, in China

At the invitation of the government authorities for religious affairs and the China Christian Council (CCC), a five-member delegation from the Anglican Church of England visited Beijing and Shanghai. It was the second trip to China by the Archbishop since his inauguration in 2013. At the request of his wife, Caroline Welby, a visit to the "Light of Grace-Nursing Home" run by the Shanghai Christian Council was on the agenda – both visitors and hosts emphasized the great task of future care

for the elderly in both countries. Pastor Wu Wei, President of the CCC, welcomed the delegation at a major exchange meeting at the headquarters of the national church leadership, a meeting which was also attended by senior cadres of the Shanghai Bureau of Religious Affairs. Other participants from the Chinese side included Pastor Kan Baoping, Pastor Shen Xuebin, Mr. Gu Mengfei, Deputy Secretary-General of the Three-Self Movement, and Ms. Gu Jingqin, Head of Overseas Relations. Pastor Wu explained how thoroughly Chinese Protestants in all churches are now studying the new Regulations on Religious Affairs and that they are actively traveling in the direction of Sinicization. Archbishop Welby said that the Christian world community can learn a lot from the Chinese Church. He invited his hosts to the Lambeth Conference in the summer of 2020 in Canterbury (*AsiaNews* April 11; ccctspm.org April 26, 29).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Mid-June 2019:

Pastor Wang Yi's wife released from custody

Jiang Rong, the wife of well-known human rights lawyer and evangelical pastor Wang Yi, who was arrested in December along with her husband and about 10 other community members of the Chengdu Early Rain Covenant Church, was released on bail in mid-June. A member of the parish, Mr. Li Xiaofeng, was released with her. Pastor Wang Yi is still in jail, as far as is known, without having access to a lawyer. Since no information is known about Jiang Rong's health, people close to her assume that she is under close scrutiny and cannot communicate freely. During the night of 9 to 10 December 2018, around one hundred people were arrested and interrogated by the police; most were released quickly (*AsiaNews* June 14; see *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 10-11).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

June 12-19, 2019:

Commission of the World Council of Churches meets in Nanjing

From June 12 to 19, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Faith and Order Commission met in Nanjing, invited by the China Christian Council. Over 50 participants from more than 30 countries met for exchange in three study groups on the topics of ecclesiology, moral judgment and justice and peace. Time for discussion followed. The China Christian Council has been a member of the WCC since 1991. Following a meeting of the Commission of Churches on International Affairs in November 2012 and a meeting of the WCC Executive Committee in November 2016, this was the third major conference of the World Council of Churches in China. In addition, in January 2018, a delegation of the WCC headed by Secretary-General Olav Fykse Tveit visited China to kick off the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the WCC (ccctspm.org June 25; oikoumene.org June 25; see *RCTC* 2018, No. 2, p. 14).

Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle

Catholic Church

March 26, 2019:

***Xinde (Faith Weekly)* reports on a new museum about the Catholic fishermen of Wuxi**

Already in March 2018, an exhibition hall on the culture of the Catholic fishermen of Wuxi (Jiangsu Province) was opened. As an article in the Catholic newspaper *Xinde* (Shijiazhuang) reports, most of

the Catholics of Wuxi were originally fishermen and lived in boats. Over time, they moved ashore and only a few are still engaged in fishing. As the old traditions threatened to be forgotten, it was important to preserve the ancient objects and photos of their earlier special way of life and the piety of Wuxi's Catholic fishermen, the article said. Therefore, the parish of Wuxi, led by their pastor Fr. Guo Mandong, decided to open a museum. In 2016, parishioners began to interview old people, collect objects and build a boat model. On March 1, 2019, Zhang Li, directress of the Propaganda Department of Liangxi District, Wuxi City, inspected the museum, gave it a positive rating and called for the preservation of Wuxi's intangible cultural heritage (*Xinde* 2019, No. 12, March 26).

April 2019:

Official bodies of the Henan Catholic Church begin applying new measures for the annual [especially political] review of the clergy – Removal from office of religious personnel found organizing courses for minors

A priest from Henan told *UCAN* that in April, the Catholic “Two Bodies” (Patriotic Association and Church Affairs Commission) of Henan Province contacted him to conduct a review. Related documents consist of “Measures for the Annual Review of Catholic Religious Personnel of Henan Province” (河南省天主教教职人员年度审核办法) with attached “Annual Assessment Form.” According to the form, the annual review covers the following areas: 1. Love for country and Church (evaluation criteria: adherence to Sinicization and the principle of independence); 2. moral quality (socialist core values, social morality); 3. respect of the laws; 4. compliance with Church regulations; 5. fulfillment of the duties of service; 6. theological knowledge; 7. health status; 8. service to society (cooperation with party and government, social services). For each area 10 or 15 points can be achieved, with the maximum total score of 100. A score of 55 and below means “unqualified.” The result of the examination is stamped in the official certificate for religious personnel. If a cleric (or religious Sister) achieves a score of “unqualified” two years in a row, he (or she) will temporarily be deprived of ministerial duties, according to the “Measures for the Annual Review.”

At the same time, *UCAN* reported that at a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Catholic “Two Bodies” of Henan on December 28, 2018, “Measures for the Administration of Catholic Religious Personnel of Henan Province” (河南省天主教教职人员管理办法) had been adopted. Paragraph 11 of this extremely restrictive document states that the status of a religious professional is to be revoked if one of 14 listed acts is present, including: 2. “did not participate in the review for religious officers”; 5. “held some kind of course or activity, such as holiday course, attended by minors”; 6. “violated the principle of independence, autonomy and self-government [...]”; 8. “without the permission of the religious authorities has unauthorizedly organized educational activities of any kind”; 9. unauthorized participation in studies, further education or conferences abroad or in courses organized by foreigners in China; 10. “has accepted the appointment to an ecclesiastical ministry by a foreign religious organization or individual (including foreigners in China).”

Both documents were available to *UCAN* and also to the editors of *China heute* and *RCTC*. Catholics from China told *UCAN* that these were currently “the most stringent administrative regulations for religious personnel throughout China” (*china.ucanews.com* April 26; *UCAN* April 30).

From April 2019:

Diocese of Mindong: Bishop Guo can officially celebrate the Chrism Mass, but later withdraws his application for state recognition because the authorities use it to put pressure on his priests

As part of the Sino-Vatican agreement on episcopal nominations of 22 September 2018, Bishop Guo Xijin (until then Ordinary recognized by the Pope in the underground) accepted to step down at the request of Rome and accept the post of auxiliary bishop, so that Bishop Zhan Silu, hitherto not recognized by the Pope, could become the Ordinary of Mindong Diocese – a ‘sine-qua-non’ for the acceptance of the Sino-Vatican agreement from Chinese side. Even the priests of the diocese in the underground were apparently ready to cooperate with Bishop Zhan (see *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, pp. 11-12, 16). In the Diocese of Mindong (Fujian Province), the majority of priests and faithful belong to the underground.

However, in early April 2019, Bishop Guo told *UCAN* that the authorities were only prepared to accept him as auxiliary bishop if he accepted the principle of an independent, autonomous and self-governed Church and applied to join the Chinese Catholic Bishops’ Conference [which has incorporated this principle in its Statutes] and its subordinate Catholic Church Commission for Religious Affairs of the Province; but he would not do that. Surprisingly, however, on April 18 Auxiliary Bishop Guo, wearing episcopal insignia, was allowed to concelebrate together with Bishop Zhan and all priests (including those from the underground) the obligatory Chrism Mass of the diocese on Holy Thursday. *Vatican News* commented that this was a “positive and encouraging sign” for the Sino-Vatican dialogue. *AsiaNews* suspected on April 18 that the Vatican and the Chinese central government had probably intervened to rescue the agreement.

On June 18, *AsiaNews* announced that Bishop Guo was allowed to concelebrate the Chrism Mass because (according to *Bitter Winter* on April 17) he had signed the request for state recognition requested by the religious authorities, but in a modified form – agreeing that he would obey Bishop Zhan and obey the laws but would not follow the principle of independence or the Patriotic Association (PA). According to *AsiaNews*, the religious authorities refused to release the amended document signed by Guo and submitted the underground priests of Mindong to intense pressure to join the PA, by leading them to believe that Bishop Guo had already done so. Finally, Bishop Guo (according to *Bitter Winter* on May 24) sent a letter to the Fu’an Public Security Office, the Fu’an Religious Affairs Bureau and Bishop Zhan, in which he withdrew his application for government recognition. In the letter, Msgr. Guo said, according to *AsiaNews*: “The government has already decided to persecute priests who refuse to sign the request [for membership in the PA]. If I am unable to protect them, it is pointless for me to be recognized as an auxiliary bishop. I am willing to face persecution together with the other priests.” According to *AsiaNews* sources, Mindong was supposed to have been a “pilot project” for the implementation of the Sino-Vatican agreement (*AsiaNews* April 3, 18; June 18; *bitterwinter.org* June 10; *UCAN* April 5; *Vatican News* April 18).

April / May 2019:

Reports on official demolition orders for churches in Handan and Yujiang

In May, *UCAN* reported that Handan Diocese of Hebei Province had received notification from the authorities that churches, crosses and church signs that had been erected without permission had to

be demolished; the unconfirmed information circulated that 24 churches were on a demolition list. So far, however, only in the village Shenliu had the church cross been removed on May 6-7, 2019. A source told *UCAN* that in the past the Diocese of Handan had to submit for church construction only the land registry and the permission of the Religious Affairs Bureau; today, a more extensive procedure with construction permission etc. is required; this would now be used by the authorities as a pretext to crack down on churches which had been built earlier. According to *UCAN*, signs at the Nanmenli Church and other churches in Handan have recently been posted saying “Access to minors prohibited, party members not allowed to believe in religion.”

In the underground Diocese of Yujiang, Jiangxi Province, the unregistered Annunciation Church in Nanfeng County received a demolition notice on May 1, according to *UCAN*. The church had been closed for worship since Christmas. The priests and the faithful are said to have previously refused to join the Patriotic Association. It is unknown whether the announced demolition has in the meantime taken place.

On the other hand, Gianni Valente reported in *Vatican Insider* that in the Catholic village of Shizhuang in Baoding Diocese, after a “reconciliation Mass” on March 3, 2019, official and unofficial Catholics of the village had, with approval of the authorities, jointly converted an old factory into a makeshift church (*AsiaNews* April 30; May 7; china.ucanews.com May 8, 15; June 4; *UCAN* May 13, 17; June 5; *Vatican Insider* April 5).

April 9 and 11, 2019:

First election of bishops since the conclusion of the Sino-Vatican Agreement on the Appointment of Bishops in the Dioceses of Jining and Hanzhong

In the Diocese of Jining (Inner Mongolia), the former Vicar General of the Diocese, Fr. Anthony Yao Shun, was elected candidate for the post of local bishop. Fr. Yao Shun, a priest in his fifties, has earned a master’s degree in liturgy in the United States. The election was overseen by Bishop Meng Qinglu of Hohhot. The bishopric of Jining has been vacant since the death of Bishop Liu Shigong in 2017. The diocese has about 70,000 faithful, 31 priests and 12 religious sisters.

In the Diocese of Hanzhong (Shaanxi), 44-year-old Fr. Stephen Xu Hongwei was elected Coadjutor Bishop. He completed a master’s degree in theology in Rome and worked for some time in Canada. Bishop Dang Mingyan of Xi’an presided over the election. Hanzhong Diocese is led by 85-year-old Bishop Yu Runshen, with some 9,000 faithful, 24 priests and 8 sisters.

Both elections were held in hotels. According to sources from *UCAN*, the election in Hanzhong took place under heavy pressure by the authorities, with around a hundred police and government officers present. In both cases only one candidate was proposed. Both candidates had been appointed by the Pope before the Sino-Vatican Agreement, so that the elections were judged by local Church sources as a formality (to comply with the official Chinese procedure). In the opinion that Fr. Sergio Ticozzi expressed in the *South China Morning Post*, this was a positive sign that China had accepted the candidates approved by the Pope (*South China Morning Post* April 16; *UCAN* April 12).

[Addition after the editorial deadline of this News Update (10 July): The two candidates were consecrated on August 26 and 28, 2019 respectively. There have been no other episcopal elections so far.] Around 40 episcopal sees in Mainland China are currently vacant.

April 14, 2019:

Once again, an underground priest of the Diocese of Xuanhua in Hebei is arrested

According to *UCAN*, citing a source from the diocese, shortly after Palm Sunday Mass, Fr. Peter Zhang Guangjun was dragged from his car by government officials in civilian clothing after they had smashed the car's windows. The next day, the Xuanhua authorities allowed people from the diocese to meet the detainee. According to *UCAN*, Zhang is responsible for a parish of 10,000 believers and had previously been detained for two months in 2011. On March 29 and 28, 2019 respectively, Coadjutor Bishop Cui Tai and Vicar General Fr. Zhang Jianlin had already been "taken away" from the same diocese, without giving any reason; they were still being detained as of April 16 (*UCAN* April 16; see *RCTC* 2019, No. 2, p. 15-16).

On May 8, 2019, Su Tianyou made an appeal in *UCAN* for information about his now 87-year-old uncle, Bishop Su Zhimin of Baoding, Hebei, who has been in detention since 1997. He was last seen in 2003 and it is not even known whether he is still alive.

May 2019:

Authorities are putting pressure on the Dioceses of Fengxiang and Fuzhou to join the Patriotic Association

On May 11, 2019, the first Assembly of Catholic Representatives of Baoji City was held in Fengxiang, Shaanxi Province, and Bishop Li Huiyuan (not yet recognized by the government) was elected first chairman of the Patriotic Association (PA) of Baoji. The same day, the Patriotic Association of Fengxiang County, which belongs to the City of Baoji, was also founded – as reported on the website of the official Catholic governing bodies of Shaanxi. The founding of the two branches of the Patriotic Association was preceded by great pressure on Fengxiang Diocese: On April 4, 2019, the authorities demolished the church of Qianyang, and according to *AsiaNews*, the authorities planned to demolish at least four other churches in the diocese. The longtime Bishop of Fengxiang, Lukas Li Jingfeng, who died in 2017, had worked in the underground for a long time and was able to prevent the founding of a Patriotic Association even after his recognition by the government.

On May 29, *UCAN* reported that all priests, especially senior pastors, of the Diocese of Fuzhou, Fujian Province, had been asked to join the PA. In the Diocese of Fuzhou the underground is very strong. Meanwhile, the priests of Fuzhou Diocese are not permitted to leave the country, according to a local source. *UCAN* was in possession of a Church document sent to the Diocese of Fuzhou stating that Church groups under pressure from local authorities should point out that negotiations were currently underway between China and the Holy See, as to whether underground priests would have to join the PA (*AsiaNews* April 4, 10; china.ucanews.com May 29; sxtzj.org May 15; *UCAN* June 3).

May 7, 2019:

Huiling charitable institution commemorates the late Jean Vanier, founder of the Ark

Huiling, a Community-based Service for people with intellectual disabilities and autism, praised the work of the founder of Christian "L'Arche" (ark) communities, where people with and without intellectual disabilities live together. Jean Vanier died at the age of 90 near Paris. He founded the first L'Arche

community in 1964 in a village north of Paris. Today, there are around 150 L'Arche communities worldwide with about 5,000 members in 35 countries. In 1971, Vanier founded the ecumenical movement "Faith and Light," which is also worldwide.

Meng Weinuo, the founder of Huiling, was inspired by the L'Arche movement. She met Jean Vanier personally in May 2013 in France. Meng founded the charity 30 years ago together with priests of the PIME missionary institute. Today, the non-governmental organization operates in 20 locations in China. At the end of 2013, Huiling and L'Arche signed a partnership agreement. L'Arche supports Huiling through training courses as well as spiritually (katholisch.de May 7; UCAN May 29).

June 8, 2019:

Underground Bishop Li Side of Tianjin has died

Bishop Li Side died in a hospital in Jizhou after suffering a stroke in mid-May. – Bishop Li was born on October 2, 1926 in Zunhua, Tangshan, Hebei Province into a family with a long Catholic tradition. In 1940 he entered the minor seminary and in 1949 the major seminary in Beijing. On July 10, 1955 he was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Tianjin. He spent many years in prison. On June 15, 1982, he was consecrated Bishop of Tianjin without government permission. In 1989 Bishop Li was arrested again after participating in the founding assembly of an underground bishops' conference. Since 1992 he had been under house arrest in the remote mountain village of Liangzhuangzi in Jixian County (since 2016, Jizhou District), 60 km from Tianjin, where a large number of faithful and priests visited him. Many sought his advice. Bishop Li was very much concerned with priestly vocations and vocations to religious life. In 1994, he founded the Order of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

After his death, Bishop Li lay in state in the morgue in Jizhou, not in the Cathedral of Tianjin. He was also buried in Jizhou under strict government control on 10 June. Underground Coadjutor Bishop of Tianjin, Bishop Shi Hongzhen, was not allowed to attend the funeral. He too has been under house arrest for many years in a small parish on the outskirts of Tianjin under a highway bridge. – The Diocese of Tianjin has about 60,000 faithful, 65 priests and two Sisters' communities with about 70 Sisters. In 2006, the official Bishop of Tianjin, Bishop Shi Hongchen, died. He came originally from the underground and was ordained auxiliary bishop by Bishop Li Side in 1982. As far as the government was concerned, since 1992 he functioned as Bishop of Tianjin. After his death many priests of the official Church also sought contact with Bishop Li (*Agenzia Fides* June 24; *AsiaNews* June 10; *UCAN* June 12).

Sino-Vatican Relations

April 29 to October 7, 2019:

Vatican present with a pavilion at the International Horticultural Exhibition in Beijing

According to *Vatican News*, the Holy See is participating in this year's International Horticultural Exhibition in Beijing with its own pavilion. This was confirmed on 17 April by Lu Kang, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, according to the *Global Times*. He also said that Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, will take part in some "relevant activities." According to Lu Kang – the *People's Daily* reports – about 110 countries, regions and international organizations have confirmed their participation in the International Horticultural Exhibition. Lu emphasized that China and the Vatican have been steadily working to improve relations since the agreement last fall (*Global Times* April 17, *People's Daily* April 18, *South China Morning Post* April 17; *Vatican News* April 10).

May 22, 2019:

Pope calls for the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China on May 24

At the close of the general audience in St. Peter's Square on May 22, Pope Francis recalled the feast day of Mary Help of Christians, which his predecessor had ordained as the day of prayer for the Church in China. He said, "Next Friday, May 24, we are celebrating the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary Help of Christians, especially venerated in China at the Shrine of 'Our Lady of Sheshan' near Shanghai. This beautiful occasion allows me to express my special closeness and affection to all Catholics in China who continue to believe, hope and love, under daily labors and trials. Dear Catholics of China, Our Heavenly Mother helps you all to be witnesses of charity and brotherhood, always united in the communion with the universal Church. I pray for you and bless you. Let us pray together to the Mother of God: Hail Mary ..."

As the Belgian Verbiest Institute reported, three groups from China and Taiwan greeted the Pope at this general audience: 28 parish priests from mainland China attending a training course at the Verbiest Institute in Leuven; three brothers of the Shanghai "underground" Zhu family (two of whom are priests) together with other Shanghai believers; and Fr. Paulin Kubuya SX, responsible for inter-religious dialogue at the Taiwan Bishops' Conference, with a group of Buddhist monks from Taiwan (vatican.va May 22; *Verbiest Update* No. 47, May 2019).

May 12, 2019:

Party-friendly newspaper *Global Times* for the first time ever publishes interview with the Vatican's Cardinal Secretary of State

The English-language Chinese newspaper which aims at a foreign readership asked Cardinal Pietro Parolin about the continuation of the Sino-Vatican dialogue (answer: "The channels of communication are working well"), and about the opposition to this dialogue within the Church. The interviewers also asked about the Cardinal's opinion on sinicization and inculturation, and about possible areas of Sino-Vatican cooperation. At the end of the interview, Parolin sent greetings from Pope Francis to the leaders and people of China. He added that "The Holy Father asks Catholics in particular to undertake with courage the path of unity, reconciliation and a renewed proclamation of the Gospel." The interview was conducted by Francesco Sisci and *Global Times* reporter Zhang Yu (see text of the interview at www.globaltimes.cn/content/1149623.shtml?from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0).

May 28 to July 14, 2019:

"Diplomacy of art" – Sino-Vatican special exhibition "Beauty Unites Us" in the Palace Museum, Beijing

The special exhibition in the Forbidden City in Beijing featured nearly 80 pieces of the approximately 5,000 Chinese objects in the Vatican Museums in Rome. This exhibition had been in the planning since 2017 (see *RCTC* 2018, No. 1, p. 17). Barbara Jatta, director of the Vatican Museums, spoke in this context of the "diplomacy of art." *AsiaNews* cites Jatta as saying that there is a shared awareness that there is a universal language, that of beauty. This language is "a powerful appeal to harmony and unity," Jatta said. The *South China Morning Post* described the objects from Rome as being primarily donations from early China missionaries or gifts from the Chinese emperor to the pope. In addition to the objects

from Rome, in an act of “great friendship and generosity,” according to *AsiaNews*, also exhibited were works by Chinese Catholic artists from the Palace Museum in Beijing, including Wu Li (1632–1718) and Giuseppe Castiglione SJ (1688–1766).

This form of cultural exchange between Rome and Beijing was seen by observers as a delicate effort to gradually improve relationships (*AsiaNews* May 28; *South China Morning Post* May 28).

June 18, 2019:

First lecture on Pope Francis at a Chinese university

The semi-official *Global Times* reported that Benoît Vermander, a professor of religious studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, gave a lecture on Pope Francis and his ideas for the future at Beijing University on June 18. In his lecture, Prof. Vermander tried to explain the Pope’s global perspectives on caring for the poor and marginalized, and explained the theological, ecclesiastical, social and environmental issues that also concern the Pope in this regard. According to the *Global Times* Vermander said that a better understanding of the Pope’s global prospects could improve cooperation between the Vatican and China on issues such as migration, environmental protection and education for peace. The lecture, organized by the History Department of Beijing University, was attended by 40 students and faculty. There was also a lecture “Growing in Friendship – A Perspective on Sino-Vatican Relations” by P. Antonio Spadaro SJ, editor-in-chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica* magazine, scheduled for June 20 at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*Global Times* June 19).

June 28, 2019:

“Pastoral Guidelines of the Holy See Concerning the Civil Registration of Clergy in China” published

Nine months after the signing of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China on the Appointment of Bishops, the Holy See, upon requests from Chinese bishops, has issued guidelines clarifying several points. In these guidelines the Holy See requests, among other things, “that the civil registration of the clergy take place in a manner that guarantees respect for the conscience and the profound Catholic convictions of the persons involved” and “that no intimidatory pressures be applied to the ‘non official’ Catholic communities.” The document says that “the Holy See continues to dialogue with the Chinese Authorities about the civil registration of Bishops and priests in order to find a formula that, while allowing for registration, would respect not only Chinese laws but also Catholic doctrine.” At the same time, “the Holy See understands and respects the choice of those who, in conscience, decide that they are unable to register under the current conditions,” the guidelines say (see text of the guidelines in Italian, English and Chinese at <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/06/28/0554/01160.html>; cf. *China heute* 2019, No. 2, pp. 72-73 [in German]).

Hong Kong

April 24, 2019:

Hong Kong: Nine leaders of the Umbrella Movement convicted

On April 9, nearly five years after the protests in the fall of 2014 for more democracy, free elections and greater independence from China, a Hong Kong court has convicted nine leaders of the Umbrella

Movement for incitement or for conspiring to incite public disorder. The movement had virtually paralyzed public life for 79 days in 2014.

The founders of the Occupy Central movement, law professor Benny Tai, retired sociologist Chan Kin-Man and Baptist minister Chu Yiu-Ming were sentenced to 16 months in jail, with 75-year-old Rev. Chu being given a two-year suspended sentence. Raphael Wong Ho-ming, vice-chairman of the League of Social Democrats, and deputy Shiu Ka-chun received a sentence of eight months. Former parliamentarian Lee Wing-tat and former 26-year-old student leader Eason Chung Yiu-wa were given an eight-month sentence followed by probation for two years, and former 25-year-old student leader Tommy Cheung Sau-yin was sentenced to 200 hours of community service. The sentence for MP Tanya Chan was suspended due to serious health problems.

On the evening of April 24, as four of those convicted were serving their sentences, more than 1,000 people held a vigil in front of the Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre. Cardinal Joseph Zen was among those present. He said he would visit the detainees on a regular basis.

The trial has received severe criticism from local and international human rights groups, including Amnesty International. The Commission for Justice and Peace of the Diocese of Hong Kong warned in a statement that this was “a great setback to the democratic movement of Hong Kong” (*AsiaNews* April 9, 24; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* May 4; *sueddeutsche.de* April 24; *UCAN* April 25).

Since April 28, 2019:

Protests against Hong Kong’s extradition bill

Since April 2019, demonstrations have repeatedly taken place in Hong Kong, protesting against the “Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019” proposed by the Hong Kong Government. As the open letter from the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Diocese has clearly stated, if the amendments to the law were to become final, individuals from Hong Kong could be extradited to any other country, even if no such agreement has been reached with their respective countries or their countries have not yet signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (for details, see the article in *China heute* 2019, No. 2, pp. 73-75 [in German], and the text of the open letter of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Diocese at www.asianews.it/news-en/Against-extradition:-Hong-Kong-Justice-and-Peace-invokes-solidarity-of-Catholics-worldwide-and-the-G20-47391.html).

June 4, 2019:

Commemorative events for the 30th anniversary of Tian’anmen in Hong Kong

The Catholic Church in Hong Kong has organized an exhibition from May 18 to 26, 2019, on the role of the Catholic Church during the events on Tian’anmen Square in 1989. *UCAN* reported on this exhibition, which included the experiences of those days of Biddy Kwok, who is chairwoman of the Commission for Justice and Peace in the Diocese of Hong Kong, and Fr. Louis Ha from the same diocese. Both had participated in the Hong Kong protests and prayers in solidarity with the students in Beijing. In addition, Fr. Louis Ha had helped journalists returning from Beijing to find a place in Church buildings to work on their reports from Tian’anmen Square. Joseph Cardinal Wu, then bishop of Hong Kong, regarded the student movement as a peaceful and rational search for democratic reforms.

On June 4, 2019, a vigil was held in Hong Kong commemorating the estimated 2,000 “martyrs” of Tian’anmen – the exact number of victims is very difficult to establish due to strong censorship of

Tian'anmen in China. *AsiaNews* reported that, according to the Hong Kong authorities, at least 180,000 people attended the event at the Victoria Park.

An 18-minute documentary produced by *Bitter Winter* on Tian'anmen and religious persecution establishes a link between the massacre and the rise in the number of religious adherents, as well as the government's attempt to quell it. The documentary shows that disillusion with their government after Tian'anmen led many Chinese to turn to religions in search of hope.

At a conference at Purdue University on the topic of Christianity and Social Activism in Chinese Societies, Yang Fenggang of Purdue University has filmed video footage of Chinese Christians who had personally witnessed Tian'anmen (see: <https://mailchi.mp/f20724185306/yb1s7o9khi-2937369?e=d5f83e7f48>; *AsiaNews* June 4; *Bitter Winter* May 18; *CRCS E-Newsletter* No. 53, June 4, 2019; *UCAN* May 22; June 4).

June 12, 2019:

“Colloquium of the Six Religious Leaders of Hong Kong” at Papal Audience

The Colloquium of the Leaders of the Six Religions of Hong Kong – Buddhism, Daoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam and Confucianism – on the occasion of its 40th anniversary visited the Holy See for the first time. The Hong Kong religious leaders met Pope Francis at the general audience on June 12 and visited the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Members of the colloquium have been meeting twice a year for forty years and also have many gatherings to discuss specific issues that affect the people living in Hong Kong – said Cardinal John Tong, Administrator of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, to *Vatican News* (June 14).

Taiwan

May 1, 2019:

Taipei: Longshan Temple prohibits candles

One of the oldest and certainly the most popular temples of Taipei, the Longshan Temple, banned the sale and use of candles in its extensive premises as of May 1, 2019. This drastic measure was decided upon not only due to the effects of air pollution, but above all because of the shock aroused around the world by the devastating fire that struck Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral. As a visible signal to the pilgrims, the stands for the burning of candles have disappeared. However, a representative of Wanhua District where the temple is located did not rule out the introduction of electric candles. There are no plans to ban the traditional burning of incense sticks, he said. Since 2017, however, only one joss stick per person is allowed in order to limit the emission of particulate matter. In August of 2014, the Xingtian Temple in Taipei was the first to mandate a total ban on the use of traditional joss incense sticks (*CNA* after focustaiwan.tw April 25). Willi Boehi

May 17, 2019:

Taiwan is the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriages

The Taiwanese parliament passed a law that from May 24 allows homosexual couples over the age of 18 to officially register their marriage, to adopt their partner's biological children, to have joint health

insurance and to inherit their spouse's goods. That is, they are equal to other married couples with regard to tax law, insurance and the custody of children. On May 17, the day the law passed, thousands of supporters gathered around the parliament building with signs and flowers and applauded loudly. At the same time, there were thousands protesting against the law. President Tsai Ing-wen congratulated homosexuals, saying they now have “the blessing of society.” At the same time, she thanked all those who have supported the law even though they have different views on the subject.

The legalization of same-sex marriage was one of Tsai's campaign promises, but is also criticized by many groups in Taiwan. In a referendum held in November 2018 – which had come about after pressure from opponents of same-sex marriage, including Christians and Buddhists – 7.65 million voters supported the current definition of the Civil Code, which envisages marriage between men and women only; 2.9 million voted against. The Taiwanese Constitutional Court, however, had decided in 2017 that the then legal form of the marriage – that is, marriage exclusively between men and women – violated the principle of equality. The court gave the government two years to redraft the legislation, with the two options of opening up marriage for all or creating a registered partnership. If the legislature does not comply with this, “the court still declares marriages between same-sex partners valid,” said the *Frankfurter Rundschau* of May 25, 2017. The new law does not allow the marriage of a Taiwanese citizen with a partner from a country where same-sex marriage is not legal (*AsiaNews* May 17; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* May 17; see also *RCTC* 2019, No. 1, p. 19).

Singapore

May 20, 2019:

Opening of a multi-religious temple in Singapore

The Independent from Singapore reported in April on the opening of a multi-religious temple in Singapore scheduled for May 20, 2019. The article said that this temple is evidence of Singapore's religious diversity. – On June 28, a video titled “THK Temple Opening” was uploaded to YouTube, introducing this new temple and also the “‘Voluntary Welfare Organization’ THK” and its goals behind this project. THK stands for the Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society, which, according to its chairman Lee Kim Siang, quoted by the newspaper, is deeply committed to respecting the different denominations. In addition to a prayer room, in which digital tablets with religious texts of various religions are available, there is also a “hall of filial piety” in the building, where it is possible to set up a tablet with the genealogy of ones deceased ancestors. Conferences on inter-religious dialogue are also planned (*The Independent* April 22; YouTube June 28).

This “News Update” was first published in *China heute* 2019, No. 2, pp. 78-86 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the “News Update” refer to the year 2019.