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## Religions and Christianity in Today's China [Vol. 8, 2018, No. 3]

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中國宗教評論

Religions  
& Christianity  
in Today's  
China

Vol. VIII 2018 No. 3



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## Editorial

Dear Readers,

The third issue 2018 of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中国宗教评论) besides the regular News Updates on religions and especially Christianity in China contains three further articles:

In his article “Religion in China: Back to the Center of Politics and Society” Ian Johnson (China correspondent of the *New York Times* and author of *The Souls of China. The Return of Religion after Mao*) describes how China is in the midst of an unprecedented religious revival with hundreds of millions of believers and thus – despite oppression in manifold ways – faith and values are returning to the center of a national discussion over how to organize Chinese life.

Prof. Dr. Fredrik Fällman (Senior Lecturer in Chinese and Associate Head of the Department of Languages & Literatures at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden) in his contribution “‘Two Small Copper Coins’ and Much More. Chinese Protestant Women and Their Contributions to the Church – Cases from Past and Present” focuses on gender equality and gives many examples of the roles of women in the Chinese Church, not only as caretakers, but also as transmitters, inspirers, preachers and educators.

The issue concludes with a report by Dominic Niu on the interesting “Conference on Inculturation of Catholicism in China,” at the Catholic Seminary in Jilin in June this year.

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*Sankt Augustin, September 2018*

*The Editors*

## News Update on Religion and Church in China March 19 – June 30, 2018

*Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, Katharina Feith, Isabel Hess-Friemann,  
Jan Kwee and Gregor Weimar  
Translated by David Streit*

*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](http://www.china-zentrum.de)). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2018, No. 2, pp. 3-25) covered the period November 19, 2017 – March 13, 2018.*

### Politics

March 21, 2018:

#### **Communist Party of China publishes “Plan to Deepen the Reform of Party and State Institutions,” further blurring the line separating party and state**

As part of the very far-reaching program of reconstruction, a number of major state agencies were placed under the aegis of various party organs. Thus, the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council have been integrated into the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party. These and many other shifts in the apparatus of the party and government organs are seen as strengthening the party’s primacy over the state and as a reversal of structures erected by Deng Xiaoping which led to a greater separation of party and government. According to *Xinhua*, “mass organizations,” which include the official religious associations, are to be involved in the reform plan, although no further information was made known (*AsiaNews* May 7; *Global Times* March 21; [gov.cn](http://gov.cn) March 24; *Merics China Update* 6/2018; *UCAN* March 27; *Xinhua* March 21). – See the entries of March 21, 2018 and of April 1, 2018 in the section “Religious Policy.”

April 18, 2018:

#### **China creates International Development Cooperation Agency**

China has officially announced the creation of an International Development Cooperation Agency. The new agency will be responsible for the strategic guidelines and foreign aid policy, for coordinating and drafting proposals on any key aspects concerned, for reforming the foreign aid system, and for the

implementation of their planning and monitoring. This will centralize the development cooperation that has thus far been parceled out among numerous authorities. So far, China has mainly promoted development projects in neighboring states and in particular has supported the Silk Road Initiative. Whether more money will flow into developing countries in the future and whether the aid is not as much motivated by Chinese economic interests as in the past, still remains to be seen (*Xinhua* April 18; *Merics China Update* 6/2018, March 9–22).

**May 5, 2018:**

## Celebrations in honor of Karl Marx's 200th birthday

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, who was born in Trier, Germany, on May 5, 1818. The Chinese government took this opportunity to present the city of Trier with a 5.50 m statue (18 ft.) to honor the memory of the “greatest philosopher in the history of mankind.” Using this and other epithets, Xi Jinping paid homage to Karl Marx in his speech in the big commemoration ceremony in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on May 4, as reported by *Xinhua*. The newspaper *Trierischer Volksfreund* reported on the solemn unveiling of the statue on May 5. The ceremony took place in the presence of the Lord Mayor of Trier, Wolfram Leibe, of the Prime Minister of the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate, Malu Dreyer, and of Guo Weimin, Vice Minister of the Press Office of the Chinese State Council.

In his own speech, President Xi Jinping stated that the commemoration of Marx was one way to demonstrate the firm conviction of the “scientific truth of Marxism.” The analysis of this speech by the Party newspaper *Renmin Ribao* emphasized the importance of Marxism for China, and praised Xi's speech as a brilliant summary of Chinese Marxism.

Newspaper columnist Cary Huang sharply criticized the Chinese government in her column in the *South China Morning Post*. She interpreted this emphasis and orientation towards Marxism as a sign of defensiveness in the face of forces which oppose the absolute power of the party and its leadership. She said that for a long time now it has been almost impossible to find any signs of Marxism in China. On the contrary, China has been taking on the features of a capitalist, market-oriented society, such as those described in Charles Dickens' novels. These are precisely the forms against which Karl Marx had campaigned, based on his convictions, Cary Huang said. According to *Ping Kuo Jih Pao*, Willy Lam Wo-lap said that the Chinese leadership is trying to maintain its legitimacy by referring back to Marx. The Catholic bishop of Trier, Stephan Ackermann, said in an interview with the *Katholische Nachrichten-agentur* that although Marx had given rise to social reform, he certainly was no saint. Ackermann was speaking of the importance of criticizing systems which exploited people as workers. Here, according to Ackermann, Marx was very justified to speak for the need of reforms. Historical Marxism, however, has also brought about much “misery” in this world, the Bishop said (*KNA* May 5; *Ming Pao* May 5; *Ping Kuo Jih Pao* May 5; *Renmin Ribao* May 6; *South China Morning Post* May 12; *Xinhua* May 4, 6).

## Religious Policy

**March 21, 2018:**

### State Administration of Religious Affairs integrated into the United Front Department, Party assumes direct control over religions

In the dual structure of party and state organs, the State Administration of Religious Affairs 国家宗教事务局 (SARA), placed directly under the State Council, was responsible for the carrying out of

religious policies and for the supervision of religious organizations, while, with regard to the party, the United Front Work Department (UFWD) of the Central Committee had political oversight over religious matters. The SARA was founded (under another name) in 1951 and re-founded in 1979 after the Cultural Revolution.

In the course of the recent restructuring of party and state organs (see above), announced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party on March 21, 2018 and confirmed by the State Council on March 24, the SARA has been dissolved as an independent government agency and has now been placed directly under the Party's UFWD, with all of its functions being taken over by the UFWD. The UFWD will continue to use the governmental "label," i.e., the name of the SARA, in dealing with the outside. This means that specific religious affairs and organizations will in future be administered exclusively by the party and not by the state, even if, in addition to the name, personnel and structures of SARA might also be brought into the UFWD.

According to *AsiaNews*, some observers think that SARA will now become the executive arm of the UFWD. This seems feasible given that the "Plan to Deepen the Reform of Party and State Institutions" in listing the future tasks of the UFWD, lacks the previous concrete tasks of the old SARA, such as drafting legal norms or supervising religious organizations. It also remains to be seen what impact this restructuring of institutions will have on the local level. Under the old system, the grass-roots clergy in effect had to deal with representatives of both authorities.

Voices from the Chinese churches and commentators see this incorporation of the State Administration of Religious Affairs into the United Front Work Department as a signal that in future the party is going to be exercising stronger control over the religions (*AsiaNews* April 3; May 7; [chinasource.org](http://chinasource.org) April 2; [gov.cn](http://gov.cn) March 24; *Xinhua* March 21). Chinese text of the "Plan to Deepen the Reform of Party and State Institutions" at [www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c\\_1122570517.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c_1122570517.htm).

**April 1, 2018:**

## **SARA Director Wang Zuo'an named Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department**

On April 1, it was announced that Wang Zuo'an has been promoted to one of the ten vice-ministerial positions of the United Front Work Department (UFWD), while continuing his current post as director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). Born in 1958, Wang, who had worked at UFWD from 1983–1987, then joined the SARA and has been its director since 2009. He was not re-elected to the Central Committee at the 19th CCP Party Congress in the fall of 2017.

At an April 3 press conference (see below), Chen Zongrong, until then Vice-Director of SARA, told journalists that the new organizational structure had been formally announced on April 1 during a gathering of the leading officials of the UFWD as well as of the SARA and of the State Council's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. Both SARA and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office have now been incorporated into the UFWD. "We are in a process of adjustment," Chen said, with a new leadership of the UFWD to be formed. According to Chen, the reform demonstrates the strengthening of the Party's centralized, unified leadership over religious work and will optimize the institutional mechanisms for religious work. "The CPC advocates atheism and advocates the promotion of atheism, but it does not mean that the freedom of religious belief of citizens cannot be guaranteed," Chen said (*AsiaNews* April 3; [english.scio.gov.cn](http://english.scio.gov.cn) April 3; [fo.ifeng.com](http://fo.ifeng.com) April 2).

April 3, 2018:

## State Council publishes White Paper on “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief”

The Chinese government’s first and so far only White Paper on religious freedom had been published in 1997. This new White Paper essentially repeats well-known Chinese positions on religious policies. It dispenses with the detailed description of the “inglorious” role of the Western missionaries in the 19th / 20th centuries which had given the 1997 White Paper a very conservative ideological character.

The 2018 White Paper puts the number of religious believers in China at 200 million, whereas in the 1997 White Paper the estimate was 100 million. At the press conference announcing the document, Chen Zongrong, previously Vice-Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, said that the estimate of 100 million went back to Zhou Enlai’s statement from the 1950s, and that since then China’s population has more than doubled (english.scio.gov.cn April 3). – See the full English text of the new White Paper at [www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node\\_8004087.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_8004087.htm).

April 4, 2018:

## Local authorities in Henan urge all residents who believe in one of the five religions to register

In a notice of April 4, 2018, issued by the Neighborhood Committee of Pingyuan (presumably belonging to Anyang City in Henan), any residents who believe in Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism or Islam, are urged to go immediately to the Neighborhood Committee (i.e., the lowest administrative level) in order to register. This was reported by the US-based organization China Aid, which also published a photo of the announcement. An employee of the Pingyuan Neighborhood Committee told China Aid over the phone that residents had to bring their household registration and identity card and that they had to fill out a form, filling in their name and personal details, religious affiliation and when converted, religious affiliation of the members of the family, etc. The *Global Times* (which is under the auspices of party newspaper *Renmin ribao*) wrote that a Pingyuan Neighborhood Committee employee had confirmed the announcement saying that “the higher religious department” had asked neighborhoods to carry out a “census” (chinaaid.org April 11; globaltimes.cn April 9; UCAN April 13).

The registration of ordinary believers has thus far not been the practice in the People’s Republic of China. The revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” which went into effect on February 1, stipulate that village committees and residents’ committees must assist the government in the management of religious affairs (§ 6). For the situation in Henan see also the sections “Christianity,” “Protestantism” and “Catholic Church.”

May 7, 2018:

## State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes draft on “Measures for the Administration of Collective Religious Activities of Foreigners within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China”

The document was published as “draft for the solicitation of comments” with a deadline of June 7, 2018. According to the draft, the new regulation concerns all religious gatherings of 50 or more people (§ 2).

Collective religious activities of aliens (CRAA) must take place at sites registered for religious activities (hereinafter, “temples and churches”) or in temporary sites for CRAA approved by the religious affairs department of a people’s government at the county level or above (§ 3). What is new in this measure is the application process by at least three elected representatives of the foreigners who wish to engage in CRAA, called “organizers.” These organizers “shall have no negative records,” must not enjoy any kind of immunity in China and may only act as organizers in one place at a time (§ 5). The organizers must submit their application to the religious organization of the respective religion and sign a contract with the respective temple or church which is to be reported for the record to the religious affairs department (§§ 6, 7). Host temples and churches provide the clergy for the direction of the CRAA; if it is really necessary for a foreigner to conduct the service, this must also be reported to the authorities (§ 8). The procedure for applying for a temporary site for CRAA (§ 9 ff.) makes it possible for services to be provided to foreigners who belong to religions not recognized in China, such as Jews, Mormons or Bahai’s.

Chinese citizens are not allowed to participate in CRAA (§ 16). CRAA “must accept oversight by religious affairs departments”; hosting temples and churches or providers of temporary sites must proactively inform themselves about the nature of foreigners’ religious activities and immediately report any illegal actions to the authorities (§ 18). Should temples and churches or providers of temporary sites violate any laws or legal provisions in their services for CRAA, they will be punished according to the law (§24).

The new measures, which have not yet been officially adopted, are based on the “Provisions on the Administration of Religious Activities of Aliens Within the Territory of the People’s Republic of China” (1994) and the “Implementing Rules” for these Provisions (2000, revision 2011). The Chinese text of the draft of the new regulations (中华人民共和国境内外国人集体宗教活动管理办法[征求意见稿]) and an English translation can be found at [chinalawtranslate.com](http://chinalawtranslate.com).

**May 23, 2018:**

## **Nationwide Session of the United Front Work Department for regulating the “excessive construction of large outdoor religious statues”**

Wang Zuo’an, referred to in the report as the “Vice Minister of the Central Committee’s United Front Work Department and Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs,” held the keynote address, and leaders of the United Front departments and religious affairs departments of all provinces participated. The meeting called for the regulation of the construction of large outdoor religious statues to be given priority in the context of regulating the problem of the commercialization of Buddhism and Daoism ([zytzb.gov.cn](http://zytzb.gov.cn) May 25).

In November 2017, new directives with the title “Some Views on the Further Regulation of the Problem of the Commercialization of Buddhism and Daoism” were issued by the SARA and other departments. The large outdoor statues referred to are probably primarily Buddhist and Daoist giant statues, for which an admission charge is often expected of visitors. In recent months, however, there were also reports of the demolition of a Catholic outdoor “Way of the Cross” in Henan and of the statue of a Saint in Hebei (see entries of June 5, 2018 and of May 2018 in the section “Catholic Church”).

Since the revised religious rules came into effect on February 1 of this year, the construction of large outdoor religious statues outside the grounds of religious sites is now prohibited, the construction of such statues within temple or church grounds must be authorized by the authorities (§ 30).

June 1, 2018:

## State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes “Measures for the Approval and Management of Provisional Places for Religious Activities”

An important new feature of the revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” which came into force on February 1, 2018, was the introduction of “provisional places for activities” in article 35. Detailed provisions were now fixed in the new “measures,” which were dated February 22, 2018.

The application for a provisional place for religious activities can be made by religious citizens when there is a need for collective religious activities but barriers to the establishment of a regular site for religious activities (which requires a laborious preparation phase, proof of finance, etc.) are prohibitive. Prerequisite for the application is that there is still no registered place of worship of that particular religion in the same area. Any approval granted is valid for a maximum of three years. The application must be made by elected representatives of the faithful, who also sign a statement of commitment regarding compliance with laws etc. The application is made directly to the local religious affairs department, which then obtains the consent of the respective local religious organization. The local religious organization has the authority to supervise and give instructions to the provisional place. Religious activities in provisional places may not be led by persons who do not have the status of religious personnel or by foreigners, and the acceptance of donations from abroad is not allowed (see the text of the 宗教临时活动地点审批管理办法 at <http://sara.gov.cn/zcfg/582592.htm>).

It seems that the new rules aim at regulating informal religious meeting places that have sprung up as a consequence of migration and urbanization, such as the informal places of worship set up by Muslim migrant workers from northwestern China on the outskirts of Shanghai where there are no official registered mosques. From a remark by Chen Zongrong (SARA) at the press conference on April 3, 2018 (see the entry above) connecting “venues for religious activities privately set up by the Christian churches” (i.e., house churches) with the new possibility to apply for a provisional place for religious activities, it can be deduced that the new “Measures” are also meant as a means of regulating so far unregistered Protestant house churches. However, for house churches that distance themselves from the official Protestant “Three-Self-Church,” this alternative may be only moderately attractive given the proposed oversight role of the latter.

June 8, 12 and 30, 2018:

## Ningxia and Beijing launch “Four-Enter” actions for religious sites

After launching the campaign of “Four-Enter” mosques in northwest China in May (see entry of Spring 2018 in the “Islam” section), in June the campaign was extended to all five official religions in some places. The elements of the “Four-Enter” (四进) campaign are: 1) national flag, 2) constitution and laws, 3) socialist core values and 4) the outstanding traditional Chinese culture. These four elements are to enter all sites for religious activities.



Wall displaying the socialist core values at a bicycle station in Beijing, May 2018. – The socialist core values are being advertised everywhere in China – and they are now also to be displayed in all “Four-Enter” sites for religious activities. The twelve values are: wealth and strength 富强, democracy 民主, civilization 文明, harmony 和谐, freedom 自由, equality 平等, justice 公正, rule of law 法治, patriotism 爱国, dedication 敬业, honesty 诚信, kindness 友善. Photo: Martin Welling.

In Ningxia, the campaign was launched on June 8 by Buddhists and Protestants and on June 12 by Daoists and Catholics. Photos show celebratory flag-raising ceremonies. In Beijing, on June 30, a “Four-Enter” opening which included all five religions took place on the square in front of the Protestant Haidian Church. In many provinces, however, there does not seem to be any trace in the media about “Four-Enter” actions. On July 4, *Radio Free Asia* learned from a staff member at the State Administration of Religious Affairs that the campaign was not aimed at all religions, but at certain religions and at Islam in particular.

There have been earlier reports that religious sites in certain regions have been requested by the authorities to hoist the national flag, e.g. in Tibet and in various places in Xinjiang, Zhejiang and Hubei; nationwide actions are new (rfa.org July 4; sara.gov.cn July 4; tianzhujiao.me June 21; zytzb.gov.cn June 14). See *RCTC* 2016, No. 3, pp. 15-16, as well as the entry of June 11, 2018 in the section “Daoism.”

## Religions in General

April 1, 2018:

### ***South China Morning Post*: Mormons elect first Chinese-born elder as an “Apostle” to the “Quorum of the Twelve”**

The *South China Morning Post* (*SCMP*) reported that the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” known commonly as “the Mormons” and headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, has now elected to its ruling panel, the “Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,” the first two church elders who are not white. The two are: the Brazilian Ulisses Soares and Gerrit Gong, an American of Chinese descent whose grandparents had emigrated from China to the United States.

More than half of the Mormons now come from outside the U.S., so some Mormons said that the church leadership, through greater diversity, now more closely reflects the ethnic composition of its members worldwide. According to the *SCMP*, this is also seen as a sign that under the leadership of the new Mormon president, Russell Nelson, the church will focus even more on globalization. Nelson is said to be able to speak Chinese and there is speculation that the appointment of Gong may be a step to support the development of the community of Mormons in China. The *SCMP* article quotes a Mormon church researcher, Matt Martinich, who estimates the number of Mormons in Mainland China to be about 10,000. There are no official figures to be had because the People’s Republic of China does not recognize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a religion.

Gong and Soares previously served in the “Quorum of the Seventy” – which is subordinate to the Quorum of the Twelve – whose members are chosen for a limited time. The elders who serve as members of the Quorum of the Twelve, however, are elected for life, and the longest-serving becomes the new church president. So it is now possible that a person of color may one day become church president (*SCMP* April 1).

## Daoism

April 26, 2018:

### **Daoist Ritual at inauguration of the construction site of a Gansu nuclear project – Chinese Academy of Sciences apologizes**

The groundbreaking ritual for the construction of an experimental thorium reactor in Minqin County, Wuwei City, Gansu Province, became public knowledge after a worker uploaded video footage of it

onto the internet. According to ThePaper.cn (April 29), the said nuclear project is being carried out in cooperation between the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Gansu Province. The Daoist priest who performed the ceremony is said to have been invited by the local contractor. On April 30, the academy apologized on its Weibo microblog for not having prevented its contractor from “deviating from the spirit of science” (german.china.org.cn May 2; opinion.people.com.cn May 2; scmp.com May 1; sixthtone.com May 2; thepaper.cn April 29; *Xinhua* April 29; for the related debate see <https://stephenjones.blog/2018/05/03/daoist-debate/>; [www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_2108391](http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2108391) thepaper.cn; [www.sixthtone.com/news/1002327/weve-got-to-stop-calling-taoism-a-superstition](http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1002327/weve-got-to-stop-calling-taoism-a-superstition); *China heute* 2018, No. 2, pp. 75-76).

June 11, 2018:

## Chinese Daoist Association releases appeal to raise the national flag at all Daoist sites as part of the “sinicization of Daoism”

The text is addressed to the Daoist associations of provinces, districts and cities. All officially approved sites for Daoist activities are called upon to display the national flag in a conspicuous spot on the site and thereby release the positive power of patriotism. With the help of the national flag-raising campaign, the Daoist sites should spread respect for the constitution and the laws as well as lead the believing masses to cling to the sinicization of Daoism and to adapt themselves actively to the socialist society (the text of the appeal titled 关于在全国道教活动场所悬挂国旗的倡议 can be found at [www.daoisms.org/article/sort028/info-36507.html](http://www.daoisms.org/article/sort028/info-36507.html)).

In recent times, and in particular following Xi Jinping’s speech at the National Conference on Religious Work in 2016, the concept of “sinicization” has become a central demand of China’s government for all religions, especially for Christianity and Islam.

## Buddhism

April 2018:

## Following protests, a new scheme to launch an IPO (Initial Public Offering of stock) on the Buddhist holy mountain Putuoshan has been blocked

Putuoshan Mountain is located not far from Shanghai on an island belonging to the city of Zhoushan (Zhejiang Province). It is one of the four mountains sacred to Chinese Buddhism. In 2017, a total of eight million people visited the place. The Putuoshan Tourism Development Company operates the tourist infrastructure of the island such as ferries, cable cars and the shops and stands selling joss-sticks. According to a report by Kai Strittmatter in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), various authorities of city and province are involved in the company.

In early April, the Putuoshan Tourism Development Company proposed launching the offering of stock on the holy mountain on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. According to the *Apple Daily*, the annual income from Putuoshan tourism was estimated at 386 million Yuan in the securities prospectus. The SZ reported that planners hoped to bring in a further 612 million with the IPO, money which would then be invested in additional tourism infrastructure such as thermal spas. Just six months earlier, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), along with other government departments – including the China National Tourism Administration and the China Securities Regulatory Commission – had issued “Some Views on the Further Regulation of the Problem of the Commercialization

of Buddhism and Daoism” (关于进一步治理佛教道教商业化问题的若干意见), which specifically prohibits “using sites for Buddhist or Daoist activities as company assets to launch an IPO” (see text of the document at [www.sara.gov.cn/xwfb/xwj20170905093618359691/575692.htm](http://www.sara.gov.cn/xwfb/xwj20170905093618359691/575692.htm)).

On April 11, a post titled “The ‘IPO of Putuoshan’ Violates the Legal Rights and Interests of Buddhism” appeared on the website of the official Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA). Seen from a superficial point of view, the actual Buddhist property, the temples themselves, is not included in the stock package proposed at the IPO, the article said. However, it argued, Buddhism is the most important resource attracting people to the mountain. The author expressed the belief that the IPO would inevitably lead to a vulgarization of Buddhism and would bring harm to its reputation. In the event that Putuoshan shares should prove successful on the stock market, that very success would trigger a chain reaction in which other Buddhist and Daoist mountains like the Wutaishan, the Jizushan, the Wudangshan or the Longhushan would surely follow suit, the author said. He wrote that the IPO was a clear violation of the new state regulations and called on the competent authorities to “resolve the matter appropriately.” Later in April, the Putuoshan Tourism Development Company halted its IPO at the request of government securities regulators.

Two other Buddhist mountains, Emeishan in Sichuan and Jiuhuashan in Anhui, have been listed since 1997 and 2015, respectively. In the summer of 2012 there was already a discussion about a planned IPO of Putuoshan (economist.com April 26; sueddeutsche.de April 23; article from the website of the CBA as on [http://fo.ifeng.com/a/20180411/44945154\\_0.shtml](http://fo.ifeng.com/a/20180411/44945154_0.shtml); see also: *RCTC* 2012, No. 4, p. 4).

## Islam

### Spring of 2018:

## Sinicization in Ningxia: Action against Arab-Muslim architectural elements

In the Ningxia Autonomous Region, about one-third of the population belongs to the Chinese-speaking Muslim Hui nationality. In September 2017, the *Global Times* had already reported on government actions against “pan-*halal* tendencies” in Ningxia, such as removing Chinese-Arab signposts. In recent months, the removal of Arab architectural elements, especially from secular buildings, but in part also from mosques, has been increasingly reported in the autonomous region. An article of the *South China Morning Post* from May 14 reports that if one drives south from the capital, Yinchuan, “the roadside is now littered with onion domes – green, golden, and white – freshly removed from market buildings, hotels and parks.” According to the *Post*, much of the Arab-inspired decor was only added to buildings in the last decade, when the Ningxia government wanted to attract tourists with elements of the Hui culture. The many new mosque buildings in the “Arabian” style, continued the report, were partially due to the fact that most of the old mosques, built in the style of Chinese temples, had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. New buildings made of concrete in the oriental style were cheaper and more spacious and were also considered by some Muslims as being more “authentic,” the *Post* said, quoting Hui scholars. Imams and sources close to the government in Ningxia told the *Post* that Arab-style design elements would no longer be allowed on mosques in the future.

On February 20, 2018, the U.S.-based organization China Aid provided a photo of a Dazhanchang Township Party document which contained an eight-point action plan of Zhongning County in Ningxia for religious sites. The document stated, among other things, that “Arab and Saudi-style building elements are to be removed” and that mosques have to be sinicized, with all “Arab-style minarets demolished by the end of March.” In Yinchuan, the muezzins’ call to prayer was banned because of concern about noise pollution, according to the *Post*. The measures sparked concern among the ethnic Hui Muslims in Ningxia that similar repressive measures could be used in their region as had already

been put into effect in Xinjiang (chinaaid.org Feb. 20; *South China Morning Post* May 14; *UCAN* March 27).

In April 2017, the tendency of “Arabization” in mosque construction was criticized at a conference on mosque architecture in Xi’an (see *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 9-10).

May 18, 2018:

## Sinicization of Islam: Chinese Islamic Association launches campaign for “Four-Enter” mosques – All mosques are supposed to display China’s national flag

With a ceremony at the Beijing’s Dongsì Mosque and a written appeal to all regional Islamic associations and mosques, the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA), the official umbrella organization of Muslims in China, launched the “Four-Enter” mosques (“四进”清真寺) campaign. According to the CIA’s call, the following four elements should enter every mosque in China: 1) The national flag; 2) China’s constitution, laws and legal norms; 3) the socialist core values, and 4) the outstanding traditional culture of China. In detail, the CIA’s appeal calls for the following actions:

The national flag should be raised all year round in a clearly visible place in all mosques that have the capability of doing so. The mosques must also study China’s constitution and laws, especially the Regulations on Religious Affairs, and must properly handle the relationship between state law and religious law. Mosques may hire a lawyer to protect their rights (!). The socialist core values must be prominently displayed on placards in the courtyard of each mosque so that the faithful can learn them; they are to be interpreted and disseminated through Qur’an exegesis and preaching and may be practiced through charitable services. Mosques should be open to visitors and they may arrange for special persons to present to visitors Islam’s patriotism, love of peace, tolerance, respect for women, etc. The traditional Chinese culture is to be studied by Muslim clergy in the form of the classics and included in regular mosque education (*jingtang jiaoyu* 经堂教育, “scripture hall education”). The works of the Chinese Muslim scholars of the past (meaning the so-called “Islamic Confucians,” *Huiru* 回儒) must be consulted in mosque instruction and in the interpretation of the Qur’an. Thus the appeal of the Chinese Islamic Association.

At the opening of the campaign, Wang Zuo’an, director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs and now Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party, said that the “Four-Enter” mosques are a concrete contribution to the sinicization of Islam. According to *Xinhua*, similar opening ceremonies for the “Four-Enter” mosques have been held in Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang – all northwestern provinces with large Muslim populations. During the month of June, the campaign spread to other parts of the country as well as to other religions (see the appeal of the CIA at: [www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/jujiaoredian/201805/19-11988.html](http://www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/jujiaoredian/201805/19-11988.html); *AFP* May 21; [chinaislam.net.cn](http://chinaislam.net.cn) May 19; *Xinhua* May 18; [zytzb.gov.cn](http://zytzb.gov.cn) June 19).

May 22 and June 6, 2018:

## *Global Times* reports on criticism of Islam at universities

On May 22, the *Global Times*, a newspaper close to the party, published an article about online complaints allegedly made by Northwest Minzu University students in Lanzhou (Gansu), who said their preparations for the semester’s final exams were “severely disturbed” after some Muslim students started praying on campus at 3:00 a.m. during the month of Ramadan. A university spokesperson interviewed by the *Global Times* said that the university forbids all on-campus religious activity, but

added that “Aside from members of the Communist Party of China or Communist Youth League of China, students have the right to practice their beliefs in accordance with law at religious sites outside the campus.”

In a June 6 article, the *Global Times* quoted an employee of the Nanjing Agricultural University who denied that religion had been disseminated in a course on Islamic culture taught by a Pakistani doctoral candidate at the university – an accusation made by Marxist expert Xi Wuyi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on her blog on May 30. The employee added that in any case the course had already been cancelled half a year before because the lecturer did not have the academic qualifications to teach at a Chinese university (*Global Times* May 22; June 6).

April / May / June, 2018:

## New reports confirm the dramatic extent of the re-education camps in Xinjiang

According to reports by *Radio Free Asia (RFA)*, Human Rights Watch and others, since April of 2017 in Xinjiang Province, in the course of “de-extremification” measures, there have been extrajudicial mass detentions in “transformation through education” (*jiaoyu zhuanhua* 教育转化) centers of Uighurs and Kazakhs who have shown signs of harboring “strong religious views” or “politically incorrect” views (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 4, p. 11).

In May of this year (2018), Adrian Zenz of the European School for Theology and Culture in Korntal, Germany, an expert on Chinese minority policies in Tibet and Xinjiang, carried out a study demonstrating the large scale of the reeducation camps. In it, he evaluated accessible public sources, such as online procurement bids from various levels of government in Xinjiang for the construction or equipping of “transformation through education training centers” or facilities with similar names as well as related job postings. Zenz came to the conclusion that he could conservatively estimate that at the present time approximately 200,000 people were being detained in Xinjiang’s re-education camps. In his paper, he wrote that “While there is no certainty, it is reasonable to speculate that the total number of detainees might range anywhere between several hundred thousand and just over one million [...] It is therefore possible that Xinjiang’s present re-education system exceeds the size and capacity of the entire former Chinese re-education through labor system [that was officially abolished in 2013].”

The dramatic increase in Xinjiang re-education is generally attributed to the policies of Chen Quanguo, who became Party Secretary of Xinjiang in August 2016.

The May 2018 study by Adrian Zenz can be found at: [www.academia.edu/36638456/\\_Thoroughly\\_Reforming\\_them\\_Toward\\_a\\_Healthy\\_Heart\\_Attitude\\_-\\_Chinas\\_Political\\_Re-Education\\_Campaign\\_in\\_Xinjiang](http://www.academia.edu/36638456/_Thoroughly_Reforming_them_Toward_a_Healthy_Heart_Attitude_-_Chinas_Political_Re-Education_Campaign_in_Xinjiang) (*Associated Press* May 18; *AP* as reported in the *South China Morning Post* May 17; *Asia-News* April 13; *Deutsche Welle* June 20 – <https://p.dw.com/p/2zucA>; *rfa.org* June 14, 27; *Reuters* April 18; *South China Morning Post* April 2; *Washington Post* May 16; *Xinhua* March 13).

## Christianity

April 2018:

### Dramatic crackdown on Christian churches in Henan province – Access to Christian churches forbidden to minors

From Henan, there is an increasing number of reports that the authorities are banning children from attending Christian services and religious education, cracking down on unregistered communities,



Sign on a church in Henan with the inscription: "In order to ensure the order and safety of the congregation, minors are not allowed to enter the church. Catholic church of the Nangaocun Village." Photo: *UCAN*.

dismantling crosses and so on. Both Protestant and Catholic communities are being affected, and also officially registered churches are being targeted.

Speculating about the reasons behind the sudden pressure that began in early February and (at least according to Catholic reports) intensified significantly in April, reports indicate that Henan is China's province with the highest number of Protestant Christians and that house churches are multiplying fast there. On the Catholic side, according to *AsiaNews*, most of the Catholics in Henan belong to the underground. *UCAN* cited rumors that Henan's new party secretary, Wang Guosheng, who had been in office since mid-March 2018, wanted to rectify the province within a year after his predecessor had come under criti-

cism for, among others, the presence of the many Christian churches in the poor counties of Xihua and Luoning and because of the increase in the number of house churches. Ying Fuk-tsang from the School of Divinity of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, however, wrote that according to his own study of reports by Communist Party and government organs from Henan, the crackdown on the Christians in the province has been under preparation for at least two years (i.e., since the 2016 National Conference on Religious Work). According to Ying, the party sees itself in a "fight over the next generation."

The prohibition on the participation of minors in religious activities is not covered by any known Chinese law (*America Magazine* May 1; *china.ucanews.com* April 19; *la-croix.com* May 4; *rfa.org* April 19; *UCAN* April 18; May 10, 11, 24). See: *RCTC* 2017, No. 4, p. 12; 2018, No. 2, pp. 12, 17 and 19 as well as the related entries in the sections "Protestantism" and "Catholic Church" of this News Update.

April 4, 2018:

### ***Apple Daily*: Bibles have suddenly disappeared from online stores**

According to a report by the Hong Kong newspaper *Apple Daily* (*Ping Kuo Jih Pao*), the Chinese government has apparently stopped the sale of Bibles through online shops. The Bible is no longer available in many online stores such as Taobao, JD.com, Weidian, Dang Wang or Amazon.cn, according to *Apple Daily*, not even the versions printed by the official churches. – Although Bibles are being printed in China, until now they could not be purchased commercially but only in church bookstores or online. This latest action by the government is certainly also related to the new legal regulations on religions and to increased pressure on Christianity and on Islam in particular (*Apple Daily* April 4 as reported on *BBC Monitoring*; *nytimes.com* April 5).

April 7, 2018:

### **Harbin's only "functioning" Orthodox church reopens for worship following renovation**

The Pokrov Church in Harbin has been closed since 2014 for renovation. The opening Divine Liturgy, with a hundred faithful attending, was conducted by Father Yu Shi, who was ordained with the permis-

sion of the Chinese State Administration of Religious Affairs in 2015 after completing his training in St. Petersburg. “On the Orthodox Church issue, China and Russia do not have problems of principles,” reported the *Global Times* quoting Zhang Baichun, an expert on the Orthodox Church at Beijing Normal University. Zhang said that there are still some minor issues to resolve, such as the issue of ordination of priests, the sending of more theology students to Russia, as well as the question of allowing Orthodox services in some other cities. To date, the Orthodox Church in China has only been locally approved in some places (*Global Times* April 11).

For more on the Pokrov Church and on other Orthodox churches in Harbin see the contribution of Piotr Adamek in *China heute* 2018, No. 2, pp. 118-121 [in German].



The Pokrov Church in Harbin. Historical photograph: [www.orthodox.cn](http://www.orthodox.cn).

## Protestantism

End of March until June of 2018:

### China Aid: Reports of government action against Protestant communities in Henan

As reported by the US-based China Aid, citing local Christians, the authorities in Henan have been targeting house churches since February 1, and by March 19, 2018, 100 house churches had been closed in Nanyang City. On May 26, China Aid said that forms for registering as religious sites have been distributed to house churches in Henan and Anhui.

In early June, the organization reported that the Ningling County Council had ordered the removal of all church crosses. There were reports that the government was destroying Christian decorations, such as tiles with the inscription “Emanuel,” which people had affixed to the outside of their houses. One Christian wrote that officials were now demolishing Christian images even inside private homes, such as the one in his own mother’s bedroom.

According to a China Aid report from mid-April, in Lushan County, the religious affairs department summoned 700 preachers belonging to registered “Three Self Churches” for a conference during which they were told to study the “Regulations on Religious Affairs.” They were also told to increase from 95% to 100% the percentage of churches displaying the national flag, and were ordered to ban children under the age of 18 from visiting the churches. China Aid further said that according to reports of local Christians, the religious affairs bureau was establishing branches in towns and villages and assigning special groups to monitor religious activities in villages, and the village cadres were now responsible for administrating religious activities in their jurisdiction. According to another witness, the authorities had closed down the Sunday schools in the official churches. According to China Aid, there have also been reports of cases where authorities have attempted to convince Christians to give up their beliefs or suffer unpleasant consequences, such as the loss of social assistance to cover the subsistence level or pension, that children would not be allowed to go to school, that officials would be dismissed, or that family businesses would be adversely affected ([chinaaid.org](http://chinaaid.org) March 26; April 10, 11, 18, 21, 30; May 26; June 3).

March 27–28, 2018:

## Outline published of “Five-Year Work Plan to Promote the Sinicization of Protestant Christianity in China (2018–2022)”

The extensive document, signed by the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council, is dated December 2017. On March 27 and 28, these two Protestant governing bodies held a special ceremony in Nanjing to launch their “Five-Year Work Plan.” Also present were representatives of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Communist Party’s United Front Work Department (UFWD).

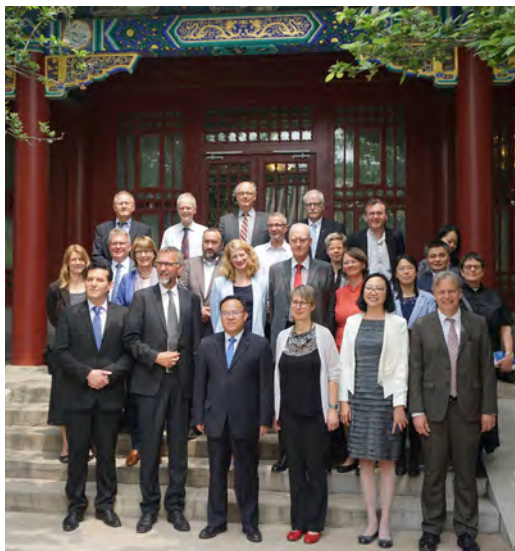
The international report on the Five-Year Work Plan placed special emphasis on passages of the text relating to the Bible. In Chapter 2, it states that the “major tasks” include the following: “Contents of the Bible that are compatible with the core values of socialism should be deeply researched in order to write books that are popular and easy-to-understand.” Also, “Be conscious of fostering research talent on the Bible and lay a solid foundation for reinterpreting the Bible and writing annotations for it.” As tasks for the year 2019, among other things, the plan seeks to link the approaching 100th Anniversary of the Union Version of the Chinese Bible with “organizing related commemorative activities and seminars for promoting Sinicized biblical interpretation. Recruit Chinese Christians to annotate the Bible so as to provide basic theological support for advancing the Sinicization of Christianity.”

The Five-Year Work Plan also includes purely political projects, such as, in 2021 the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party.

The text of the 推进我国基督教中国化五年工作规划纲要 (2018–2022) was published at [www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/10284](http://www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/10284); quotes according to UCAN’s English translation of the Five-Year Work Plan at [www.ucanews.com/news/protestant-five-year-plan-for-chinese-christianity/82107](http://www.ucanews.com/news/protestant-five-year-plan-for-chinese-christianity/82107).

May 10–11, 2018:

## Chinese-German interreligious consultation in Shanghai



The German participants of the interreligious consultation visit the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in Beijing, May 2018. The two SARA representatives in the 1st row are Yu Bo (3rd from the left) and Xiao Hong (5th from the left). Photo: China-Zentrum.

On May 10 and 11, the China Christian Council (CCC) issued an invitation for a Sino-German interreligious consultation in Shanghai on the theme: “Different religions – common future.” A 15-member delegation from Germany, consisting of representatives of Protestant and Catholic Churches, of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), together with representatives from politics and science, made up the German side of the consultation. It was supplemented locally by members of the German consulate staff as well as by leaders of the German-speaking Christian communities in Shanghai and Beijing. From the Chinese side, there were representatives of all five officially recognized religions, as well as officials from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), the Shanghai Municipal Administration, representatives from the sciences and from the Amity Foundation – all together a total of 23 persons. The “team for foreign contacts” of the CCC provided simultaneous translation for all of the presentations

and discussion contributions. Following the actual consultations, the German delegates were invited by the Amity Foundation in Nanjing and the SARA in Beijing to take part in an extensive visiting program that ended on May 15.

The event was the continuation of an earlier German-Chinese interreligious consultation, which had taken place in Hamburg and Berlin from May 8–11, 2016. See: *RCTC* 2016, No. 3, pp. 11-12.

*Isabel Hess-Friemann*

**June 4, 2018:**

## Death of the evangelical theologian Chen Zemin

Chen Zemin, longtime study director of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS) and close companion of Bishop K.H. Ting, has died at the age of 101. Professor Chen strove to develop a native Chinese theology. Most of today's leaders in the church structures and in the educational institutions of the China Christian Council have gone through his school (see the obituary by Liu Ruomin in *China heute* 2018, No. 2, pp. 80-81 [in German]).



Professor Chen Zemin at his desk, 2007. Photo: Liu Ruomin.

**June 11, 2018:**

## *AsiaNews*: New wave of arrests and deportations of Korean missionaries

*AsiaNews* reports that officials in Wenzhou have arrested two South Korean Protestant missionaries who worked there as “underground pastors” in a church that is not part of the “Three-Self Movement.” The church rooms were searched by the police and closed for a week. According to *AsiaNews*, last month alone, 30 Korean missionaries were arrested and brought before a judge in the Ningxia Autonomous Region and in the provinces of Shanxi, Hebei and Henan. The *Christian Today* website reports that there are more than 4,000 Koreans currently working as missionaries in Mainland China. *AsiaNews* writes that since April, the State Administration of Religious Affairs has intensified controls on foreign believers, with a clear focus on missionaries from South Korea. Pastor Eric Foley of Voice of the Martyrs Korea is quoted by *AsiaNews* as saying that over the past 18 months, raids on Korean missionary activity have greatly increased. More than a thousand have been deported between 2013 and 2017, and there could be more to come, once new regulations introduced on February 1, 2018 come into full effect (*AsiaNews* June 11).

## Catholic Church

**March 19, 2018:**

## Inner Mongolia: Underground priest physically removed from his parish – forced to work as a laborer on a farm

*AsiaNews* has reported that Fr. Ding Zhanmin, pastor of the underground Church in Beishaliang, Hohhot Diocese of Inner Mongolia, was forced by officials from the Baotou District Religious Affairs

Bureau to leave his parish on March 19 and was escorted to Xilin Gol (also Inner Mongolia) where he was ordered to work on a farm. Representatives of the United Front, through threats and bribes, had repeatedly attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to persuade Father Ding to join the Patriotic Association. Fr. Ding's parish should subsequently be taken over by the official Church. According to witnesses close to Fr. Ding, *AsiaNews* said, heavy pressure has been placed on underground priests to join the Patriotic Association, stressing that "even the Holy See has now made compromises." "In fact," *AsiaNews* continued, "since the so-called dialogue between China and the Holy See got under way, the rumor is spreading that membership of the PA no longer poses any problem. Many priests of the underground Church have turned to the Holy See for clarification, but without receiving an answer." Fr. Ding had already been arrested once before in January of 2012 along with four other priests (*AsiaNews* March 26).

**March 25, 2018:**

## **Chinese Catholics donate for disaster relief**

Following the donation of a total of 157,000 Euros for disaster relief by Chinese Catholics in 21 dioceses on Palm Sunday 2017 during the first nationwide fundraising day, the campaign, supported by Jinde Charities, was launched once again on Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018. The funds raised during the past year were used by Jinde for materials, health care, psychological support and reconstruction projects in Hunan, Jilin, Guizhou and in Hualien (Taiwan) (*Fides* April 6; see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, pp. 16-17).

**March 26, 2018:**

## **Bishop Vincent Guo Xijin from Mindong is briefly "taken away" by authorities**

On Monday of Holy Week, the "Underground" bishop and his secretary were picked up at their home following a talk with the local religious affairs bureau. He was able to return to the diocese one day later or, at the latest, before Easter. According to a local source cited by *UCAN*, the authorities wanted to prevent Bishop Guo from celebrating the Chrism Mass with the priests of his diocese on Holy Thursday because the Chrism Mass is an expression of his authority as bishop. At Easter 2017, Bishop Guo had been abducted for twenty days. This past January, there were reports (which so far have not been officially confirmed) that the Vatican had asked Bishop Guo to step down as the local bishop so that the illegitimate Bishop of Mindong, Bishop Zhan Silu, could be recognized by the Pope (see: *RCTC* 2018, No. 2, pp. 20-21) (*AsiaNews* March 27; *nytimes.com* April 3; *UCAN* March 28).

**From April 1, 2018:**

## **In Henan Province, authorities are preventing minors in many places from going to church – Pressure is being placed on schools as well**

According to a list published by *AsiaNews* on April 20 (see below), in Zhengzhou Diocese, during the Mass on April 1, Easter Sunday, government personnel took the children out of church, and since then have been guarding the church doors every Sunday to prevent children from entering. At the church of Qixian in the Diocese of Kaifeng and in the Cathedral of Anyang, posters were installed with the inscription "Access for minors forbidden"; also in these two places, police officers have been stationed

at the church doors every Sunday since then. In the Diocese of Anyang, a Catholic kindergarten was closed and parents were asked to register their faith in their children's school. It says in the list that in a church of the Diocese of Xinxiang on April 18 children's bibles were confiscated.

According to *UCAN*, two elementary schools in Linzhou and Xingyang, Henan Province, sent out a letter with the title "Why minors must not enter religious sites – open letter to all parents of elementary and middle school students in the city" on April 11 and 12. The letter stated, with reference to the principle of separation of education and religion, that religion should not interfere in national and public education, adding that "it is illegal for organizations or individuals to guide, support, allow or condone minors to believe in a religion or to participate in religious activities" (*AsiaNews* April 20; china.ucanews.com April 17; rfa.org April 19; *UCAN* April 18, 20).

April 8, 2018:

## Announcement of the official Catholic governing bodies of Henan Province prohibits religious instruction and church attendance for minors – A "red line" that Catholics are warned not to cross

The Catholic Patriotic Association and the Catholic Church Affairs Commission of Henan Province announced that all forms of religious education for minors are banned throughout the province and that believers are forbidden to take their children to church for worship. In the circular of April 8, which is addressed to the subordinate local Catholic governing bodies in Henan Province, reference is made to an April 3 order by the provincial government for the separation of education and religion. The circular warned that in these matters "it was only propaganda and education previously, but now it is a red line, a high-pressure line, so take it seriously," adding that otherwise the religious sites in question will be closed down and the legal status of the religious officials will be canceled (see photo of the circular with Chinese text and tentative translation at <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Henan,-church-banned-for-children-under-18:-taking-the-legs-from-under-the-Christian-community's-growth-among-young-people-43646.html>).

*Radio Free Asia* interviewed Father Wang Yuesheng, chairman of the Patriotic Association of Henan Province. He referred first to the principle of the separation of education and religion, but then said when asked, that they had already been in contact with the central government in this matter. He added that "we will not give up the fight for our rights" and that the matter had two sides (*AsiaNews* April 17; rfa.org/cantonese April 19).

April 20, 2018:

## *AsiaNews* publishes appeal with list of attacks on the Catholic Church in Henan

An appeal calling for prayers for the Catholic Church in Henan that *AsiaNews* received on April 19 from different parts of China and that also circulated online on Chinese networks, listed forceful actions of the authorities against churches in 7 of the 10 dioceses of the province. *UCAN* has also reported on these acts. In addition to the ban on the church visits by minors (see entry above of April 1, 2018), the list also reported the following incidents:

On April 17, in the village of Hutuo, Gongyi City in the Diocese of Luoyang, a church in which an underground priest resided was demolished, the priest expelled, and the grave of the Underground Bishop of Luoyang, Bishop Li Hongye (1920–2011), was destroyed. Several crosses in the province were forcibly removed. In the Diocese of Puyang, a church was destroyed, and officials in Qingfeng



The grave of Bishop Li Hongye in Hutuo was completely destroyed on April 17, 2018.  
Photo: *UCAN*.

County forced community leaders to report names and personal details of parishioners. According to the list, in the Diocese of Shangqiu officials went from house to house announcing: “Now, believing in religion is no longer allowed by the government, and whoever believes in it, your children will not be allowed to go to school; your elders’ subsidies will be deducted; and if you still do not listen to this advice, you will be expelled from public office; and if there are retirees at home, their pension will be stopped.”

On April 24, in the Diocese of Zhumadian (the eighth Diocese of Henan from which attacks were reported), the unregistered Catholic church of Gadazhang, whose pastor is officially registered, was placed under seal by the authorities.

According to *AsiaNews*, the Catholic Church in Henan exists mainly in the Underground. There is only one bishop recognized by the government in the whole province, Bishop Zhang Yinlin of Anyang. Several of Henan’s bishoprics are vacant (*AsiaNews* April 20; *china.ucanews.com* April 17, 18, 19; *UCAN* April 18, 20, 25).

## May 2018:

### Statue of Chinese saint dismantled

Shortly after the statue of Saint John Wu Wenyn was erected at the church at Dongdongtou in Yongnian parish of the Diocese of Handan in Hebei Province, on May 3, 2018, in a solemn ceremony attended by 35 priests and numerous faithful, the statue had to be removed again. Wu Wenyn was born in the village of Dongdongtou in 1850 and was a catechist in the community. He was tortured during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and executed. On October 1, 2000, Pope John Paul II declared him a saint in Rome. He is the only saint of the diocese of Handan.

According to a source known to *UCAN*, the authorities had urged the church to remove the statue after the ceremony “stirred a commotion on the internet.” This is considered a further step in the direction of increasing reprisals (*Fides* May 17; *UCAN* May 24).

## May 15, 2018:

### Largest cathedral in northern China consecrated

In Chengde, Hebei Province, a US\$ 11 million (RMB 70 million) complex of cathedral, sisters’ convent and bishop’s residence was built for the illicitly ordained Bishop Guo Jincai. Bishop Guo is not yet recognized by Rome, but is one of the seven bishops to be legitimized after the conclusion of a Sino-Vatican agreement. Most of the cost of the 15,000 square meter complex was covered by funds from the Catholic Patriotic Association of Hebei Province and the Hebei Catholic Administrative Commission. Hebei Province has one million Catholics, and Chengde Diocese has 30,000, most of them farmers.

On May 15, Bishop Guo presided over the inauguration Mass with ten bishops concelebrating. In addition to Bishop Guo, there were Bishop Ma Yinglin (Chairman of the official Bishops’ Conference), also unrecognized by Rome, and the recognized bishops Fang Xingyao (chairman of the Patriotic Association), Shen Bin, Meng Qinglu, Fang Jianping, Li Shan, Pei Junmin and Yang Yongqiang (the latter are all vice-chairmen of the Patriotic Association and / or of the Bishops’ Conference). Bishop Sun Jigen of

Handan was also present. More than 800 of the faithful as well as some government officials attended the ceremony.

After the Mass, a symposium was held in which government officials expressed the hope, according to *UCAN*, that the Diocese of Chengde under the leadership of Bishop Guo would continue to uphold the flag of “loving the country and the church” and adhere to the principle of independence and the direction of Sinicization. Bishop Guo said the new complex reflected the care and support of the party and government for patriotic religious communities and individuals. He affirmed that he would follow the guidance of President Xi Jinping’s socialist ideology in the new era (*UCAN* May 25).

**May 16–17, 2018:**

### **“Five Year Outline for the Development of Sinicization of Catholicism” adopted by Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and official Bishops’ Conference**

A “Five Year Outline for the Development of Sinicization of Catholicism” (天主教中国化五年发展纲要) was adopted after discussion by acclamation at the 4th Joint Assembly of Leaders of the Ninth Term of the Chinese Catholic “One Association One Conference” movement. The text discussed was obviously already a revised version, because changes were explained. Nothing further was made known about the content of the document (*chinacatholic.cn* May 22).

**June 5, 2018:**

### **Authorities destroy the Way of the Cross in Diocese of Anyang, Henan Province**

The 14 Stations of the Cross, carved from slate, with depictions of the suffering of Jesus in Chinese style were forcibly removed by the authorities using excavators and other heavy equipment. According to *UCAN*, the Way of the Cross led to the shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the only Catholic pilgrimage site in the province. The pilgrimage church in Tianjiajing Village, Linzhou, was built in 1903–1905 by order of the then Apostolic Vicar of North Henan, Monsignor Stefano Scarsella, of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), in thanksgiving to God for having preserved local missionaries from the dangers of the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. The church was severely damaged by the Japanese in World War II, as well as during the Cultural Revolution. Later on, many Catholics repeatedly made their pilgrimage to the site. According to *UCAN*, there were about 10,000 pilgrims from 3 provinces on July 16, 1986, Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The following year, 1987, the government of Henan declared the pilgrimage site illegal and since then has allowed few pilgrims access to the shrine (*AsiaNews* June 9; *UCAN* June 8).

**June 12–13, 2018:**

### **Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and official Bishops’ Conference hold joint session on theological seminaries**

The joint meeting on “seminary work” in Chengdu was aimed at reinforcing the “line of running the seminaries according to [the principle of an] independent, autonomous and self-governing church,” according to the report posted on the website of the two bodies. The first item on the agenda was an

exchange of experiences on political education at seminaries. Then, given the declining number of vocations, for the first time they discussed the topic of “research on priestly vocations.” In addition to leading representatives of the two official Catholic bodies, the leaders of nine Catholic theological seminaries (places not mentioned) as well as representatives of the State Administration of Religious Affairs and of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee participated in the meeting (chinacatholic.cn June 20).

June 15, 2018:

## Death of Bishop Joseph Li Mingshu of Qingdao

Bishop Joseph Li Mingshu of the Diocese of Qingdao in Shandong Province has died at the age of 93. He was consecrated bishop there on August 13, 2000, with the approval of both the Vatican and the Chinese government. The Diocese of Qingdao was formerly a mission area cared for by the Divine Word Missionaries (Steyl Missionaries). Today the diocese numbers 12 priests and a local women’s religious community with 12 sisters. The succession of Bishop Li is not yet determined (*AsiaNews* June 18; tianzhujiao.me June 16; *UCAN* June 20; vaticannews.va July 7).



Bishop Li Mingshu (left) in 2003 in the Mission Museum of Steyl. Next to him is Mr. Liu Bainian in front of a historical photograph of the mission station of the Divine Word Missionaries in Qingdao. Photo: Archive China-Zentrum.

## Sino-Vatican Relations

March 22–23, 2018:

### Symposium “Christianity in Chinese Society: Impact, Interaction and Inculturation” at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome

Religious scholars from state academies and universities of the People’s Republic of China, western sinologists and theologians of the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Holy Spirit Seminary in Hong Kong presented a series of lectures. *UCAN* reported that Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yulin, a Vice-Chairman of the official Chinese Bishops’ Conference, talked about the role model function and positive influence of the Catholic Church in Chinese society through her social ministry; he said that this was an important form of adaptation. In his welcoming address, John Cardinal Tong of Hong Kong spoke of the indispensability of dialogue. Among the participants were Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary of the Holy See for Relations with the States, who delivered an address, and Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, who reportedly led at least the last Vatican delegation to Beijing. One of the co-organizers of the symposium, according to the program notes, was Hong Kong’s Catholic Yuan Dao Study Society, which in recent years has been one of the organizers of such conferences between Catholic and Chinese scholars and Chinese religious leaders in Hong Kong and Beijing. Composed as it was and in this place, the symposium was certainly something new. The symposium was, according to *America Magazine*, “read as a clear sign of an improvement in Sino-Vatican relations” by observers (*America Magazine* March 28; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* April 14; *UCAN* April 28; *Vatican Insider* March 22; poster and program of the symposium).

End of March:

## Media speculate about “Holy Week Deal” between China and the Vatican

On the one hand, the speculation can be traced back to a blog post by Cardinal Joseph Zen (Hong Kong), who wrote on March 15 that he would not give up until “that unfortunate signing happens, rumored to be on March 23 or 27.” On the other hand, on March 28, the party-friendly Chinese *Global Times* quoted Bishop Guo Jincai as saying that an agreement could be signed “as early as the end of this month.” He said that the negotiations had reached the “final stages” and the timing depended on “technical issues.” Guo is Secretary-General of the official Chinese Bishops’ Conference and one of the seven bishops not recognized by the pope. However, the *Global Times* also wrote that Wang Meixiu of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences does not share Guo’s optimism, partly because of the need to clarify the issue of the bishops not recognized by Rome, but also because, Wang said, “legal and political changes in China also need to be taken into consideration.” The newspaper was referring to the new “Regulations on Religious Affairs” and to the absorption of the role of the State Administration of Religious Affairs by the United Front Work Department of the Party. On March 28, Lu Kang, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, said that China was ready to meet the Vatican halfway to promote constructive bilateral dialogue and progress – reported the *Global Times* (*CNN* April 1; [globaltimes.cn](http://globaltimes.cn) March 28; *UCAN* March 21; April 4).

March 29, 2018:

## Press Secretary of the Holy See denies rumors that the Vatican is about to sign an agreement with Beijing

*Vatican News* reported this, writing: “Replying to journalists’ questions on Thursday, Greg Burke said there is no ‘imminent’ agreement between the Holy See and the Peoples Republic of China. He added that Pope Francis remains in ‘constant contact’ with his advisers on the situation of the Church in China and follows the progress that is taking place in dialogue between the two sides” (*Vatican News* March 29).

April 3, 2018:

## Sino-Vatican relations at the press conference on the State Council’s White Paper on the Freedom of Belief

At the international press conference, journalists asked many questions about the state of the negotiations between Beijing and the Vatican. As representatives of the former State Administration of Religious Affairs, Chen Zongrong and Xiao Hong initially limited themselves to the stating that an effective channel for dialogue existed and that China was prepared to improve relations through constructive dialogue. When a journalist from Singapore’s *Lianhe Zaobao* newspaper said that some Catholics felt restricted in their religious freedom because the government did not allow the pope to appoint bishops in China, Chen said China’s constitution laid down clear guidelines in the matter. “China’s religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination. [This means that foreign bodies] should not interfere in any way with China’s religious affairs.” Chen said that he does not agree that it limits the freedom of religious belief “if we do not allow Rome to fully control the right to appoint bishops” ([english.scio.gov.cn](http://english.scio.gov.cn) and [scio.gov.cn](http://scio.gov.cn) April 3).

April 30, 2018:

## Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin uses less optimistic tones in an interview with *Vatican Insider*

According to Cardinal Parolin, there are successes and failures in the dialogue with the Chinese government. It was important to proceed with the dialogue. “If the government were not Communist and respected religious freedom, there would be no need to negotiate. Because we would already have what we wish for,” Parolin said. The goal is “spaces of freedom for the Church, so that she can live a normal life that is also in communion with the Pope.” It is “fundamental that [...] the official community, subject to the control of the government, and the so-called underground community – which today each walk their own path – be united.” We hope to reach an agreement on episcopal appointments, Parolin said. “And we hope that the agreement will then be respected. We have the will to do so and we hope that the Chinese government also has this same will” ([www.lastampa.it/2018/04/30/vaticaninsider/parolin-a-great-sign-of-hope-for-korea-vuqyEwvhuYvkuoVZRUq6JN/pagina.html](http://www.lastampa.it/2018/04/30/vaticaninsider/parolin-a-great-sign-of-hope-for-korea-vuqyEwvhuYvkuoVZRUq6JN/pagina.html)).

May 24, 2018:

## Day of Prayer for the Church in China – Call of the Pope and pilgrimage statistics from Shanghai

At the end of the general audience in St. Peter’s Square on May 23, Pope Francis said: “Tomorrow, 24 May, the annual Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary ‘Help of Christians’ will be celebrated. She is particularly venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai, China. This occasion invites us to be united spiritually with all the Catholic faithful who live in China. Let us pray for them to Our Lady, that they may live the faith with generosity and peace, and that they may be able to perform practical gestures of fraternity, harmony and reconciliation, in full communion with the Successor of Peter. Dearest disciples of the Lord in China, the universal Church prays with you and for you so that despite difficulties you may continue to entrust yourselves to God’s will. Our Lady will never leave you lacking her help and will protect you with her motherly love.”

According to a list published on the website of the Diocese of Shanghai, more than 17,400 persons pre-registered for the pilgrimage to the Basilica of Mary on Mount Sheshan between April 29 and May 31, 2018. These figures did not include those who had taken part in the diocese’s own pilgrimage on May 15. The registered pilgrimage groups came almost exclusively from Shanghai and the neighboring provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Inter-diocesan pilgrimages are often prevented by the authorities. In May of the previous year, 19,300 pilgrims had taken part in the Sheshan pilgrimage, including significantly more groups of pilgrims from more distant provinces than this year ([w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180523\\_udienza-generale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180523_udienza-generale.html); catholicsh.org May 24; see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, p. 17).

First half of June 2018:

## New Round of Sino-Vatican talks in Rome – The Vatican is also said to have expressed concern over the tightening of Chinese religious policies

According to a *Reuters* report from journalist Philip Pulella (who also interviewed Pope Francis in June), “Vatican and diplomatic sources” said on June 15 that the Vatican and Chinese delegations had

met “in Rome in recent days” to talk about the question of episcopal nominations. The Vatican also expressed its concern over restrictions, including the prohibition of “unaccompanied minors” (*sic*) in some regions from entering churches, one of the sources told *Reuters*.

This is the first time that the Vatican has leaked that it had raised issues of religious freedom in China in the internal negotiations with Beijing. The last meeting of the two delegations took place in December 2017 in China (*Reuters* June 15).

June 20, 2018:

## ***AsiaNews* publishes passages from *Reuters* interview with Pope Francis – “Dialogue is a risk, but I prefer the risk to the sure defeat of not talking”**

*AsiaNews* has released the excerpts relating to China from the recording of Philip Pullella’s interview with Pope Francis, which, according to *AsiaNews*, had been held two days previously. The excerpts were not published in this form by *Reuters*. We quote here from *AsiaNews* ([www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope-talks-to-Reuters-about-the-dialogue-with-China-44224.html](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope-talks-to-Reuters-about-the-dialogue-with-China-44224.html)):

*Q: How is rapprochement with China going?*

A: We are at a good point, but relations with China follow three different paths. First of all, there is the official one. The Chinese delegation comes here, takes part in meetings, and then the Vatican delegation goes to China. Relations are good and we have managed to do good things. This is the official dialogue.

Then there is a second dialogue, of everyone and with everyone. ‘I am a cousin of the minister so and so who sent me to say that ...’ There is always an answer. ‘Yes, all right, let’s go forward.’ These side channels are open, let’s say, at a human level, and we do not want to burn them. We can see goodwill, both from the Holy See and the Chinese government.

The third path, which for me is the most important in the rapprochement with China, is cultural. Some priests work at Chinese universities. Then there is also culture, like the exhibit that was put on in the Vatican and in China. This is the traditional path, like those of the great ones, like Matteo Ricci. [Note by *AsiaNews*: The twin exhibit at the Vatican and in Beijing, decided last November, should have been held in March 2018, but, according to Vatican sources, has not yet been realized for ‘technical reasons.’]

I like to think about relations with China as, multifaceted, based not only on the official diplomatic one, because the other two are very enriching. I think things are going well. In your question, you mentioned two steps forward and one step backward. I think the Chinese deserve the Nobel Prize for patience, because they are good, they know how to wait, time is theirs and they have centuries of culture ... They are a wise people, very wise. I respect China a lot.

*Q: How do you respond to concerns such as those of Cardinal Zen?*

A: Cardinal Zen taught theology in patriotic seminaries. I think he’s a little scared. Perhaps age might have some influence. He is a good man. He came to talk to me. I received him, but he’s a bit scared. Dialogue is a risk, but I prefer the risk to the sure defeat of not talking. With respect to time, someone mentioned Chinese time. I think it is God’s time – forward, calm.”

## Hong Kong

May 29, 2018:

### Hong Kong: Appeal for the release of Bishop Cui Tai

The Hong Kong Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission issued a statement on May 29 calling on the Chinese government to release Bishop Augustinus Cui Tai, Coadjutor Bishop of Xuanhua in Hebei Province. The bishop belongs to the underground Church. The appeal is supported by Cardinal Joseph Zen. According to the statement, Bishop Cui was taken away by government officials to an unknown location in mid-April of 2018. It also states in the appeal that Bishop Cui, without any reason nor local process, has spent the past eleven years, i.e., since 2007, in continuous custody or under house arrest. "During this time, Msgr. Cui was often locked up in secret detention centres, or in hotels, or taken away for forced 'travel' under the escort of government officials." Only on Chinese holidays was he occasionally allowed to visit his elderly sister. The appeal also calls for adequate medical treatment for Bishop Cui, who suffers from various illnesses, as well as the release of other imprisoned clerics. Bishop Su Zhimin and Father Liu Honggen of Baoding are both explicitly named.

Bishop Cui was born in Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province, in 1950. He studied at Baoding underground Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1990 by Yixian Bishop Shi Enxiang. In 2013, he was ordained Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Xuanhua (*Asianews* May 30; *UCAN* May 30).

June 23, 2018:

### Bishops of Hong Kong and Macao on "ad limina" visit to Pope Francis

Hong Kong Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung, his Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing OFM and Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sang of Macao came to their joint Ad Limina visit to Pope Francis on June 23, 2018. This was their first visit in ten years. Speaking to *AsiaNews* after their visit with the Holy Father, Bishop Yeung said the Vatican's position toward China was clear: "The Vatican does not want to irritate anyone; it does not want to make any wrong moves [for the Church], but at the same time it must do something for the good of the Church and of Chinese society." One must keep talking, diplomatic relations would not be taken up overnight. "The Pope," said Bishop Yeung, "asked us to pray. We want to pray for him, for the Church in China, and for all those who have sacrificed their lives for the faith in China ..." (*AsiaNews* June 23).

## Taiwan

May 14, 2018:

### The bishops of Taiwan make their "ad limina" visit to Pope Francis

For the seven Taiwanese bishops, this was their first Ad Limina visit in 10 years, and thus the first since Pope Francis began his pontificate. The delegation was led by Archbishop John Hung Shan-chuan, SVD, of Taipei, current chairman of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference. Other members of the group included Archbishop Liu Cheng-chung of Kaohsiung, Bishop Li Keh-mien of Hsinchu, Bishop Su Yao-wen of Taichung, Bishop Chung An-chu of Chiayi, Bishop Lin Chi-nan of Tainan and Bishop Huang Chao-ming of Hualien.

Upon his return from Rome, in a May 15 interview with *Radio Free Asia*, Hung said he had expressed concern to Pope Francis about the possible establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican. He said Taiwan felt orphaned internationally. Hung said: “I told the pope I hoped they [the Holy See] would not see us as part of China and would not connect us. They can establish diplomatic ties, but the rights and interests of Taiwan should not be sacrificed,” Archbishop Hung said. He also told the pope to protect Taiwan. “Please do not leave us behind in any situations.” And Pope Francis replied, “Certainly not!” The Holy Father assured Taiwan’s bishops that the shepherd would never abandon his flock. At the same time, he asked the group for their prayers for the Catholics in China.

The bishops then invited Pope Francis to the National Eucharistic Congress in Taiwan planned for March of next year. Thus far no pope has ever visited Taiwan. However, should the visit not become a reality, Archbishop Hung hopes for at least a video message from the Holy Father to the Catholics of Taiwan.

There are currently 300,000 Catholics in Taiwan, about 2% of the population. The Holy See is one of only 18 countries in the world – and the only one in Europe – to maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan. As recently as May of this year, the Dominican Republic and Burkina Faso broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and established relations with the People’s Republic of China (*AsiaNews* May 11; *Kyodo News* May 23; *Taipei Times* May 11; *UCAN* May 16, 22).

Mai 29, 2018:

## ***Apple Daily Taiwan*: Buddhist temple in Taiwan defaced, turned into Chinese Communist Party shrine**

The former Buddhist Biyun Temple in Changhua County, Taiwan has been purchased by retired colonel Wei Mingren from the Mainland and converted into a site of homage to Chinese Communism and its leaders. Retired colonel Wei served in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. He acquired this abandoned Buddhist temple and transformed it into a “base of communism and socialism,” reports *Taiwan News*. Veteran Wei appears in public wearing his old army uniform, saying that it is only natural “in China,” of which he claims Taiwan is a part, to start the day with the raising of the Mainland Chinese flag and the singing of the national anthem of the People’s Republic.

Two groups are now increasingly protesting against this form of use of the former temple. The first is a group of Buddhist nuns with the help of two local politicians. As reported by *Apple Daily Taiwan*, Su Huanzhi, a candidate for mayor of Taipei, and Changhua County Council member Hsu Shuwei, accompanied by a group of nuns, have filed a complaint with the local authorities in Changhua charging that the colonel and his followers are “insulting Buddhism” by such a use of the former temple for purposes of communist propaganda.

Likewise, the political group “Taiwan Guo” (“The State of Taiwan”) is staging loud protests in front of the former temple. This group, as the name suggests, is committed to having Taiwan recognized as an independent state. For them, hoisting the national flag of the People’s Republic of China, and singing the Chinese national anthem, the “March of the Volunteers,” are an affront to Taiwan’s “sovereignty as a state.” They have staged several protests in front of the temple grounds. Their most recent protest, as reported by *Liberty Times News*, took place in the presence of 60 police officers who made sure that there were no physical clashes between the larger group of followers of “Taiwan Guo” and Colonel Wei and his followers (*Apple Daily Taiwan* May 29; *Chinatimes* Jan. 2, 2017; *Liberty Times News* June 8).

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## Religion in China: Back to the Center of Politics and Society

Ian Johnson

If we think of a large Asian country where religion is the center of daily and political life we might think of India or Indonesia. But China? Hardly. If we have associations of religion and China it might be historical: ancient classics like the *Daodejing* 道德经, great Buddhist art along the Silk Road, or the Nestorian stele of Xi'an.

As for contemporary Chinese religious life it's probably linked in our mind to Communism, which we think of as atheistic and intolerant of religion. Thus we might think about persecution: Christians meeting in underground churches, the Dalai Lama in exile, or sects like Falun Gong being banned. This might be reinforced by governmental or non-governmental reports that paint a bleak picture of religious life in China.

For example, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom inevitably reports that each year in China is worse than the year before.<sup>1</sup> The USCIRF designates China as one of a dozen "countries of particular concern" in religious freedom. A similar picture emerges from groups such as Freedom House, which report on growing controls over religious life in China.<sup>2</sup>

There's nothing wrong with these images or inaccurate about these reports. Many of them come from the media, and as someone who has worked as a journalist in China for years – I first went there as a reporter in 1994 – I know that they are legitimate topics to write about. We must continue to report about religious oppression in China, especially as the government under Xi Jinping continues to take a more active role in Chinese society – something I'll come back to later.

But focusing on oppression can blind us to a greater truth: that China is in the midst of an unprecedented religious revival, involving hundreds of millions of people – best estimates put the figure at 300 million: 10 million Catholics, 20 million Muslims, 60 million Protestants, and 200 million followers of Buddhism or traditional religions in China.

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1 [www.uscirtf.gov/countries/china#annual-reports-chapters-summaries](http://www.uscirtf.gov/countries/china#annual-reports-chapters-summaries).

2 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/china-religious-freedom>.



Worshippers lighting candles outside the temple to the Great Immortal Huang, during a ten-day retreat in 2012.  
Foto: Sim Chi Yin.

This doesn't include the tens or even hundreds of millions of people who practice physical cultivation like Qigong or other forms of meditative-like practices.<sup>3</sup>

The precise figures are often debated, but even a casual visitor to China cannot miss the signs: new churches dotting the countryside, temples being rebuilt or massively expanded, and new government policies that encourage traditional values. Progress is not linear – churches are demolished, temples run for tourism, and debates about morality manipulated for political gain – but the overall direction is clear. Faith and values are returning to the center of a national discussion over how to organize Chinese life.

What drives this growth? I would argue that hundreds of millions of Chinese are consumed with doubt about their society and turning to religion and faith for answers that they do not find in the radically secular world constructed around them. They wonder what more there is to life than materialism and what makes a good life. As one Protestant pastor (female) told me, “We thought we were unhappy because we were poor. But now a lot of us aren't poor anymore, and yet we're still unhappy. We realize there's something missing and that's a spiritual life.”

Most surprisingly, this quest is centered on China's heartland: a huge swath of land running roughly from Beijing in the north to Hong Kong in the south, Shanghai in the east to Chengdu in the west. This used to be called “China proper” and for twenty-five centuries has been the center of Chinese culture and civilization, the birthplace of its poets and prophets, the scene of its most famous wars and coups, the setting for its novels and plays, the home of its holiest mountains and most sacred temples. This is where Chinese civilization was born and flourished, and this is where the country's economic and political life is still focused.

We have long known that China's ethnic minorities – especially the Tibetans and Uighurs – have valued religion, sometimes as a form of resistance against an oppressive state. But now we find a similar or even greater spiritual thirst among the ethnic Chinese, who make

<sup>3</sup> Yao Xinzong – Paul Badham, *Religious Experience in Contemporary China*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2007.

up 91 percent of the country's population. Instead of being a salve for China's marginal people, it is a quest for meaning among those who have benefited most from China's economic takeoff.

This is of profound significance for China's future. China's ethnic minorities matter – after all, even though only 9 percent of the population, in raw numbers that is still 100 million people, many of whom live in strategically important borderlands, for example, in Tibet, Xinjiang and Yunnan. So we should not ignore or downplay their religious life. But the brutal reality of China is that ethnic Chinese, also called Han Chinese, dominate China's economic, political, and spiritual life – even in these border lands. For better or worse, it is the spiritual journey of the ethnic Chinese that will determine the soul of the new superpower.

Not all Chinese see their country's national malaise in spiritual terms. Government critics often view it as purely political: the country needs better rules and laws to solve society's ills. Reformers inside the system see it more technocratically: if they had better administrative structures and provided better services, apathy and anger would abate.

But most Chinese look at the problem more broadly. China needs better laws and institutions, yes, but it also needs a moral compass. This longing for moral certitude is especially strong in China due to its history and tradition.

For millennia, Chinese society was held together by the idea that laws alone cannot keep people together. Instead, philosophers like Confucius argued that society also needed shared values. Most Chinese still hold this view. For many, the answer is to engage in some form of spiritual practice: a religion, a way of life, a form of moral cultivation – things that will make their lives more meaningful and help change society.



Worshippers at the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception (Xuanwumen) in Beijing.  
Foto: Sim Chi Yin.

All told, it is hardly an exaggeration to say China is undergoing a spiritual revival similar to the Great Awakening in the United States in the nineteenth century. Now, just like a century and a half ago, a country on the move is unsettled by great social and economic change. People have been thrust into new, alienating cities where they have no friends and no circle of support. Religion and faith offer ways of looking at age-old questions that all people, everywhere, struggle to answer: Why are we here? What really makes us happy? How do we achieve contentment as individuals, as a community, as a nation? What is our soul?

How did China get to this situation? To understand we have to back up to the mid-19th century. China went through a series of crises that were paralleled around the world. This was the encounter with the West, and its far superior military and technological power. China lost a series of wars that saw it lose territory. Chinese looked around the world and saw how the West had carved up most of the globe into colonies. Even ancient lands like India were controlled by tiny Western countries like Britain. Would China be next?

Thus began an assault on the existing power structure – which meant the political-religious state that ran China.

Why religion? Couldn't China have modernized without attacking traditional religions? To understand why religion became a problem for China's modernizers, we have to understand the central importance of religion in traditional Chinese life.

Today many of us are used to thinking of religion as one part of society, perhaps a pillar, but discrete and not dominating. But in most traditional societies this was not how society was organized. Religion was central to life. It was involved not only in a narrowly defined "spiritual pursuit" of transcendental issues, but in how people lived their lives – from the location and orientation of their dwellings to their professions.

In China, this was also the case. Religion was part of belonging to your community. A village had its temples, its gods, and they were honored on certain holy days. Choice was not really a factor. China did have three separate teachings, or *jiao* 教 – Confucianism (*rujiao* 儒教), Buddhism (*fojiao* 佛教), and Daoism (*daojiao* 道教) – but they did not function as separate institutions with their own followers. Primarily, they provided services: a community might invite a priest or monk to perform rituals at temples, for example, and each of the three offered its own special techniques – Buddhist Chan meditation or devotional Pure Land spiritual exercises, Daoist meditative exercises, or Confucian moral self-cultivation. But they were not considered separate. For most of Chinese history, people believed in an amalgam of these faiths that is best described as "Chinese Religion."

This faith extended to politics as well – so much so that scholars like John Lagerwey speak of China having been run by a "political-religious state." The emperor was the "son of heaven." His officials legitimated their positions through religious rituals at local temples. And at the very local level – where life was actually lived – the world revolved around temples. This was where the local gentry, or literati, met and organized local life, from irrigation and road-building to raising militias. Thus the historian Prasenjit Duara calls temples a "nexus of power" in traditional China.

So when revolutionaries wanted to change China, they went after power where it lay: in this political-religious system that ran the empire. A telling example involves Sun Yat-sen, who would eventually help overthrow the Qing Dynasty and establish the Republic of China in 1912. One of his first acts of rebellion as a young man was to go to the local temple in his hometown and smash its statues.

What of the monotheistic faiths? Islam entered China more than a millennium ago via traders along its coast and up through the Grand Canal to Beijing, as well as along the Silk Road from Central Asia. But Islam was mainly confined to China's geographic periphery, including regions like Xinjiang, Gansu, and Ningxia that were only occasionally under Chinese control. Even today, with these regions firmly ruled by Beijing, Islam counts at most twenty-three million believers, or 1.6 percent of the population. Conversions almost only happen when people marry into Muslim families – a result of government policies to define Islam as a faith that is practiced by only ten non-Chinese ethnic groups, especially the Hui and Uighurs. Islam sometimes provides an identity for people who do not want to be ruled by China – a situation we find today among the Uighurs in China's far western province of Xinjiang – but its marginalized position means it rarely enters the contemporary national debate on faith, values, or national identity.

The impact of Christianity was radically different. It entered China later but spread among Han Chinese, causing much angst around the turn of the 20th century. One popular saying then was “one more Christian, one less Chinese” (*duo yi ge jidutu, shao yi ge Zhongguoren* 多一个基督徒, 少一个中国人) – the idea was that the religion was incompatible with being Chinese. But its influence was huge, helping to define modern China's religious world. One basic reason for Christianity's influence was its presence in the West. Chinese reformers realized that Western countries were Christian and concluded that it was not incompatible with a modern state. Some, like the Nationalist Party leader Chiang Kai-shek, even converted.

But more influential was the decision by almost all modernizers of China to adopt the Western distinction between religion and superstition.

The paradigm to determine acceptable from unacceptable practices was imported from the West via Japan, which had started a similar discussion a generation earlier. Chinese thinkers imported words like *zongjiao* 宗教 (religion) and *mixin* 迷信 (superstition).

The new way of organizing society called for the compartmentalization of religion, much as it had been in other societies. For much of European history, for example, politics and religion were closely intertwined. The rise of the nation-state in the seventeenth century began to change this, diminishing and compartmentalizing religion. The bureaucratic state took over schools and hospitals and destroyed legal privileges enjoyed by the church. The rise of Protestantism played an important role too, with the binary terms of authentic “religion” and taboo “superstitions” used to try to discredit some Catholic practices. This fed into Christianity's long-standing appeal to logic: true religion could be defended by reason; everything else was superstition and should be destroyed.

As the world globalized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these ideas spread. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed after World War I, the new Turkish state abolished the caliphate – the ruler of all Muslims – and even converted some mosques into mu-

seums. In the Middle East after World War II, political movements like the Ba'ath Party in Iraq and Syria tried to scale back Islam as well, seeing it as a cause for their region's colonization by the British and French. All these movements were united by one desire: a strong state to imitate and fend off Western countries.

In China, this movement developed momentum as revolutionaries like Sun gained ground in the late nineteenth century. At that time, China had an estimated one million temples around the turn of the century. A movement for political reform in 1898 called for many temples to be converted to schools. Although this reform plan was defeated, many local governments took steps on their own, and today many of the best-known elementary and high schools across China are located on the grounds of former temples. Most notable was the destruction of the old City God temples. As the prime representatives of the old system of political-religious power, they were first taken over by the modernizing Chinese state and then destroyed; in fact, only a handful of City God temples exist today. The wrath of reformers was almost boundless; even before the Communist takeover in 1949, half of these one million temples had been destroyed, shuttered, or converted to other uses.

Some traditional faiths survived. Out of the old amalgam of Chinese beliefs, Buddhism and Daoism coalesced into organized religions with organized hierarchies – something they did not have previously in this form. Buddhism responded best to the new times. In the last dynasty, the Qing, it had already held a privileged position in society because the ruling family were ethnic Manchurians, who worshipped a form of Buddhism. It had a better-educated clergy that could interact with the new bureaucratic state being constructed by the Nationalist (and later the Communist) state. Early 20th century Buddhist thinkers came up with the idea of “Humanistic Buddhism” (*renjian fojiao* 人间佛教), the idea being that Buddhism should be part of the here and now, dealing with problems in society, and not only concerned with otherworldly affairs.

But most Chinese religion did not fare so well. Confucianism had been too closely tied to the old system to survive easily, despite efforts in the early part of the 20th century to organize it into a religion, or even to declare it China's “national” religion, much as Japanese reformers had done with indigenous religious practices that became known as Shintō. As for Daoism, it survived, but only barely. Because it was less hierarchical than Buddhism, most of its temples were not organized and ended up being closed or destroyed, leaving just a few of the great monasteries in the countryside or remote mountains.

Most tragically, folk religion was all but wiped out. These were the innumerable small temples or shrines that were locally managed and not linked to the major faiths – in other words, the vast majority of temples in China. They were declared “superstitious.” Hundreds of thousands of temples were obliterated, an immense wave of auto-cultural genocide.

When Sun's Nationalist Party took power, the pace picked up. Sun's successor, Chiang Kai-shek, launched the “New Life” movement to cleanse China of old ways of doing things. Along with trying to eradicate opium, gambling, prostitution, and illiteracy, the Nationalists launched a campaign to destroy superstition as part of a broader effort to *jian guo* 建国, or create a nation. In a precursor of Mao's Red Guards, Nationalist Party youth organizations sent groups out to destroy traditional temples, and the government issued regulations with the ominous name “Standards to Determine Temples to Be Destroyed

and Maintained.” The Nationalists effectively controlled China for only ten years, so the impact of their measures was limited, but the course was set: Chinese religion was a social ill that needed to be radically reformed or destroyed in order to save China.

This way of looking at religion – as a problem that had to be controlled for China to resume its place as a great power – was picked up by the Communists, when they took power in 1949. More organized and possessing a powerful bureaucracy led by a Leninist political structure, they treated religion as one among many social groups to control. As in the beginning of the Republican era, only five religious groups were registered with the central government: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Christianity, which for administrative purposes was divided into two: Catholicism and Protestantism.

Organizations under Communist Party control were set up to run these five groups. But this system only lasted a few years. By the late 1950s, China was being run by increasingly erratic leftist policies, culminating in the Cultural Revolution. From 1966–1976 this meant the banning of all open religious expression.

When that ended with Mao’s death in 1976, the Communist Party began to revise its position. Bereft of allies in society, it allowed all five religious groups to return. They rebuilt churches, mosques and temples. They retrained clergy. The official religious organizations were reinstated. In Christianity, underground congregations existed but were explicitly tolerated in seminal government publications, such as Document 19.

This doesn’t mean that China enjoyed religious freedom. Over the next thirty or so years, persecution continued – underground communities were attacked, the Dalai Lama’s faction was still ostracized, while new religious movements like Falun Gong were attacked. But by and large the government was neutral. Religion was viewed skeptically but its growth was tolerated. By and large the government allowed religious groups to multiply – and they did, with churches, temples, and mosques sprouting up across the country.

For about the past decade, however, we have been in a new era. It’s easy to peg this to Xi Jinping’s assumption of power in 2012 but I believe it began earlier, around 2008.

This was one of those epochal years in China when history seemed to turn. The great Beichuan earthquake killed 69,000 people and spurred an outpouring of civil society activity. Led by Christian groups, people journeyed to Sichuan to donate food, water, and blankets. Some began to investigate why so many schools collapsed.

Out of this came two distinct trends: charitable donations that were encouraged by the government, and activists, some faith-based, who wanted to find the deeper reason for the tragedy. Most of the religious groups were soon sent home. The government eventually passed a law allowing charitable giving, including from faith-based communities, but discouraged civic engagement.

Around the same time, the government began to encourage “intangible cultural heritage,” a term borrowed from UNESCO to mean practices, such as music, rituals, drama, and song – things that were deserving of protection but couldn’t be felt and seen, such as the Great Wall.



A women prayer at a private Tibetan Buddhist worship hall in the outskirts of Beijing. Foto: Sim Chi Yin.

In practice, this meant rehabilitating many things that previously had been attacked as superstitious. Hence rituals, and even traditional folk religious pilgrimages were redefined as cultural practices worth preserving and even subsidizing.

As a strong leader with more levers of power than his predecessor, Xi has increased the pace of this tilt toward traditional faiths. Early on he visited Confucius' hometown of Qufu and praised the sage. During a visit to UNESCO in 2013 he praised Buddhism, saying it had contributed mightily to China after it had indigenized several hundred years ago. He also increased money for intangible cultural heritage, so much so that China now has more than 12,000 practices, many of them with a spiritual orientation, that the government actively subsidizes.

Xi also meets regularly with religious leaders in a way his predecessors did not. He has met four times with the Taiwanese Buddhist abbot Xing Yun of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist missionary movement, and allowed the organization to set up offices in China to promote the faith.

In some ways, we can see in Xi's actions the recreation of the old political-religious state that ran China. But instead of religion truly being imbued in the state, it is more of a tool used to legitimize authoritarian rule. In some ways this is a familiar scenario: many rulers turn to religion when their own ideology becomes bankrupt. Thus we see, for example, the ex-KGB officer Vladimir Putin adopting the mantle of defender of the Orthodox faith, or in earlier years dictators like Saddam Hussein turning into devout Muslims.

As in those countries, not all religions are being equally promoted in Xi's China. While Buddhism, Daoism, and folk religion are being explicitly supported for the first time in a century, Islam and Christianity are on the defensive. Both are seen as violating a primary taboo in Chinese society: possessing foreign ties. Of course, all religions have a foreign

component. Even Daoism, China's only indigenous faith, has ties to believers in Sino-phone communities around the world, many of which – especially in Southeast Asia – helped rebuild Daoist temples after the Cultural Revolution. And Buddhism, too, has believers in other countries, not to mention the exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. By and large, however, the government feels it can contain these foreign links and that they are outweighed by the benefit that sponsoring these faiths have to the Communist Party's legitimacy. The Abrahamic faiths, however, are still viewed as foreign faiths that have inadequately Sinicized.

The government views these two faiths very differently. Islam is used by some separatist groups, especially in western Xinjiang, to justify their political agenda, including among a tiny minority the use of terrorism. The government sees it primarily as a law-and-order issue that the state can handle with violent repression. This is doubtlessly wrong – the aspirations of these peoples, especially the Uighurs in Xinjiang, are legitimate and will only be reinforced by more violence, especially outrageous rules to limit *halal* restaurants. But from the government's point of view Islam is a faith that can be controlled by isolation and repression. It is seen as a police problem, hence the government's constant refrain that it is a victim of global Islamist terrorism.

Christianity is a deeper and arguably a more profound challenge to the government's effort at constructing a new spiritual world. Islam is limited to ethnic minorities and has little appeal to the Han majority – conversions are almost nil – but Christianity appeals to China's Han majority. Without stretching too much, one can say that Christianity is the first major religion to find a permanent foothold among the Han majority since Buddhism arrived two millennia ago.

Just as with Islam, the government appears to be increasingly skeptical about Christianity. China is a big country and it's possible to string together a few pessimistic anecdotes from around the country – which are helpfully provided by lobby groups devoted to highlighting religious persecution – to prove that the situation in China is dire. Still, I think it's worth noting a series of problems facing Christianity.

From 2014 to 2016, the government forcibly removed crosses atop more than 1,500 churches in the province of Zhejiang. On the positive side, this campaign was not extended to other provinces but there are some worrying signs. One is that the Communist Party official in charge of the demolition campaign was Xia Baolong, a close associate of Xi Jinping. (Xia was in charge of law enforcement and the court system when Xi was Zhejiang Communist Party secretary more than a decade ago, making him essentially Xi's right-hand man in the province.) That implies that Xia was not operating on his own but almost certainly with Xi's approval.

Some local Christians argue that the Zhejiang case was special and that to a degree local Christians brought it on themselves: by putting bright red crosses atop even office blocks where an underground church might be meeting they were too blatantly obvious – almost challenging officials to grant them recognition. It's also worth noting that only very few churches were demolished; the rest continued (and continue) to function normally. But it was clearly a shot across the bow: Christianity should not have such a public face.

More recently, there have been increasing reports of underground Protestant churches that are facing bureaucratic hurdles. One of the most prominent, the Zion Church in Beijing, has been threatened with having its lease canceled. Churches and religious pilgrimage sites also now have systematic monitoring by closed-circuit cameras, which can be linked to facial-recognition software to give a list of worshippers.

And then there are government efforts to span Protestantism and Catholicism: blanket coverage of churches and pilgrimage sites with closed-circuit television cameras, something also found at mosques but not at Buddhist or Daoist temples (although it's quite possible that they will eventually have this too, given the government's determination to blanket the country with cameras, but the decision to first cover churches and mosques feels significant).

Most striking are new regulations calling on all religions to "Sinicize," which I can only interpret as meaning being closely under party control. This rule applies to all religions – hence the sometimes absurd situation of Daoist temples holding "study sessions" to promote their Sinification – but I think Christianity is at the center of this because it is the Christians who have the biggest and most vibrant underground churches. Clearly the message is that these underground churches must join the official church. The methods are different. Protestants are facing relatively light pressure – the chicanery with cameras and leases, for example.

Catholics, though, face a more sophisticated effort. This is the four-year diplomatic push to normalize relations between the Vatican and the Communist Party. This is not without advantages for Catholics, and hence it should not be immediately written off as a naïve effort by Rome that plays into the hands of the state. According to some demographic studies, the number of Catholics in China is at best stagnant, and quite possibly falling. This is partly because Catholicism, for historic reasons, is rural based, but rural China is emptying out as the country goes through an unprecedented urbanization. Its clergy, however, is divided between above- and underground, making it not able to respond effectively to this challenge. In short, mission work has faltered. Thus from the Vatican's point of view, a deal with China could make sense if it revives the church's structure in China and allows it to more effectively provide pastoral work.

Unfortunately, this is diametrically opposed to the Chinese government's goals, which is to better control Christianity. Hence we have experienced a series of apparent delays and no prospect of a deal. We shouldn't forget that in 2016 proponents of the negotiations said they had made great progress and a deal was a few months away. Two years later, no deal seems likely. Now, one could be announced tomorrow, and it could allow the Vatican credible influence over the choice of bishops, so much so that the church is revived, the underground and above-ground churches are unified and the religion is invigorated. But this – certainly not the effect of an invigorated church – is not Beijing's goal. Thus one has to conclude that while a deal could happen and could be helpful, this seems like a less likely outcome.

From Beijing's point of view what it probably would achieve is to provide an example to the Protestants – the Pope has brought the underground Catholics together with the Party-run church, so why can't you underground Protestants join the patriotic Protestant

church? Thus I suspect that any campaign against Protestants probably would happen after a deal is reached with Rome.

If we take all this together, the most important conclusion is that religion, far from being an issue of fringe or esoteric interest, is back in the center of Chinese politics. This is the result of hundreds of millions of worshippers pushing for a place in society. And now, because they have not died out but instead proven to be an irreplaceable part of modern-day, the Communist Party has decided to try to coopt some of this new social force, creating opportunities but also growing tensions.

For millennia, religion was the ballast that kept the Chinese state stable. For over a century, the state cast it overboard and Chinese society heaved to and fro, swinging from dictator-worship to unbridled capitalism. Now, religion is back but the question is if it will be a stabilizing force in society, or unmoored by counterproductive government policies, a loose cannon that crashes through the decks.

## “Two Small Copper Coins” and Much More Chinese Protestant Women and Their Contributions to the Church – Cases from Past and Present

Fredrik Fällman

### Introduction

Observations of Christian congregations around the world, including China, will show that women make up the majority in most given settings. One could say that women have been, and are, the backbone of the Church, from the women around Jesus to the studies today that show how women make up the majority of active church members, in China as much as elsewhere. The comparative lack of male churchgoers has been discussed at length in many Churches and denominations in the West, and there have also been a number of surveys and studies trying to document and analyse this situation. Recent studies also indicate that women are more religious than men in general, especially among Christians.<sup>1</sup> In the first decades after Mao Zedong’s death the tendency towards a majority of older women may have been even stronger in China than in the West, since fewer younger people felt secure enough to state their faith publicly in China, or were willing to suffer the consequences in school or at work. Also, the Chinese government recognises the situation of a majority of women in the Church, especially in the countryside. There is even a typical Chinese phrase for this phenomenon, “lao san duo” 老三多 (three old many), i.e.

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- 1 For an interesting and in-depth study of the situation in the UK, see Jacintha Ashworth – Ian Farthing, “Church-going in the UK. A Research Report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK,” Tearfund, April 2007, available at BBC News, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03\\_04\\_07\\_tearfundchurch.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf) (accessed August 10, 2018); Pew Research Center, *The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World. Women Are Generally More Religious than Men, Particularly among Christians*, 2016, March 22, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2016/03/Religion-and-Gender-Full-Report.pdf> (accessed August 10, 2018).

“many women, many old, many with low cultural level [education]” (妇女多、老人多、文化程度低者多).<sup>2</sup>

Research on religion in China in general and Christianity in particular has not taken gender issues particularly into account until fairly recently, and with regard to Christianity there has often been a more historical perspective, for example in the work of the American historian Jessie G. Lutz. Hong Kong theologian Kwok Pui-lan 郭佩蘭 has, among other things, pointed out the importance of including Chinese Christian women in the greater historical perspective of research on modern and contemporary China.<sup>3</sup> Another recent contributor to the study of women and religion in China is Kang Xiaofei, who has pointed to the importance of Christian schools and colleges in creating early generations of urban women receiving modern education. Many of these also became professionals and shared the values of the “New Culture” and “May Fourth” movements. Kang argues that these progressive women helped reshape the male dominated project of modernity, also within religious organisations, and may have played a more important role than is commonly recognised. Those Christian women pioneers also questioned complementarian doctrines then prevalent in the Church, i.e. that men and women have different roles to fulfil, thereby justifying the limitations of women in society and Church. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such complementarian ideas have met increasing resistance in Churches around the World, but in contemporary China they are both actively contested and promoted by different groups.<sup>4</sup>

It can be a negative factor to be openly religious if you are a government employee in China, even if laws and regulations stipulate equal rights for all citizens. However, it is clear that younger generations are less inhibited by this situation and are more public with their faith. This goes for young intellectuals especially, exemplified by a number of high profile “intellectual congregations” in the larger cities of China. One factor in this is the gradually diminishing number of state employees, and the breakdown of the “iron bowl of rice.” Pension, health and unemployment benefit systems are under construction, but are conditional and not general.

It is sometimes very hard to find traces of the impact of Chinese Christian women. One can sense them behind the stories of men in the Church, but as they have been “serving spirits,” wives, widows, unmarried sisters and nurses, they were not in the forefront and are little mentioned in older texts and other material. The plight of women in China in general was much debated already in the 19th century, not least among Western missionaries working in China, and often images of gloom and darkness were spread. Chinese women were depicted as enslaved and enclosed in the family, and this can be traced in

2 Jiang Yiping 姜一平 (ed.), “Bu pingfan zhi nian de zongjiao he zongjiao yanjiu” 不平凡之年的宗教和宗教研究, in: 中国网 China web portal, September 10, 2009, [www.china.com.cn/culture/zhuanti/09zongjiao/2009-09/10/content\\_18497228\\_6.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/culture/zhuanti/09zongjiao/2009-09/10/content_18497228_6.htm) (accessed June 20, 2018).

3 Jessie G. Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility*, Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press 2010; and Kwok Pui-lan, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in: Daniel H. Bays, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996, pp. 194-208.

4 Kang Xiaofei, “Women, Gender and Religion in Modern China, 1900s–1950s: An Introduction,” in: *Nan nü* 19 (2017) 1, pp. 1-27. See also Jia Jinhua – Kang Xiaofei – Yao Ping, *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body*, Albany: SUNY Press 2014.

book titles and texts from the previous century. One example is Swedish missionary Eva Sköld who in 1907 published a book called *The Land of Dark Shadows or Something about China and Its People*, implying a terrible situation for not only women, but “China and its people” in general. However, the actual content focuses to a great extent on the life of local women in Hubei. Much of these “dark” images were also true, as we know from other contemporary accounts and also later academic studies. Similar imagery was also used by early Chinese feminists like Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907), who wrote that “China’s women still remain in the dark and gloom, mired in the lowest of all the levels of hell’s prisons” (我的二万万女同胞, 还依然黑暗沉沦在十八层地狱). She also pointed out that women’s misery is not necessarily visible but is still there as subordination and lack of economic and other freedoms.<sup>5</sup>

An interesting parallel, or possibly deliberate choice of the same imagery, is the story of Christiana Tsai (Cai Sujuan 蔡苏娟, 1890–1984), who grew up in a well-off Qing magistrate family with many children. After being sent to study in Beijing she became a Christian and later moved to the USA. As a rather young woman she fell seriously ill with malaria and was forced to spend literally decades of her life in a darkened room, often in bed. Despite this she kept her Christian faith alive, wrote and continued to evangelise from her “dark room.” In 1953 she published a rather well-known book, translated into many languages, entitled *Queen of the Dark Chamber*. Her book title, and to some extent her whole life, can serve as an interesting and symbolic starting point for further discussion about the contributions of Protestant Chinese women. Christiana Tsai overcame the “darkness” in her mind and became a Christian, and then also overcame the physical darkness to become a missionary and inspirer to many, up until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In her mission and with her actions she also overcame traditional prejudice against women and their abilities.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Tsai in her book possibly inadvertently comments on the issue of women and names in her book, saying that “‘Too Many’ became my baby name.” The Chinese edition gives this so-called “milk name” (*ruming* 乳名) as “Taiduo” (太多).<sup>7</sup> Many rural Chinese women had no proper given name as adults, the “milk name” or other first name they had as children was no longer used when they reached adulthood, and this practice continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in some areas. Married women were usually called something like “Mrs. Wang nee Li” (王李氏), and if unmarried named in kinship or category terms related to age or position.<sup>8</sup>

A phrase from “The Lesson of the Widow” as told in Mark 12 and Luke 21 is part of the title for this paper, and the inspiration came from a small journal, started by primarily women teachers and pastors-to-be at Zhongnan Theological Seminary (Zhongnan shen-

5 Qiu Jin, quoted in: Louise P. Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage in China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2008, p. 62. Chinese original literally says “My 200 million compatriots still remain in the dark and gloom, mired in the prison of the eighteenth level of hell.” The idea of “eighteen levels of hell” comes from popular religious tradition, mixed with elements of Daoism and Buddhism. Full original text at [www.cnthinkers.com/thinkerweb/literature/23462](http://www.cnthinkers.com/thinkerweb/literature/23462).

6 Christiana Tsai 蔡苏娟, *Queen of the Dark Chamber*, Chicago: Moody Publishers 1953 (Chinese language edition: *An shi zhi hou* 暗室之后, 1957).

7 Tsai, “baby name,” on page one of the first chapter both in the 1953 English edition and the 1957 Chinese edition.

8 Rubie S. Watson, “The Named and the Nameless: Gender and Person in Chinese Society,” in: *American Ethnologist* 13 (Nov. 1986) 4, , pp. 619-631.

xueyuan 中南神學院) in Wuhan in the early 1990s. This journal was called *Liang ge xiao qian* 兩個小錢 (Two Small Coins), and was published by the student union at the seminary. I followed this journal (and the seminary) when I studied at Wuhan University in 1996, and I have maintained relations to the Zhongnan seminary and the Hubei Church since. It seems quite clear that the students starting the magazine mostly thought of the notion “my two pennies’ worth” (or “my two cents”), as showing a humble attitude to what their writings might offer. However, the interpretation of the Bible text is broader than this.

Jesus saw the old widow among the many people in the temple, and noticed her gift. Possibly she had been going there all her life, giving as much as she could. No one had noticed her in the way Jesus did. However, Jesus’ words were also directed towards the powerful religious leaders who tried to get more contributions also from widows and the poor, and who tried to make them believe that their gifts would give them religious benefits. In several ways this widow is a symbol for the plight and role of women in China and elsewhere. The widow was seen as a widow, not in her own right as a woman and an equal, but as someone previously married to a man. At the time, her role and social status was predefined by this fact. She was marginalised and not seen for who she really was and what she had really done and achieved in her own right. Added to Jesus’ criticism against the religious leaders in the passage just before the “Lesson of the Widow,” there is also the aspect of a predominantly male leadership of the religious community seeing women (widows) as “useful” only when it benefits themselves. There are such aspects also when looking at the role of women in the Church generally, and in China as discussed here.

The “Lesson of the Widow” may be a good theological starting point for discussing the role and contribution of Chinese Protestant women, but the text also gives ground for a sociological reflection. What voice did the widow have and what choices did she have? And in the greater perspective of Christian women in China, what agency did they have? There is no doubt about the subordinate role of women in many societies, regardless of religious conviction, but does it always mean lack of independent decisions and free choices? If so, did they not have any agency, or is it so that “women’s agency has been concealed or overlooked, not diminished”?<sup>9</sup> Such seems to be the case in the context of Christianity in China, where women have continually played important roles throughout history. While there might be a dialectic with factors such as structures, tradition and beliefs, there are many and clear examples of agency among Chinese Christian women despite their relatively subordinate roles in family and society. For this paper I have chosen four spheres or areas to discuss a few selected cases. Many other categories or distinctions could have been chosen instead, but these four relate to issues of agency, subordination and roles that all are relevant in discussing the contribution of Chinese Christian women to the Church. The four areas are “Patriotism and Gender Equality,” “Caretakers,” “Inspirers and Transmitters” and “Preachers and Educators,” and several of these are also areas within which women commonly work. As Chloë Starr writes, Chinese Christian, educated women “went disproportionately into the caring professions and into teaching

9 For more on women and agency see e.g. Diana Tietjens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery and Women’s Agency, Studies in Feminist Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, quote from p. 2.

and social work in China, just as elsewhere.” However, there were also early critical voices against gender imbalance, such as Ruth Cheng (Cheng Guanyi 诚冠怡) of Yenching University (Yanjing dayue 燕京大学) who in 1922 argued that the issue of women and men and their places and roles in the Chinese Christian Church was an issue of “sharing with them the responsibility of service”.<sup>10</sup>

## “Patriotism” and Gender Equality

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 the party-state has been using strong pro-emancipation rhetoric and there has been much progress at least on the surface. However, the party control, the institutionalised All China Women’s Federation (Zhongguo quanguo funü lianhehui 中华全国妇女联合会; abbreviated: ACWF, Fulián 妇联),<sup>11</sup> and also the commercialisation of society have contributed to slow the development down. Commercial freedom has reduced other freedoms, and there is less space, or market, for serious debate and struggle. China is still a predominantly male-oriented society, even if women can have most kinds of jobs and have a greater economic freedom. Recent years have also seen the return of “concubines” or “second wives” (*er nai* 二奶, not formally married), sometimes even given a flat and financial support sufficient for not having to work. There is also the issue of *shengnü* 剩女, “leftover women,” meaning well-educated women who are in their late 20s (and older) and still remain unmarried. Both the phenomenon as such and the term in itself are a problem, and even the ACWF has been using this derogatory term without much reflection. The term is hardly mentioned on official Protestant Church web pages or in the national Protestant magazine *Tianfeng* 天风, however, but must have been debated also among Christians.<sup>12</sup>

In the revolutionary jargon of the PRC “women hold up half the sky” 妇女能顶半边天, a phrase commonly attributed to Mao Zedong. This expression found resonance also in the West, and many truly believed that the party-state, and even Mao Zedong himself, cared for the liberation of Chinese women, at least that the party had understood the importance of equality. The phrase as such may on one hand sound liberating, and as an expression of female capacity and agency. On the other hand, it is also a Confucian inspired idea about different gender roles in life and society. It is more like a “complementarian” view which has also been prevalent in many Christian denominations throughout history, however less pronounced in recent decades. “Complementarian” here means that men

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- 10 Chloë Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2016, pp. 53-54. Ruth Cheng’s original quote from Ruth Cheng, “Women and the Church,” in: *National Christian Conference: The Chinese Church as Revealed in the National Christian Conference Held in Shanghai, Tuesday, 2 May, to Thursday, 11 May 1922*, Shanghai Oriental Press 1922, pp. 240-242.
- 11 The ACWF is one of many so-called “GONGOs” in the PRC, “Government Organised NGOs.” Such organisations are formally independent, but are *de facto* completely dependent on the “guidance” and good will of the government and the Communist Party of China (CPC).
- 12 For more on the *shengnü* issue see Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*, New York: Zed Books 2014. A search was done in material available at the official Chinese Protestant website, [www.ccctspm.org](http://www.ccctspm.org), and also through the official magazines *Tianfeng* 天风, and *Nanjing Theological Review* 金陵神学志. Magazine search done through China Academic Journals Full-text Database (CNKI) at <http://oversea.cnki.net/kns55/brief/result.aspx?dbPrefix=CJFD>.

and women have different roles, the boundaries of which should not be transgressed. One obvious example is the centuries long prohibition of women from ordination as ministers and priests, lifted within many Protestant denominations only very late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or even the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many Churches and denominations have also implemented a number of rules for women’s right to hold positions in Church hierarchies or to vote in Church congregations, not to mention rules for women’s appearance and clothing, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While such teachings were prevalent also in China before 1949, the formal policies of gender equality have largely prohibited them in the PRC. However, with the current trend of “New Calvinism” among intellectual Christians in China, complementarian views are coming back, however on a small scale. In the USA “New Calvinists” are sometimes “evangelicals” that have (re)discovered Puritan and Calvinist teachings. Among Christian intellectuals in China “New Calvinism” is possibly a choice of freedom and resistance, with a form that gives clear answers in a confusing and immoral post-modern society. Their complementarian ideas may mean among other things that women should aim to cover their heads, that they cannot be ordained and that they should primarily care for the family. The well-known intellectual, unregistered congregation Shouwang jiaohui 守望教会 in Beijing has adopted a “Calvinist” and complementarian stance, and does not allow for the ordination of women. There are also women who accept these views, even if coming from a different background, as an article by the pen name Shuangyan 双燕 from 2009 shows. Shuangyan describes how she always struggled with the concepts of “authority” (*quanbing* 权柄) and “submission” (*shunfu* 顺服) in her previous 14 years as a preacher and ordained pastor. Her article does have elements of doubt and describes the difficulty of interpreting these concepts, but concludes that she has now found peace in submission to God’s authority, and apparently also to the authority of male leaders in Shouwang congregation.<sup>13</sup>

The framework of so-called “patriotic” religious organisations in China has added political factors that go beyond gender issues, and it is sometimes difficult to determine what factor holds the upper hand in a specific case. However, it is most likely that the “patriotic” structures of the Chinese Church have allowed a certain space for women. One may draw parallels to the developments in state church societies such as Sweden, Denmark and Norway, where the government has to some extent influenced the decisions to ordain women. It should be noted, however, that besides government proposals there was a parallel process of accepting women’s ordination in the Churches in the Nordic countries in the 1950–1960s, and since the 1980s only a very small minority has opposed this decision.<sup>14</sup>

13 Shuangyan 双燕, “Jidutu nüxing jiazhi de xunzhao” 基督徒女性价值的寻找, in: *Xinghua* 杏花 2009, No. 4, pp. 39-45 (<https://t3.shwchurch.org/2012/09/25/基督徒女性价值的找寻/>); for more on the “New Calvinist” phenomenon see Fredrik Fällman, “Calvin, Culture and Christ? Developments of Faith among Chinese Intellectuals,” in: Francis Lim Khok Gee (ed.), *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives*, Routledge 2013, pp. 153-168, and Alexander Chow, “Calvinist Public Theology in Urban China Today,” in: *International Journal of Public Theology*, 8 (May 2014) 2, pp. 158-175.

14 Already in 1923 a government commission proposed to allow women ministers in the Church of Sweden, and several proposals were also put forward in the national Church Assembly during the 1950s, before the final decision in 1958.

The lack of open debate on women’s ordination is likely an outcome of the controlled environment of the “patriotic” religious framework in China. Since the 1950s there has been a tug-of-war between the registered Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), since 1980 also the China Christian Council (CCC), and the many unregistered congregations and networks that exist in China. The TSPM/CCC national leadership have often been questioned by the unregistered, sometimes also within their own movement, and very often by Western Churches and mission organisations. There is a legitimate concern that TSPM/CCC leaders come too close to the party-state, which may be corrupting. I would still like to take an example of the contribution of a woman in this environment, and that is Rev. Cao Shengjie 曹圣洁 (b. 1931). She was the first national woman church leader ever in China, and one among still rather few in the World. She was the CCC chairperson 2002–2007, but was seen as a rather controversial figure at least in the West, and was criticised for her political tendencies. Supposedly she was even called “Old Marxist-Leninist Lady” (Ma-Lie lao taitai 马列老太太) by some TSPM colleagues. However, this expression is not directed specifically against Cao Shengjie, but is used against anyone who has worked for a long time in the party-state system and has been stuck in the rhetoric and with the viewpoints that the system has fed them for years. It is often used in the plural, and not for individuals.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, in her role as church leader Rev. Cao was still a sign for the possibility of women, that there was no difference in principle between men and women. For the great majority of Chinese women believers, she may be just a name, and not someone to relate to, but symbolically and on a worldwide scale her role as church leader is still important. Regardless of her affinity with the party-state, and whatever decisions she may have taken in her official roles, the mere fact that the largest organised Chinese Church has had a woman chairperson is a strong statement. For those critical of TSPM/CCC the appointment of a woman, especially Rev. Cao, may have been quite the contrary, merely another example of how corrupt and non-Biblical the TSPM/CCC is in naming a woman to such a position. Notably, I have not been able to find any published statements with such criticism, even if many have criticised Rev. Cao, if not for being a woman in power then more for her party-state affiliation.

Rev. Cao has also published a number of articles on the issue of women in the Church, and she was a delegate to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. At this conference Rev. Cao discussed how Christian women could contribute to the fields of education and development. Interestingly, in her paper she also mentioned the issue of male Chinese pastors adhering to “male chauvinism” (*dananzizhuyi* 大男子主义) and hindering women from being ordained. She also mentioned those who bar already ordained women from working and administering the sacraments on the grounds that it is not biblical. Rev. Cao even mentioned women being influenced to renounce their ordina-

15 David Aikman mentions this epithet for Rev. Cao, quoting unnamed TSPM officials who supposedly called her this. See David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, Washington: Regnery 2003, p. 174. Aikman seems to believe it was aimed specifically towards Rev. Cao, but considering its use and meaning there is good reason to doubt that.

tion on the same grounds, an interesting TSPM/CCC parallel to the case of “Shuangyan” as mentioned above.<sup>16</sup>

The public debate on women’s ordination and women church leaders has been rather limited in China, at least compared to some Western countries where ordination issues in some cases have led to the formation of breakaway organisations, *de facto* denominations.<sup>17</sup> There are indications here and there that the issue exists, like for example Rev. Cao’s articles, but letters to the official national Christian magazine *Tianfeng* also show that the issue is alive among ordinary believers. One male believer from Shanxi writes in 2007 asking:

*Now there are so many women pastors and elders, can they administer the Eucharist and ordain pastors and elders? Some people say that women cannot do this, and others do not accept that women baptize them. Please explain.*

现在的女牧师、女长老很多，她们能主持圣餐礼、参与按立牧师、长老的仪式吗？有人说女人不能主持，有人不接受女长老给他施洗，请解答。

The answer takes its main point from Galatians 3:28 and argues that God made men and women equal, and that God acts in the sacraments, not the person administering them. Therefore, men and women pastors are equally valid as God’s servants. The answer also strongly cautions against such “wrong teachings” (*cuowu de jiaodao* 错误的教导), leading people to question the validity of women pastors and their actions.<sup>18</sup>

Besides Rev. Cao, there are of course many more examples, and in another section below I mention Rev. Liu Nianfen 刘年芬 (1920–2002), regional YWCA leader, seminary president and vice chairperson of national TSPM. These women stand for a different kind of contribution as women in the Chinese Church, outwardly close to the official party line, and upholding the “patriotic” line on most issues. Nevertheless, their positions of power and authority have shown that women can do the same as men, and for many they may have served as guiding stars to show the possibilities of women. The TSPM/CCC is actually far ahead of the Chinese party-state system, which still has a long way to go, as only one out of 25 persons in the Communist Party of China (CPC) politburo is currently a woman, and two out of 34 in the State Council.<sup>19</sup>

16 Cao Shengjie 曹圣洁, “Zhongguo jidujiao funü zai jiaoyu yu fazhan zhong de zuoyong – zai Lianheguo di si ci funü dahui NGO luntan shang de fayan” 中国基督教妇女在教育与发展中的作用—在联合国第四次妇女大会 NGO论坛上的发言, in: *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中国宗教, 1995, No. 3, pp. 30-32.

17 One example is the Mission Province (Missionsprovinser) in Sweden, formed by ministers from the Church of Sweden that protest against women ordination, the official stance on homosexuality and some other issues. Consequently, the Church of Sweden has since 2005 defrocked those ministers assuming positions in the Mission Province, some also being ordained as bishops. See further Carola Nordbäck, “Tio år med Missionsprovinsern” (Ten Years with the Mission Province), in: *Svensk kyrkotidning*, 2013, No. 25, pp. 517-522.

18 Bai Tianmin 白天民 (question) and Jin Wei 金微 (answer), “Nü mushi, nü zhanglao keyi zhuchi shengli ma?” 女牧师、女长老可以主持圣礼吗?, in: *Tianfeng* 天风 2007, No. 4, p. 24.

19 Shui Jingjun 水镜君, “In Search of Sacred Women’s Organizations,” in: Hsiung Ping-Chun – Maria Jaschok – Cecilia Milwertz – Red Chan (eds.), *Chinese Women organizing: Cadres, Feminists, Muslims, Queers*, Oxford: Berg 2001, pp. 101-118; Guowuyuan 国务院, The Central People’s Government of the PRC online, [www.gov.cn/guowuyuan](http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan) (accessed August 10, 2018); and “Di shijiu jie Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhi jiegou tu” 第十九届中共中央组织结构图, in: CPC News online, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/414940/index.html> (accessed August 10, 2018).

While the promotion of women as church leaders after 1949 may be at least partially attributed to the political situation and formal agenda of equality, limited in reality, there are also examples from before 1949. One special example is Rev. Florence Li Tim-Oi 李添媛, the first Anglican women priest in the world, ordained by Bishop Hall of Victoria (Hong Kong) in 1944. Her ordination took place during World War II and in a situation where the Bishop saw her ordination as a solution to the need of several congregations under pressure. He had also seen the good parish work of Li Tim-Oi as a deacon during several years, and wrote the following to a friend in England just after her ordination:

*For four years she has been in sole charge of a congregation, and both spiritually and practically she has been a most successful pastor, both to men and women. ... [she is a] competent, sensible, quiet parish priest.<sup>20</sup>*

While Bishop Hall's comment is very appreciative, it emphasizes Rev. Li's sensitivity and quietness, which may have been interpreted by some that she would not be much noticed but still do good work, despite being a woman. However, competence, sensitivity, and sometimes also quietness are qualities well fit for a parish priest, man or woman, and Bishop Hall's intentions were quite certainly not in the direction of diminishing Rev. Li. He was also formally criticized for the ordination.

After World War II Li Tim-Oi chose to renounce her licence, however not her ordination and she was later formally recognized as a priest again in the 1970s. Seen in retrospect, her case must have had an impact on the ordination of women in China overall and prepared the way for such decisions in other denominations, and also after 1949. The Anglican Communion worldwide celebrated the 70th anniversary of her ordination in January 2014.<sup>21</sup> With the ordination of Li Tim-Oi, the Chinese Protestant Church was far ahead of most Churches in the West, but it is interesting that the ordaining bishop was a Westerner, Bishop Hall. The Anglican Communion at large decided to allow women ministers only in 1974, and 2014 was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women priests in the Church of England. That same year, 2014, the Church of England decided to allow women bishops.

In a more recent development, China has turned out to be one of few places where Seventh Day Adventists ordain women. As in other denominations the Adventists in the West have been debating this issue for decades, while in China the first ordinations took place already in the 1980s. This is due to the special situation in China with the Adventists existing under the umbrella of the TSPM/CCC, but also the need for Christian leaders with the rapidly expanding Church in China. Women are needed as teachers, preachers, pastors, evangelists and in all other roles, as the Church struggles to cope with the situation. International Adventist leaders have apparently accepted this situation, and according to pub-

20 Letter from Bishop Hall to friends in England, January 27, 1944, quoted in the booklet for the memorial Eucharist in St. Martin-in-the-fields, London, January 25, 2014, available at the Li Tim-Oi Foundation website “It Takes One Woman,” <http://www.ittakesonewoman.org/docs/oosbooklet25114.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2014).

21 “Anglicans Mark 70 Years since Ordination of First Woman Priest,” in: Anglican Communion News Service, [www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/01/anglicans-mark-70-years-since-ordination-of-first-woman-priest.aspx](http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/01/anglicans-mark-70-years-since-ordination-of-first-woman-priest.aspx) (accessed August 10, 2018); Florence Li Tim-Oi, *Raindrops of My Life: The Memoir of Florence Tim Oi Li*, Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1996; and Edmund B. Der, “Florence Tim Oi Li: Pioneer & Mentor of the Women Priests’ Movement,” in: The Anglican Church of Canada online, [www.anglican.ca/faith/worship/resources/li-tim-oi/li-tim-oi-der/](http://www.anglican.ca/faith/worship/resources/li-tim-oi/li-tim-oi-der/) (accessed September 5, 2014).

licly available reports and articles it seems that it is well tolerated and that the pragmatic Chinese understanding and action in this respect is successful. This is yet another example of where China is ahead of the rest of the world with regard to the role of women in the Church, and where Chinese Christian women contribute beyond their own borders.<sup>22</sup>

## Caretakers

Becoming a nurse, a midwife or a teacher was often the only way for a woman who wanted to leave her stay-at-home life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the West as well as in China. For Western women mission was also an option. In mission history medical work plays a very important role, and the various missions to China are no exception. There are also a few more well-known Chinese Christian women doctors and nurses who have left a lasting legacy. Among the most well-known is Shi Meiyu 石美玉 (Mary Stone, 1873–1954), among the first Chinese women to receive Western medical training. She was trained together with Kang Cheng 康成 (Ida Kahn, 1873–1931) at the University of Michigan, and they both returned to China as medical doctors in 1896. They were both also active as missionaries, especially Shi who became a leading Methodist preacher. Interestingly their legacy extends not only throughout China, but on an international level. In 1914, Levi Barbour, a Regent of the University of Michigan, met Kang and Shi while travelling in China, and was so impressed that he started to plan for a scholarship for Asian women after coming back to the USA. The first Barbour Scholars arrived in the USA in 1918, and scholarships have since been awarded not only in medicine and science, but also in political science and sociology. Originally known as The Barbour Scholarships for Oriental Women, they are now called the Rackham Barbour Scholarships for Asian Women.<sup>23</sup>

Both Kang Cheng (Kahn) and Shi Meiyu (Stone) were supported and promoted, Kang even adopted and educated by American missionary Gertrude Howe of the Woman's Foreign Mission Society, affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA. Howe's close relationship especially with Kang has been questioned as “cultural imperialism,” and that Kang was almost turned into an American. Howe as an unmarried woman missionary in China, and her cultural training and promotion of Kang and Shi caused tensions in a missionary community that while preaching equality still was very male dominated.<sup>24</sup> Another more recent example of a Chinese Christian woman medical expert is Dr. Lin Qiaozhi 林巧稚 (Lim Kha T'i, 1901–1983). She was the leading gynaecologist at Peking Union Medical College Hospital from the late 1940s till her death. She was also a dedicated Christian who did not refrain from expressing her faith even during the harsh climate for religion under Mao Zedong. Dr. Lin befriended premier Zhou Enlai, which may explain

22 “Women Serving as Ordained Ministers in the Adventist Church in China,” in: *Advent Life*, <http://adventlife.wordpress.com/2012/06/26/women-serving-as-ordained-ministers-in-the-adventist-church-in-china-by-at-news-team> (accessed August 24, 2014).

23 “A Cosmopolitan Tradition: Barbour Scholarships,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, <http://bentley.umich.edu/exhibits/cosmo/barbour.php> (accessed August 22, 2014).

24 Barbara Reeves-Ellington – Kathryn Kish Sklar – Connie A. Shemo (eds.), *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960*, Duke University Press 2010.

why she was protected to a certain extent. After her death Lin was commemorated with a stamp in 1990, a TV film (“Endless Love” [Da ai ru tian 大爱如天], by CCTV) in 2007, several biographies and even a bronze statue at the China Women and Children Museum (Zhongguo funü ertong bowuguan 中国妇女儿童博物馆) in Beijing.<sup>25</sup>

An interesting case of a woman’s contribution in the caring field that I discovered more or less by chance is Liu Baozhen 刘葆真 (1900–1984). Her case shows how difficult it can be to find and become aware of women’s contributions to Church and society in China. She is much less known than her famous husband, Dr. Li Xingjie 李星阶 (Edmund Li, 1896–1989). However, she helped her husband to build up the renowned Kangsheng Hospital (Kangsheng yiyuan 康生医院) in Shashi 沙市, Hubei province (now part of Jingzhou Municipality 荆州市). Kangsheng Hospital was a privately operated hospital founded in 1930, supported financially by the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden (MCCS, Ruidian xingdaohui 瑞典行道会), but merged in 1956 to form the current No. 3 Jingzhou People’s Hospital (Jingzhou shi di san renmin yiyuan 荆州市第三人民医院).<sup>26</sup> All material about this hospital that I have seen, in Chinese and in Swedish, only mentions the founder Dr. Li Xingjie, not his wife Liu Baozhen. Li Xingjie’s father, Li Pinsan 李品三, was a famous evangelist, and Li Xingjie’s two brothers Li Qiongjie 李琼阶 and Li Yabo 李亚伯 were both well-known pastors, and perhaps there was no space left for his wife to be seen or heard. Dr. Li also became a church leader and board member in Hubei during the 1930s and 1940s.

Liu Baozhen’s medical specialty was obstetrics, and curiously the Kangsheng Hospital is mentioned in some recollections and historical notes as especially strong in this field, however without mentioning her name.<sup>27</sup> Through her dedication and perseverance, along with a passion for care and a passion for faith, Dr. Liu Baozhen apparently made great contributions to the reputation of the hospital. The current medical authorities in Jingzhou proudly tell the legacy of Kangsheng hospital, and they mention the Swedish missionaries, Dr. Li Xingjie’s advanced medical studies, and also Dr. Li’s work after 1949 when the hospital was nationalised. Several articles about Dr. Li Xingjie as well as some files in the MCCS archives in Sweden only mention Dr. Liu Baozhen as Dr. Li Xingjie’s wife, not even mentioning her name. However, in private collections I have found memorials from Li’s and Liu’s children after the passing away of their parents. One Swedish missionary recollection claims that Liu Baozhen was merely a nurse, but her children titled her “doctor”

25 Guowei Wright, “Lin Qiaozhi – the Steady Pulse of a Quiet Faith,” in: Carol Lee Hamrin – Stacy Bieler (eds.), *Salt and Light: Lives of Faith That Shaped Modern China*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock 2009; Ren Wanxia 任万霞, “Lin Qiaozhi: Yisheng de yi ban shi tianshi” 林巧稚: 医生的一半是天使 (Lin Qiaozhi: Half of the Doctor is an Angel), in: Sina Finance Online, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20140329/024518651652.shtml>; and “China Marks 100th Birthday of Chinese Gynecological Pioneer,” in: *People’s Daily* English online edition, December 22, 2001, [http://english.people.com.cn/200112/22/eng20011222\\_87258.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200112/22/eng20011222_87258.shtml). The stamp can be seen at [www.christiantimes.cn/assets/cache/widen\\_700\\_watermark/assets/media/post/201304/10602/2013042314351439.jpg](http://www.christiantimes.cn/assets/cache/widen_700_watermark/assets/media/post/201304/10602/2013042314351439.jpg), and the film is accessible at <http://v.cdstm.cn/video.php?vid=2939> (all accessed August 10, 2018).

26 Jingzhou shi di san renmin yiyuan 荆州市第三人民医院 (No. 3 Jingzhou People’s Hospital), official web page, [www.jz3y.com](http://www.jz3y.com) (accessed August 24, 2014).

27 “Hbjzslscg 的博客,” Hubei Jingzhou minjian shiliaoguan 湖北荆州民间史料官 (Hubei Jingzhou Popular History Data Office), <http://hbjzslscg.blog.163.com/blog/static/5376699220089165118465> (accessed August 18, 2014) (This page is now closed but partially archived at [https://web.archive.org/web/20170915000000\\*/http://hbjzslscg.blog.163.com/](https://web.archive.org/web/20170915000000*/http://hbjzslscg.blog.163.com/)).

in their memorial at her funeral in 1984. Only one local Jingzhou article that I have found includes Liu Baozhen among the “qualified doctors in all specialties” (各科医生具备) at the Kangsheng hospital, her having graduated from “a famous medical school” (出自著名医校). Liu’s husband Li Xingjie studied at the Datong Medical School in Wuhan, affiliated with Renji Hospital (Renji yiyuan 仁济医院), now the Union Hospital of Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology. It is not yet clear where Liu Baozhen studied.<sup>28</sup>

Liu Baozhen worked at the Kangsheng Hospital from 1924 to 1965, when she retired for health reasons. She is only one of many examples of the women who in their daily lives and in their contemporary time are taken for granted, at best honoured and seen as natural authorities, but after retirement and later pass slowly into oblivion. Dr. Liu served and focused on her work, on practicalities, while her more well-known husband became a church board member and was promoted as a medical authority who is still spoken of. This reminds us again that “women’s agency has been concealed or overlooked, not diminished” (Diana Tietjens Meyers).<sup>29</sup>

In their recollections of their parents, Dr. Li’s and Dr. Liu’s children specifically mention their mother’s Christian devotion, how she always wore a cross around her neck, while at work or at home, in health and sickness. According to her children, her dedication went far beyond the responsibility of an ordinary doctor, and she would give reduced fees or even free care for people with special needs. She is an interesting example of a Chinese Christian woman making an important contribution locally, but being taken for granted and later forgotten. Reading further between the lines in historical material may reveal more of her story, and contribute to local Christian history.

Besides these more or less famous names, there are many Christian women who have served as nurses, nursing assistants and home carers, as well as medical doctors, and who may have contributed as much as their male counterparts but were never seen. Such contributions rarely catch the attention of academia, but recently Professor Yu Jianrong 于建嵘, well-known scholar of Chinese rural society at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS, Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院) in Beijing, has made some interesting comments in this respect. He has argued that today Christian women in the Chinese countryside often achieve respect and understanding in the long run through their unceasing “good work,” caring for elderly and sick, breaking (others’) bad habits such as smoking and drinking, keeping the household and so on. They also often endure hardships from relatives, sometimes with non-Christian husbands beating them and scolding them for their Christian convictions. The mere fact that Yu Jianrong mentions Christian women in rural China in one of his articles is a step forward. His observations show that

28 Feng Yiran 冯毅然, “Youlian yaofang yu Kangsheng yiyuan” 友联药房与康生医院 (Youlian Pharmacy and Kangsheng Hospital), Jingzhou jiyi 荆州记忆 (Jingzhou Memories), Tencent, March 19, 2018, <https://new.qq.com/omn/20180319/20180319B17QM4.html> (accessed July 17, 2018).

29 Personal files for Dr. Li Xingjie, MCCS Archives, Stockholm; Li Xingjie’s children, “To the Memory of Dr. Edmund Li,” speech at memorial service in Shashi Church, July 30, 1989 (translated by former missionaries Nils Ahlgren and Gertrud Trädgårdh) (private missionary collection, Stockholm); Liu Baozhen’s children, “Consecration – Mother’s Life-long Desire,” memorial account of Dr. Liu Baozhen, Shashi Church, December 4, 1984 (translated by friends of the family) (private missionary collection, Stockholm); Gösta Stenström, *Kyrkorna vid Yangtsefloden* (The Churches along the Yangtse River), Stockholm: Svenska missionsförbundet 1990, p. 70.

the image of women in rural China, while still painted in dark colours, is changing slowly, and spread rays of light in academic works.<sup>30</sup>

## Transmitters and Inspirers

Transmission of the basics of Christian faith in the family is a very important task often carried out by the women in the family, grandmother, mother, aunt or among siblings. There may also be the case of a wife converting a husband, and possibly also other family members. Women have also done tremendous work as Sunday school teachers, sowing seeds that may grow to something more later in life. Such contributions can sometimes be critical for the continuation of Christian faith in the family, in the local area or the region, but the legacy will often also live on through other means.

Research about Christianity in China often focuses on the larger cities and the more populated Eastern parts of the country. However, Christianity most likely came to China first through Central Asia, even if there are only few believers in this area today. I would like to mention here a very special case of a Protestant woman leaving a legacy on several levels, as medical worker, as educator and as transmitter of the Gospel in and outside her family. Her witness of faith may have had an impact for Christianity in the whole of southern Xinjiang.

This woman was called Tornisa, an Uyghur woman born in the early 1920s who died in 1991. For part of her youth she lived with the Swedish M CCS missionaries in Yarkand 莎车, at their “girls’ home.” The “girls’ home” was not really an orphanage, and Tornisa spent some time with her family, but she was influenced for the rest of her life by her upbringing with the Swedes. After attending the local mission school, Tornisa was trained as a mid-wife by the missionaries and later also worked as such. In her teens she became a Christian and was baptised. Tornisa told her children and grandchildren Bible stories while they were growing up, all through the 1950–60s as well as into the cultural revolutionary 1970s and the early 1980s. Several of Tornisa’s family members are Christians also today, despite the hardships of being Christian among Muslims, and also in the generally hostile atmosphere towards religion that prevails in contemporary Xinjiang. Some female family members continue to be open about their Christian faith, and talk openly with friends and colleagues, continuing Tornisa’s legacy also today.<sup>31</sup>

In the special environment of Xinjiang, and with the stigma of being an ethnic minority that is officially categorised as “Muslim,” it is remarkable that Christian faith was kept alive through Tornisa and a few other women. The special case of Tornisa perhaps says less about the contribution of Protestant women than about her personally, but under the circumstances only a woman could have accomplished what she did. Most of the Uyghur

30 Yu Jianrong 于建嵘, “Zhongguo jidujiao jiating jiaohui hefahua yanjiu” 中国基督教家庭教会合法化研究, in: Aisixiang 爱思想, December 18, 2013, [www.aisixiang.com/data/70584.html](http://www.aisixiang.com/data/70584.html) (accessed August 20, 2014).

31 John Hultvall, *Mission and Revolution in Central Asia*, PDF book 2004, part VII, chapters 6-7, <http://equumeniakyrkan.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Hultvall-ENG.pdf> (accessed August 23, 2014) (original Swedish edition *Mission och revolution i Centralasien*, Stockholm: Gummessons 1981); and interviews with Tornisa’s family, April 1998; April 4–7, 2006; and October 18–20, 2010.

Christian men in Kashgar 喀什, Yarkand and Yengisar 英吉沙 were deliberately killed after the Swedish missionaries were forced to leave in 1938.

Tornisa was always an outspoken and strong woman, telling her views to anyone and not being afraid of authorities. Local authorities in Yarkand arrested her for some time in her teens, and she spent a number of days sitting alone in a dark room. This experience frightened her tremendously according to her own telling, but apparently also shaped her determination even more. She was openly Christian from her teenage years and all through the rest of her life, and was under scrutiny and surveillance by the authorities from time to time until her death. She gathered other survivors of the mission already during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Cultural Revolution was still rolling over China. In 1967 Tornisa wrote a letter to Sweden that eventually reached the MCCS and the ageing missionaries. The letter told how much she longed for them, and how her life had been since they met for the last time, 30 years earlier. Throughout the late 1960s and all through the 1970s and 1980s Tornisa communicated with MCCS in Sweden, and slowly the MCCS learned that not only had parts of the Christian community in southern Xinjiang survived all the chaos in the decades past, but the Christian message had also been passed on to the younger generation. While most of the Christian men had been killed rather early on after the missionaries left, the women had in many cases been married to Muslims or atheists and forced to denounce their Christian faith. In 1986 Tornisa was able to visit Sweden, and she travelled around the country to tell her story and to let people know that there were still Christians in Yarkand and Kashgar. A TV film was made during her visit, and she had a great impact also in Swedish congregations and even outside the Church with her life story.<sup>32</sup>

Tornisa is one extreme example of Christian women as everyday transmitters of faith, as everyday missionaries. This everyday work is one of the greatest contributions of Christian women in China, but also elsewhere in the world. It goes along with the traditional role of women as mothers and household caretakers but should not be neglected in the discussion of how to spread the Gospel in contemporary society. Everyday dialogue with neighbours, friends and colleagues is possibly as effective as large-scale meetings and campaigns. The development of the Chinese Church, in a country where street preaching and large-scale revival meetings are not possible, gives ample evidence that such is the case.

Besides transmission on the family level, there are also a number of interesting Christian women “inspirers of faith,” witnesses, evangelists and revivalists who have made a great impact but are somehow still less known and appreciated for their work. One case worth mentioning is Yu Cidu 余慈度 (Dora Yu, 1873–1931), an evangelist and revivalist who was a great inspiration of Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng 倪柝声, 1903–1972), even called by some Nee’s “spiritual mother.” Watchman Nee is a name well-known to anyone taking an interest in Chinese Christian history and recent developments. But how many know of Dora Yu? Yu was originally a medical doctor, trained at Soochow Hospital (Boxi yiyuan 博习医院) in Suzhou. After graduating she was sent to Korea as a medical mis-

32 *Ibid.*; “Tornisa – kvinnan som skrev” (Tornisa – The Woman Who Wrote), TV film produced by Magnus Ekman and Christer Ernehall, Kaggeholm MTV 1986; Tornisa files in “Östturkestanansamlingen” (East Turkestan Collection/Samuel Fränne Collection), Swedish National Archive, Stockholm (archive reference code SE/RA/720860).

sionary for the Methodist Episcopal Church (Jianlihui 監理會). After a few years in Seoul she returned to China and started her own independent mission in Shanghai. Yu Cidu later became a well-known evangelist who travelled around China. At a revival meeting in Fuzhou in 1920 the young Ni Tuosheng was in attendance and had a strong experience that made him convinced of his own mission. Ni also studied briefly at the Bible school Yu Cidu had started in Shanghai, before starting his own preaching, and the work that was to become the movement of Local Churches (Difang zhaohui 地方召會).<sup>33</sup>

Yu Cidu, Shi Meiyu, Kang Cheng and Lin Qiaozhi all remained unmarried, and committed their whole lives to their mission. By making this choice they came to exist a little outside the traditional framework, since the norm for women was to be married and relate to a man, a husband. The Church has a long tradition of men and women taking vows and living a communal life in a religious order, but these women were instead outstanding professionals and/or preachers who inspired men and women through their caring and missionary work. They have all been lauded for their contributions, but are still much less known than male counterparts. They certainly gave their “two copper coins,” and so much more.

## Preachers and Educators

One of my inspirations for this article is Rev. Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟 (b. 1952) in Wuhan. Rev. Ge is a retired chaplain and Bible teacher at Zhongnan Theological Seminary, one of the regional seminaries affiliated with the TSPM/CCC. The seminary is commissioned to provide theological education for the six provinces and autonomous regions Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan. Since its start in 1985 the Zhongnan Seminary has always had a significant number of women in leading positions, exemplifying the role and contribution of Protestant women as preachers and educators in the Chinese Church. The founding president of Zhongnan Seminary was also a woman, Rev. Liu Nianfen 刘年芬 (1920–2002), and it is clear that she actively promoted other women to leading positions. Rev. Liu was also an early “patriotic” woman church leader, among the first to sign the so-called “Three-Self manifesto” (Sanzi gexin xuanyan 三自革新宣言) in 1950, and later a vice chairperson of the national TSPM. Through her work in YWCA she also became an important inspirer for young women in Wuhan and Hubei, and through the seminary also women from several central Chinese provinces. According to estimates up to one third of the faculty of TSPM/CCC seminaries are now women.<sup>34</sup>

Rev. Ge Baojuan was born in 1952, grew up in a Catholic family, and has a brother who is a Catholic priest in their native Jiangsu province. After finishing school, she studied at a local teachers’ college and started working as a teacher. For some time during the Cultural Revolution she, like so many others, had to do manual farm work. When Chinese society

33 Silas Wu (Wu Xiuliang 吴秀良), *Yu Cidu zhuan* 余慈度传, Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe 2012.

34 Tian Yu 田雨, “Xi yang hong – Liu Nianfen mushi fangtan lu” 夕阳红—刘年芬牧师访谈录, in: *Tianfeng* 天风 1995, No. 7, pp. 18-19; Wang Zhenren 汪振仁, “Yinwei Yehehua bi zai nimen qiantou xing – zhuisi Liu Nianfen mushi” 因为耶和华必在你们前头行—追思刘年芬牧师, in: *Tianfeng* 2003, No. 2, pp. 50-51; and Kwok Pui Lan 郭佩兰, “Christianity and Women in China,” unpublished paper of the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting 2008, available at <http://wenku.baidu.com/view/ff895a24bcd126fff7050b09> (accessed August 10, 2018).

gradually went back to a normal state again after Mao Zedong's death, Ge Baojuan wanted to realise the calling she had felt to study theology and preach, and therefore decided to go to the Protestant seminary in Nanjing, Jinling Union Theological Seminary (Jinling xiehe shenxueyuan 金陵协和神学院), that opened for new students again in 1981. She was in the first class after reopening. Coming from a Catholic family, where she is still the only Protestant, her choice of becoming a minister is quite extraordinary. Besides being a charismatic preacher and enthusiastic teacher, Rev. Ge Baojuan has also continuously promoted women's issues, as can be seen to some extent in several articles published in the national Christian magazine *Tianfeng*. She was a founding member of the Hubei Christian Council women's committee and has also worked for women's issues nationally. Besides a direct involvement in women's issues, she has a strong passion for social work that has achieved both local and national attention, for example her work with orphans and handicapped, as well as the Ark School (Fangzhou xuexiao 方舟学校) in Gedian 葛店 near Ezhou 鄂州 (outside Wuhan) where school dropouts are given a second chance at education.<sup>35</sup>

Besides her work at the Zhongnan Seminary, Rev. Ge was also the senior pastor of the Thanksgiving Church (Gan'en tang 感恩堂) near the seminary, one of Wuhan's major churches with several thousand members. Among her students, many have become local church leaders, both men and women, and several of her former women students are now also national level church representatives. The proportion of female staff at Zhongnan Seminary is also high, and many posts in the Hubei TSPM and Christian Council are held by women, however not the chair positions.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

Many years ago Rev. Ge gave me an article, published in the magazine called *Liang ge xiao qian* 两个小钱 (Two Small Coins) mentioned above. The article dealt with her relation to and inspiration from an old Swedish woman missionary.<sup>37</sup> In the late 1980s the missionary Naemi Petersson (Bi Duzhen 毕笃珍, 1912–1997) came to visit Hubei, where she had spent a number of years in the 1930–1940s. Ms. Petersson made a great impression on Ge Baojuan and many others in Wuhan. According to Rev. Ge Baojuan, Ms. Petersson had really given her “two copper coins” and much more, by giving her youth to the mission, and choosing not to marry. Ms. Petersson was in charge of a girl's home in Huangzhou, and the orphaned children became “her children.” Many of them also looked to her as their

35 Interviews and conversations with Ge Baojuan, October 1996 (several occasions); May 2006 (several occasions); June 2, 2014; Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟, “Er shi zhenli, zhenli shi er” 尔识真理、真理释尔, in: *Tianfeng* 1997, No. 6, p. 21; *idem*, “Muzhe de zilü” 牧者的自律, in: *Tianfeng* 2011, No. 3, pp. 52-53; Zhang Shuilian 张水莲, “Funü zai jiaohui jianshe zhong yao fahui geng da zuoyong – ji Hubei sheng jidujiao di si ci funü shigonghui” 妇女在教会建设中要发挥更大作用—记湖北省基督教第四次妇女事工会, in: *Tianfeng* 2005, No. 6, pp. 20-21.

36 *Ibid.*; Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟, “Shi Jidu de ming de rongyao – ji Hubei jiaohui de shehui guanhuai shigong” 使基督的名得荣耀—记湖北教会的社会关怀事工, in: *Tianfeng* 2002, No. 8, pp. 46-47; Hubei Christian Council and TSPM website, www.hubeichurch.com (accessed September 10, 2014).

37 Ge Baojuan 葛宝娟, “Yong wu zhixi de ai” 永无止境的爱 (Ever Unceasing Love), in: *Liang ge xiao qian* 两个小钱 (Two Small Coins), ed. by Zhongnan shenxueyuan xueshenghui 中南神学院学生会, 1993, No 3 (internal publication 内部), pp. 17-19.

“mother.” A number of them kept contact with Ms. Petersson until her death in 1997, and some also visited Sweden several times to meet their “mother.” Several of these orphans continued to work in the spirit of their “mother” and turned out to be strong supporters of the weak and elderly in their neighbourhoods and hometowns. One “daughter” started an old people’s home, first privately, later to be taken over by the Church, showing an inspiration not only to the church but to the whole local community and the authorities. Another “daughter” became a medical doctor, serving her community in that way. Rev. Ge Baojuan was deeply inspired by Ms. Petersson to continue her involvement with orphans, school dropouts and other needy persons in society, and their contact is an example of the legacy of women’s contribution to Church and society in China.<sup>38</sup>

Many examples here show the contribution of women in a caring role, as is often presumed or taken for granted or “natural” with women, reaffirming their “traditional” role as caretakers in family and society. I believe that we can apply some aspect of the “Lesson of the Widow’s Offering” also here. Caring for the weak and elderly, doing supportive work, cooking and cleaning is, of course, appreciated and supported, but often taken for granted and often expected of women. This goes for all of society and not only the Church, in China as well as in the West. But is not this unseen work as important as preaching and teaching? The “two copper coins” put in by a serving person, man or woman, should be of equal worth compared to sermons delivered at church, or teaching hours given at the seminary. Again we may consider the notion that “women’s agency has been concealed or overlooked, not diminished” (Tietjens Meyers).

In 2012 I had the privilege of visiting the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Thanksgiving Church in Wuhan, and then I interviewed three students from the Zhongnan Seminary. They were all intent on becoming pastors, and told how their dreams of university studies and finding good jobs turned into theological studies after they felt their calling. Interestingly, it had not occurred to them that being a woman and a pastor could even be an issue. However, they had been questioned and ridiculed for being Christians, and for choosing the seminary before other higher education, but not on gender grounds. This is an interesting indication that something may be changing. At the occasion, Rev. Ge Baojuan also commented on their choice and the general situation for women in the Church briefly in the following words: “women are part of society, and they are also part of the Church.”<sup>39</sup>

38 Ge Baojuan, “Yong wu zhixi de ai.”

39 Fredrik Fällman, “Martyrer i Kina” (Martyrs in China), in: *Uppdraget* (The Mission) 2012, No. 1, Equmeniakyrkan (Uniting Church in Sweden), Stockholm, pp. 20-21.

## In the Tent of Meeting: Conference on Inculturation of Catholicism in China (天主教在中国的本地化) Held in Jilin

*Dominic Niu*



Participants of the Conference on Inculturation of Catholicism in China. Photo: Jilin Seminary.

The conference was held from June 21–22, 2018 at the Seminarium Catholicum Chilinen-sis (吉林天主教神哲学院) in Jilin City of Jilin Province, organized by the Seminary and co-sponsored by Fu Jen Academia Catholica (辅仁大学天主教学术研究院) of Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei. This was also the closing event to mark the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the seminary's re-opening (1987). Given the actual circumstances in China, that a seminary could successfully organize a conference on such a scale, with concrete co-operation crossing the boundaries of the Mainland, is something rather rare, if not entirely unparalleled. As a matter of fact, this was actually the second time that the two institutions joined forces for such an event. The first time a similarly organized con-

ference was held from June 15–16, 2015 on the theme of Cross-cultural Scholasticism (跨文化的士林哲学), held also in Jilin.

The presentations of papers and discussions were divided into three sessions, featuring a total of four speakers from the seminary and six from Taiwan. Each speaker, with the exception of one special report, was given 20 minutes for the presentation and at the end of each session, a 30-minute discussion was held with the possibility of raising questions to all the speakers for that session.

The conference was opened with a welcoming remark from the rector of the Seminary, Fr. Qian Li 钱利, followed by brief speeches from Fr. Zhu Changyou 朱长友, general administrator of Jilin Diocese, and Dr. Jiang Hansheng 江汉声, president of Fu Jen University. The first session featured three scholars: Fr. Niu Zhixiong 牛稚雄, a professor of Bible at the seminary, presented a paper on the theme of Sabbath, titled “The Holy Time: Past and Present Understanding of Sabbatical Spirit” (神圣的时间—安息精神的古今认识), examining the provenance of the important biblical concept Sabbath as well as its important significance both then and now, with a particular attention to the Chinese situations. Prof. Chen Deguang 陈德光, director of the Center for Scholasticism at Fu Jen, offered a synthesis of some important Chinese (primarily from Taiwan) scholars’ contributions to theological inculturation, with a paper titled “Chinese Inculturation of Theology: a Scholastic Approach in Taiwan” (中国神学本位化: 台湾士林学派观点); Prof. Chen Fangzhong 陈方中 of Fu Jen gave a very intriguing account and analysis of the so-called Tianjin Movement under the influence of the famed missionary Fr. Frédéric Vincent Lebbe (Lei Mingyuan 雷鸣远), a summary of his paper “Tianjin Movement: Its Critical Importance in the Catholic Inculturation Movement at the Beginning of the Republic Era” (天津运动—民初天主教本地化运动的重要关键).

The afternoon session saw three presentations. Mr. Li Jianqiu 黎建秋, president emeritus of Fu Jen University, in his presentation called “Contemporary Challenges Facing Moral Theology” (伦理神学在当代的挑战) provided an insightful overview of the current challenges facing Catholic ethics today, especially in the bio-ethics areas, encouraging the Catholic Church to pay more attention and effort to education and research in the area of modern technologies. Fr. Gong Gaode 宫高德, assistant professor of Jingyi University (Jingyi daxue 静宜大学) of Taiwan, focused on the pastoral approaches of Gregory the Great and its modern implications in his paper “Inspirations for the Modern Church in Saint Gregory the Great’s *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*” (圣教宗大国瑞的《牧灵指南》对现代教会的启示). Finally, Fr. Jia Shaoxian 贾少先, professor of dogmatic theology at Jilin Seminary, reflected on the theme of evangelization and dialogue with his paper “Mission and Interreligious Dialogue” (传教和宗教之间的对话).

On the second day, the third session began with Dr. Jiang Hansheng’s featured report “The Mission and the Future of a Chinese Catholic University Hospital” (一所华人天主教大学医院的使命和未来) in which the inception, preparation and establishment of the newly opened Fu Jen Catholic University Hospital was recounted. Particularly touching was his sharing of the vision of building “a hospital with a soul” (*yi suo you ling de yiyuan* 一所有灵魂的医院) that focuses on holistic care for all patients, so as to fully demonstrate the hospital’s Catholic characteristics and actualize its evangelical potentials. For

many it was truly an eye-opening and an inspiring experience in terms of how a Catholic institution could integrate new technologies and evangelical mission in its service to modern society.

Following this presentation, another triad of speakers spoke on different topics. Prof. He Jiarui 何家瑞, an associate fellow of Fu Jen Academia Catholica, presented a comparative study of different understandings of “truth” of two renowned philosophers, namely Jacques Maritain and John Dewey. In her paper “Truth and Education: A Comparative Study of Maritain and Dewey’s Concepts of ‘Truth’” (真理与教育: 马里旦与杜威之“真理”概念比较研究), Prof. He attempted a harmonization of their theories, which had been commonly understood as contradictory to each other. The second speaker was Fr. Gan Ruibin 甘瑞斌, director of the Spirituality Department (*lingxiubu zhuren* 灵修部主任) of Jilin Seminary, who, as a seasoned spiritual director and teacher, shared his thoughts on inculturation in the context of seminary formation and his paper was called “The Inculturation of Priestly Formation from the Perspective of the Implementation of Magisterial Teachings” (从教会训导的落实谈司铎培育的本位化). Finally, the rector of the Seminary, Fr. Qian Li, offered his reflections on the Church’s inculturation and seminary formation in China, in a summary of his paper entitled “Brief Reflections on the Church’s Inculturation and the Formation of Candidates for Priesthood in Seminaries in Mainland China: With Jilin Seminary as an Example” (浅谈教会本位化与大陆修院司铎候选人的培育—以吉林修院为例). In the end, the conference was concluded with a 45-minute general discussion where all ten speakers were invited on the stage to respond to various questions raised by the audience.

The conference, on the one hand, was by and large academic in its content, just like many other scholarly meetings; yet, on the other hand, it was also one of a kind in its own way. First of all, the seminarians took a vivid interest in the conference and raised many questions, some of which were rather challenging and thought provoking. In addition to being the questioners, two students’ choirs, as a prelude to the conference, performed two beautiful religious songs at the very beginning and set a prayerful and harmonious tone for this two-day event. Secondly, it felt very much like a familial celebration: Besides the faculty, staff and students from the seminary, in the audience there was also a large number of priests and religious sisters from the diocese, which constituted a large part of the 150 or so total number of participants present during the event.

Last but not least, this entire event was held in a large tent structure set up on an outdoor basketball court. In doing so, the organizers took full advantage of the beautiful scenic environment, refreshing summer climate as well as the smog-free fresh air, something not given nowadays in most parts of China. Of course, one important reason behind such an arrangement was the limitation of facilities and restraints of financial resources. One cannot help but give a thumbs-up to the creative genius of Jilin Seminary. Yet, given its obvious vulnerability against inclement weather, all were truly grateful that during these two days, in defiance of the weather forecast, no torrential storms, which had been a guaranteed daily visitor in the previous week, disturbed the peaceful proceeding of the event. More significantly, nothing could have been more fitting than a tent for a gathering held in the name of theological inculturation. As Fr. Qian Li had pointed out in his presentation,



The open atmosphere in the Tent of Meeting. Photo: Jilin Seminary.

the ultimate source, driving force and motivation for inculturation lies in the Incarnation of the Divine Word. The original Greek word used for this divine action is no other than *eskenosen*, literally meaning “to pitch a tent.” Indeed, the presence of something beautiful, sublime, harmonious in these two days was strongly felt by all flocked together under this Tent of Meeting – the Tabernacle, the Abode of the Divine.

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