Globethics Repository



Religions and Christianity in Today's China. [Vol. 8, 2018, No. 1]

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Journal volume
Publisher	China-Zentrum e.V.
Rights	China-Zentrum e.V.
Download date	2026-11-16 20:32:09
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/167597

News Update on Religion and Church in China September 11 – December 2, 2017

Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber and Katharina Feith
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). – The last "News Update" (*RCTC *2017, No. 4, pp. 3-24) covered the period June 12 – October 5, 2017.*

Politics

October 17 / November 17, 2017:

Xinhua: "Enlightened Chinese Democracy Puts the West in the Shade" – Communist Party propaganda chief warns about "universal values"

In an English language article published just before the Party Congress under the heading quoted above, the State run *Xinhua News Agency* argued that China's "institutionalized consultative democracy" has "never been healthier." The article claimed that this system leads to stability and social unity, while the Western liberal democracies with their endless bickering and frequent changes of Government only get in the way of progress and increasingly represent only certain social strata and interest groups. China has "absolutely no need to import the failing party political systems of other countries," the article said.

On November 17, the newly appointed head of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China, Huang Kunming, warned in an article appearing in the party newspaper *Renmin ribao* that some Western countries "are trying to seduce people" by peddling "so-called 'universal values'" so as to make them abandon "their identification with their own spiritual culture." Huang's article was on "education regarding Socialist core values and their practice" (*AsiaNews* Nov. 17; cpc.people.com.cn Nov. 17; *Xinhua* Oct. 17).

October 18–24, 2017:

19th Congress of the Communist Party of China

At the Party Congress, Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping was able to further cement his power. Among other things, the expression "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Character-

istics for a New Era" (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想) has now been inserted into the Party statutes. According to the *South China Morning Post*, this effectively means that from now on any attempt to challenge Xi will be regarded as defiance of the Party. The paper also noted that Xi was the first politician since Mao to have his ideology codified in the Party statutes while still in office.
Party Congresses of the Communist Party of China are held every five years and they set the course for the country's politics over the next few years. The Party Congress elects the members and candidates of the Central Committee, which in turn appoints the Politburo. The Politburo's 7-member Standing Committee is the Party's highest governing body. On October 18, Xi Jinping gave the keynote speech before the 2,287 delegates, a speech in which the religions were also mentioned (see entry of October 18, 2017 in the section "Religious Policy") (*AsiaNews* Oct. 24; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Oct. 28; *South China Morning Post* Oct. 18, 28; *Xinhua* Oct. 18, 24).

November 21, 2017:

Civil rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong sentenced to two years in prison

The Intermediate People's Court in Changsha (Hunan Province) found the Chinese lawyer guilty of inciting subversion of State power. The verdict charged that Jiang had, among other things, "for a long period of time been under the influence of anti-Chinese forces." Jiang had previously made a confession, which observers judged to have been made under duress. Jiang Tianyong, who is a Protestant Christian, defended people who were accused in politically sensitive cases, including the Christian human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng and the blind dissident Chen Guangcheng, as well as members of Falun Gong, Tibetans, petitioners and victims of HIV/AIDS. In 2008, his application for renewal of his lawyer's license was denied. He has been arrested several times, most recently in November 2016. In August 2016, Jiang had met the UN Special Envoy on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, and three weeks before his arrest he met the former German Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel (*AsiaNews* Nov. 21; *The Guardian* Dec. 6, 2016; *Kyodo* Nov. 21; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* Aug. 22; *ZEIT online* Nov. 21).

Religious Policy

October 18, 2017:

Xi Jinping's report to the 19th Party Congress repeats well-known positions on the religions – including a demand for their Sinicization

In his three and a half hour speech, Xi Jinping also made remarks about the religions which were essentially a confirmation of previous statements. On its new WeChat account, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) summarized Xi's statements on religion in his speech to the Party Congress in four main points: 1) Socialist democracy and rule by law should be further developed. In the process, among other things, the [Party's] national minorities' work and religious work should be moved forward in an "innovative" fashion; 2) in all the major areas of politics and society, under which religion is also enumerated, theoretical analysis and policy guidance should take place; 3) "the basic guidelines of the religious work of the Party are to be fully implemented, the orientation of the religions of China toward Sinicization is to be fully adhered to and we must work actively towards adapting the religions to socialist society" [phrases taken from Xi Jinping's speech on religion of April 2016]; 4) all kinds of

infiltrative-subversive, terrorist, separatist and religiously extremist activities are to be prevented and suppressed (SARA-WeChat-Account *Weiyan zongjiao* 微言宗教 as reported on chinacatholic.cn Oct. 20, chinaislam.net.cn Oct. 19 and fjnet.com Oct. 18).

October 18, 2017:

Seven religious leaders are among the 74 special guests at the opening of the Party Congress

The seven religious leaders invited to be present were the chairs of the official associations of the five recognized religions, with Protestants and Catholics each represented by two delegates (since the two groups each have two official governing bodies). Later, in a report on this event, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) quoted each of the seven guests with words uttered in support of Secretary General Xi and of the goals of the Party. The associations of each state-approved religion organized meetings at both national and local levels in order to watch Xi's televised speech together, photo documentations of these meetings were published on the relevant websites.

As reported by *AsiaNews*, Wang Zuo'an, Director of SARA, was not reappointed by the Party Congress to the Central Committee, to which he had previously belonged. The reasons for his failure to be reappointed are not clear (*AsiaNews* Oct. 19, 26; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Oct. 28; Nov. 4; Dec. 2; sara.gov.cn Oct. 19).

November 23, 2017:

State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes a directive against the commercialization of Buddhism and Daoism

The directive, divided into ten points, represents a continuation of the subject that has for years been the main point of China's religious-political agenda regarding Buddhism and Daoism.

The document, dated November 3, 2017, is entitled "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). Among other points, the document declares that Buddhist and Daoist sites have to be of a non-profit nature and that they may not be sub-contracted or transformed into joint-stock companies or joint ventures. Sites which are not registered as official Buddhist or Daoist sites for religious activities are not allowed to organize religious activities in the name of Buddhism or Daoism or to accept donations. The same applies to "false" monks and nuns. Other parts of the directive deal with the price which temples may request for admission to temples, with large outdoor statues, offerings of incense and the Buddhist inspired release of living beings. Internet based religious information services which are not operated by [registered] religious organizations, facilities or schools, may not organize online religious activities such as "Buddha worship on the net," virtual offerings of incense online or online fundraising, the document says. It urges local party and Government cadres to strictly observe the rules and not to give any encouragement to a "religious fever" under the guise of promoting business, tourism or culture or to gain any corrupt advantage from religious activities.

The document was signed by the SARA and by 11 other party and State entities, including the Propaganda Department and the United Front Department of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as the ministries of public security and of finance and the state administrations of tax affairs, of tourism and of cultural heritage. Many of the provisions contained in the document are unattributed quotes from the recently revised "Regulations on Religious Affairs," and can be considered as a first follow-up document of the revised rules, with further documents certain to follow.

In 2012, the government issued a precursor to this document entitled, "Views on Dealing with Problems in the Administration of Buddhist and Daoist Temples and Monasteries" 关于处理涉及佛教寺庙、道教宫观管理有关问题的意见. A commentary and a translation of the Chinese text can be found in *China heute* 2012, No. 4, pp. 208-212, 227-229 and also at www.china-zentrum.de under the heading "Dokumente zu Religion und Politik" (in German). A German translation of the new directive is scheduled to appear in a future edition of *China heute*.

Religions in General

September 20, to October 13, 2017:

China is Israel's fastest growing tourist source – Religiously motived tourism?

According to Israeli Minister for Tourism, Yariv Levin, who recently visited China, during the first half of 2017, 64,000 Chinese tourists visited Israel between January and July, an increase of 66% over last year's numbers. According to a September 20 report by *Xinhua*, Levin attributed this influx of Chinese tourists to Israel to a number of recently established direct flights between China and Israel. On October 13, the New York-based online portal Jing Travel, which specializes in the travel business with the Chinese, reported that some travel agencies have been including "history of religions" destinations in their tour programs. Jing Travel points out that there are destinations other than Israel for which it is easier to obtain a visa and which are more convenient and cheaper holiday destinations for the Chinese, and suggests that it is possible that these new tourists from China to Israel might be from the growing number of Christians in China, who are interested in traveling to Israel for religious reasons. In addition, according to Jing Travel, some other countries, with Indonesia first and foremost, are promoting religious tourism with an eye on China's large group of Muslims. Worldwide, *halal* tourism is a popular trend, but due to travel restrictions which the Chinese government imposes on large segments of its Muslim population, it is probably not to be expected that Chinese *halal* tourism will ever play a major role, Jing Travel argues (jingtravel.com Oct. 13; *Xinhua* Sept. 20).
See also the entry of November 21, 2017 in the section "Sino-Vatican relations" on the prohibition of including visits to the Vatican in the travel programs of Chinese travel agencies.

Daoism

October 24, 2017:

Meeting on the revision of teaching materials for all official Daoist academies of China

So far the country's 10 Daoist academies have no uniform educational materials, said Zhang Fenglin, Secretary-General of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), according to a report on the association's website. The creation of teaching materials for all Daoist academies – a plan adopted during the 9th National Assembly of representatives of Daoism – is therefore a pressing and daunting task for the CDA, Zhang explained. Several working meetings have already taken place and the association has completed seven volumes thus far. Representatives of CDA and the publishing house for religious culture (宗教文化出版社) of the State Administration for Religious Affairs took part in the first session, according to the report (taoist.org.cn Oct. 25).

November 30 to December 3, 2017:

Official ceremony to confer registers on 277 foreign adepts of Zhengyi Daoism

According to the report on the website of the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), the ceremony took place in the Celestial Masters' Mansion at Mount Longhu in Jiangxi Province. The three-day ritual was conducted by Zhang Jintao, head of the Celestial Masters' Mansion and one of the vice chairmen of the CDA. As is stated in the report, the ceremony had been approved by the State Administration for Religious Affairs. The 277 foreign Zhengyi Daoists came from the United States, Singapore, Thailand, Canada, the Philippines, Vietnam and Australia respectively, as well as from Taiwan and Hong Kong; 251 of them received the initial or first registers, the others were awarded higher levels. According to the report, the three day ceremony was the 28th official conferral of registers upon foreign Daoists since 1991 (taoist.org.cn Dec. 6).
The *lu* 箓-registers contain names of gods, spirits and demons and are conferred upon adepts of Daoism in order to assure them access to the gods. Priests of the Zhengyi tradition of Daoism marry and live with their families.

Buddhism

September 16, 2017:

The Jade Buddha Temple in Shanghai has been moved 30 meters

From September 2 until the weekend of September 16 and 17, Shanghai's historic Jade Buddha Temple was physically moved 30 meters northward, following a three-month long period of intense preparation and using the most modern engineering techniques available. With this move, a larger front courtyard was created to accommodate the huge tourist flow. In addition to creating more space in front of the façade of the temple, the move was also considered a fire protection measure since visitors to the shrine light immense quantities of incense just inside the gate. The 2,000-ton temple was cautiously raised up centimeter by centimeter by hydraulic jacks and then ever so slowly rolled to its new location on special rails at the rate of 3 cm per minute. Some 2 million people visit the temple every year. For peak events such as the Chinese New Year, as many as 100,000 people can crowd into the temple on any given day (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 21).

October 21, 2017:

United Front representative: Tibetan Buddhism is "a religion with Chinese characteristics"

At a press conference on the occasion of the 19th Party Congress Zhang Yijiong, Deputy Head of the United Front Department of the Communist Party of China, also talked about the Sinicization of religions. Responding to questions of journalists, he said (here as reported in *The Diplomat*): "Tibetan Buddhism, born in our ancient China, is a religion with Chinese characteristics. It is true that Tibetan Buddhism in formation had received influence from other neighboring Buddhist countries, but it adapted to the local reality and formed its own unique doctrine and rituals, which is a model of sinicization itself … That we are actively guiding Tibetan Buddhism in the direction of sinicization is in the hope that Tibetan Buddhism will further absorb the nutrition of the Chinese excellent culture."

According to *Reuters*, Zhang said: "It's a Chinese religion. It didn't come in from the outside" (*The Diplomat* Oct. 24; *Reuters* Oct. 21; *South China Morning Post* Oct. 21; *Xinhua* Oct. 21).

November 26, 2017:

63 year old Tibetan monk sets fire to himself in protest against the regime

According to reports by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), Tenga, a respected monk in his 60s, immolated himself in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Kardzi (Chinese: Ganzi) in Sichuan Province. As he set fire to himself, the monk reportedly called for freedom for Tibet. He died as a result of his burns. His was the 5th self-immolation by a Tibetan in the People's Republic of China in 2017 and the 151st since March of 2011. (See www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/).

Popular Religion

October 13, 2017:

Sixth Tone reports on threat to traditional music groups now banned from playing at funerals in the County of Pingyi, Shandong



There are also traditional brass and percussion ensembles in rural Catholic communities, such as the Xiliulin Catholic Music Society (Shanxi Province). They play mainly at Church services and funerals. Photo: Ma Li.

Music ensembles playing traditional Chinese wind and percussion instruments are regular features at funerals and weddings in rural regions of China. According to the website *Sixth Tone* (belonging to the Shanghai United Media Group), the government of Pingyi County issued guidelines for the simplification of funerals, prohibiting, among other things, performances by traditional wind and percussion music groups. At one village funeral in June of 2017, authorities confiscated the instruments of the group that was providing music for the funeral. At the same time, according to *Sixth Tone*, the county government has paradoxically introduced measures to preserve the traditional use of one of these instruments, the *suona* 唢呐 (long necked oboe), which was declared an intangible national cultural heritage in 2008.

Already on November 3, 2016, 21 Chinese professors (including Mo Zhongjian, also known as a representative of the thesis of "religious ecology"), published an appeal on the online portal The Paper, calling for the preservation of traditional Chinese funeral customs. In their appeal, the 21 scholars complained that "some local governments since this year" (i.e. 2016), in the name of funeral reform, were "attempting to forcibly abolish traditional funeral rituals, which are the fruit of 3,000 years of

Chinese civilization", including wind and percussion music. *Sixth Tone* adds that the traditional music groups are threatened not only by government measures, but have also lost popularity in recent years due to new trends in musical taste (sixthtone.com Oct. 13; thepaper.cn Nov. 3).
On traditional wind and percussion music ensembles in the Catholic Church, see Ma Li's article: "'Wenn es uns gefällt, gefällt es auch Gott'. Kirchenmusik im heutigen China zwischen europäischer und chinesischer Tradition," in: *China heute* 2012, No. 3, pp. 166-174 [in German].

Islam

September 11, 2017:

26 new students admitted to the Chinese Qur'an Institute in Beijing

On September 11, 2017, 26 students from 11 provinces – a number which appears to be very low – registered for the undergraduate course (*benke* – Bachelor degree course) at the Chinese Qur'an Institute, the national training center of the Chinese Islamic Association. On November 17, the academic year began for all courses, including a master's degree course, an undergraduate course for Ahongs (Imams) and a "Xinjiang class" (chinaislam.net Sept. 25; Nov. 23).

September 14, 2017:

Global Times on government measures against "pan-*halal* tendencies" in the Ningxia Autonomous Region of the Hui minority

According to an account on August 15 in the *Global Times*, published under the aegis of the Party newspaper *Renmin ribao*, a nationwide online-controversy erupted when a Sina Weibo user, who claimed to be a former student of Ningxia University in Yinchuan, complained that the university's too few non-*halal* cafeterias were inadequate to meet the needs of the university's non-Muslim students. The newspaper cited Xiong Kunxin of Minzu University in Beijing, who claims that there is in China a "pan-*halal* tendency," by which some Muslims are "demanding things be *halal* which cannot really be *halal*, such as water, roads and toilets." This, according to Xiong, is a clear misuse of the term and can only lead to estrangement between religious groups. 36% of the population of Ningxia belongs to the predominantly Muslim Hui nationality.
On September 14, the *Global Times* reported that Ningxia's government took countermeasures, such as the removal of bilingual Chinese-Arabic signs and "placing clear limits on *halal* food," as well as the required display of the Chinese national flag at religious sites. The *Global Times* quoted Xi Wuyi, a researcher in Marxism from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, as saying that the "pan-*halal*" movement is a "first step towards religious extremism." Li Xiangping, of the East China Normal University in Shanghai, told the *Global Times* that he believes that limits ought to be put in place in order to stem the intrusion of religion into public life. He also warned of a growing Islamophobia in the social media and described the stigmatization of Islam as wrong (globaltimes.cn Aug. 15; Sept. 14).
Since the beginning of the 2000s the government of Ningxia has been working to build up the *halal* industry to be one of the main economic activities of that poor province with the eventual goal of reaching the international Islamic market; cf. *China heute* 2009, No. 1, pp. 15-17 ("Islam als Markenzeichen – die 'Kultur der Hui-Kaufleute'" [in German]).

October 16 to November 16, 2017:

Radio Free Asia reports on a clampdown on "wild" imams and raids on Kazakh households in Xinjiang

The Washington, D.C. based broadcaster *Radio Free Asia* (*RFA*) reported on October 16 that authorities in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang had launched a campaign against "wild" imams who refused to follow the party line; such imams would be locked up and then subjected to "brain-washing." Previously, according to an anonymous source quoted by *RFA*, on September 29 in a speech to officials, Xinjiang's Party Secretary, Chen Quanguo, ordered that a strict eye be kept on all detention and re-education centers, including those established for the re-education of "wild" imams, in order to prevent any "incidents" during the run-up to the Party Congress.

Between October 25 and November 1, 2017, reportedly more than 30,000 Kazakh households in Tekes County in the Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture of Yili were searched for Qur'ans, prayer rugs, clothing purchased in Kazakhstan and any packages sent from Kazakhstan; citing local sources, *RFA* reported that all such items were confiscated (*RFA* Oct. 16; Nov. 16).

There had already been reports earlier in 2017 about the seizure of any Qur'ans published before 2012 in some parts of Xinjiang and about the setting up of new re-education camps in the Autonomous Region (see *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 8-9, and No. 4, p. 11).

November 8, 2017:

Article in *Global Times* describes Islam as an obstacle to the alleviation of poverty in China

According to the report, the Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in the South of Gansu Province, known as the "Chinese Mecca" due to its many mosques, is the second poorest area in China and one of China's "main battlefields for fighting poverty." The article quotes different sources, who all complain that the mostly Muslim population of the region spends far too much money for the building of mosques and for religious activities while at the same time many children cannot afford to go to school. Xiong Kunxin from the Minzu University of China told the *Global Times*: "Once a religion is overdeveloped, it will pose an impact on the wider secular society, sometimes posing a negative influence," he added: "We should keep it [religion] personal and it should not interfere with normal social activities." Mei Xinyu of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation told the *Global Times* that ethnic and religious identities in the region should be toned down considerably in order to promote economic growth (globaltimes.cn Nov. 8).

November 29, 2017:

Participants of the "First training course for middle-aged and young patriotic religious persons from Xinjiang" visit Buddhist Longquan Monastery in Beijing

The Central Institute for Socialism, which organized the current course for imams from Xinjiang, which had already been in session for three months, published a report on the "interreligious exchange of ideas" during the course participants' visit to the Longquan Monastery in Beijing's University District of Haidian. The monastery is headed by the chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, Xuecheng, and is known for the social commitment of its many volunteers and for its intense use of social media.



Active Temple: Visitors to a Dharma assembly are fed with soup at the gates of the Longquan Monastery (2012). Photo: China-Zentrum Archive.

The visitors from Xinjiang were reported to have been impressed by the level of education of the Buddhist monks, many of whom have graduated from university or have obtained a PhD; they remarked that in their own group "they had far too few such talents." They were also impressed by the great monastery library which possesses works from all different disciplines and which receives 5,000 visitors from outside the monastery each week, saying, according to the report: "All we do is read the Qur'an." During their visit, the course participants experienced a form of Buddhism that not only preserved tradition but also offered a contemporary interpretation of the teachings of Buddhism that ensured its adaptation to socialist society, the report of the Central Institute for Socialism claimed. It quoted them as saying that they were going to transfer this experience to the building up of mosques at home.

According to *Xinhua*, the approximately 70 course participants belonged to the Uighur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz ethnic groups. Course content included Chinese language and culture (such as Confucianism, Daoism and traditional paper cutting) as well as the main themes of the 19th Party Congress, which, as *Xinhua* noted, helped build the participants' cultural, national and political identity (report of the Central Institute of Socialism according to fjnet.com Dec. 6; *Xinhua* Dec. 4).

The Central Institute of Socialism also provides courses for personnel of other faiths, such as the session offered to Catholic religious Sisters from August 31 to September 8, 2017 (chinacatholic.cn Sept. 14).

Protestantism

November 2017:

Police in Guangdong Province detain attendants of unofficial church assemblies

According to reports by *Radio Free Asia* (*RFA*), on November 19, authorities in the City of Heshan, in the southwestern Province of Guangdong, temporarily took into custody at least ten members of a Protestant group on suspicion of "illegal assembly." The arrests took place in the restaurant where the members of the group had assembled to pray and sing hymns. They reportedly were warned never to meet informally in such a fashion again. As *RFA* wrote, those arrested were members of the Shaping Church, which is affiliated with the Three-Self Movement, but that they had gathered away from the church due to their dissatisfaction with events and the style of worship on offer there.

According to information provided by the US-based organization China Aid, on November 5 police and officials of the local Bureau for Religious Affairs in Jiangmen arrested 13 participants of a Sunday service being held in a small house church, the Qingcaodi Church. They were charged with holding a religious service in a non-approved facility and were brought for interrogation to the local police station. Christian materials found at the site were confiscated. According to China Aid, the woman who provided the church's venue, Zhai Lili, was taken into custody and held in administrative detention for about two weeks (chinaaid.org Nov. 17; Dec. 2; *RFA* Nov. 23).

November 10, 2017:

China Aid: 34 Christians in Yunnan indicted on false charges of "cult"

According to information provided by China Aid, in 2016 hundreds of Christians in Yunnan Province were wrongly accused and arrested as supposed members of the "Three Grades of Servants" movement, a religious splinter group with a Christian background which was founded in Heilongjiang. The group has been classified by the authorities as an "evil cult" and has been formally banned. At least 34 of those arrested are still in detention and are soon to be put on trial, China Aid wrote on November 10, 2017. The organization said on October 26 that many of those accused had never even heard of the "Three Grades of Servants." China Aid also reported on the trial of six of the accused Christians before the County Court of Yun in Lincang, Yunnan, on November 29. As proof of their supposed "evil cult" activity, prosecutors reportedly presented in evidence before the court the confiscated Bibles as well as several Christian classics such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

According to China Aid, in 2016 Yunnan's Department of Public Security established a special commission to investigate and prosecute the "Three Grades of Servants." The organization also reported that three of the detainees, Li Shudong, Li Meihua and Peng Zhenghua, had already been sentenced in July 2017 to four years in prison and 5,000 Yuan fine each for, among other things, membership in the "Three Grades of Servants," for recruiting cult members and for using a cult to undermine implementation of the law (chinaaid.org Sept. 8; Oct. 26; Nov. 10; Dec. 1).

November 14, 2017:

South China Morning Post: Fight against poverty alleviation in Jiangxi – Christians encouraged to replace their crosses with posters of Xi Jinping

According to the *South China Morning Post* (*SCMP*), a local social media channel in Huangjinbu Township, Yugan County, Jiangxi Province, reported over the weekend of November 11-12 that party cadres had visited poor Christian families to spread the party's poverty alleviation policies and help them in solving their material problems. The officials "melted the hard ice in their hearts" and "transformed them from believing in religion to believing in the party," the local social media channel reported. It went on saying that as a result, more than 600 townspeople "voluntarily" handed over the religious texts and images in their homes and replaced them with 453 portraits of President Xi.

This message, reported the *SCMP*, had disappeared from the social media site on Monday, but the fact that the campaign had actually taken place was confirmed by both villagers and local party cadres. Qi Yan, the party cadre responsible for poverty reduction in Huangjinbu, told the *SCMP* that the campaign has been running in the county since March. According to Qi, some households have been impoverished because of illness and have resorted to believing that Jesus could heal them. Through the work of the party cadres they would come to realize that they should "no longer rely on Jesus, but on the Party for help." Qi said that the authorities of Huangjinbu had already distributed 1,000 portraits of Xi. A third of the families in the township are Christian. The *SCMP* pointed out that the Communist Party under Xi has made poverty eradication by 2020 a political priority. 11% of the population of Yugan County live below the official poverty line, 10% are Christians (*SCMP* Nov. 14).

For more on the subject of poverty and religion/religious policy see the entry of November 8, 2017, in the section on "Islam."

November 15–17, 2017:

International Conference on the Bible and the Sinicization of Christianity

The conference was organized by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS). Among the 18 foreign participants were a number of representatives of the United Bible Society. In addition, Prof. Robert Banks of the Australian Center for Christianity and Culture; James Harding, director of St. Paul's Theological College, Malaysia; and Professor emeritus John Samuel Mbiti from Bern also took part. In addition to ten SASS employees and two simultaneous translators, there was a total of twenty scholars representing the Chinese side, including members of Protestant theological seminaries in Shanghai, Jiangsu and Shandong respectively as well as Gu Mengfei, director of the Research Department of the Chinese Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (see: ccctspm.org Dec. 7). *Isabel Hess-Friemann*

Catholic Church

October 14, 2017:

Ignatius study group for the deaf in Wenzhou celebrates its 10th anniversary

Sixty deaf people participated in the celebration of the Wenzhou Study Group, which was held in new premises at the Wenzhou Cathedral. There were also 45 deaf people from Hangzhou present. The Wenzhou group was formed on the last Sunday of September in 2007, the international Day of the Deaf. It is currently led by Fr. Lin Yi. At present the study group has 50 active members. The group's goal is, among other things, to help its deaf members achieve a deeper understanding of their faith as well as greater involvement in works of charity (*Xinde* Oct. 29).

November 17, 2017:

Death of Bishop Lucas Ly Jingfeng of Fengxiang

Bishop Lucas Ly (Li Jingfeng), Bishop of Fengxiang in Shaanxi Province and one of the most prominent personalities within the Chinese Church, died on the morning of November 17, 2017, at the age of 96. Bishop Ly was born January 15, 1921, in Tongyuanfang, Gaoling County (Shaanxi), and was ordained a priest in 1947. He spent more than twenty years in labor camps. In 1980 he was secretly ordained Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Fengxiang. In 1983 he became the Bishop of Fengxiang. Until 2004, Fengxiang was one of the few dioceses in China where only the underground Church existed, although it was widely visible. In 2004, after many talks with the authorities of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, Bishop Ly decided to accept recognition by the government as the official bishop. He succeeded in doing so without having to join the Patriotic Association. Bishop Ly always attached great importance to being in complete unity with the Pope. He ordained more than 70 priests and helped organize the construction of more than 50 churches. A few years ago, his seminary, in which seminarians of different dioceses studied, had to be closed due to a lack of seminarians.

Bishop Ly was buried on November 25 at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Fengxiang. With his death, the country lost one of the last Chinese bishops of the "old guard" (*AsiaNews* Nov. 17; *Eglises d'Asie* Nov. 17; *UCAN* Nov. 21). – See the abituary in this issue.

Sino-Vatican Relations

October 17, 2017:

Beatification process opened for Cardinal Celso Costantini, first apostolic delegate to China

On the 59th anniversary of his death, on 17 October of this year, the first, or diocesan, phase of the beatification process for Celso Cardinal Costantini (1876–1958) was ceremoniously opened in the Cathedral of the Diocese of Concordia-Pordenone, Italy. Cardinal Costantini, who originally came from the Diocese of Concordia-Pordenone, was appointed by Pope Pius XI as the first Apostolic Delegate to China in 1922 and remained in that post until 1933. From 1935 until the year he was named a Cardinal in 1953, he served as the Secretary of Propaganda Fide (now the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) in the Vatican. Costantini campaigned tirelessly to further the inculturation of the Church in China. He convened the first Chinese National Council of the Catholic Church in Shanghai (Primum Concilium Sinense) in 1924, engaged in the education of local priests, and prepared the way for the formation of the first six Chinese bishops, who were consecrated on October 28, 1926, at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. During his years as Secretary of Propaganda Fide, he was committed to building up the indigenous Church hierarchy in China in 1946 and strongly supported the translation of the Roman Missal from Latin into Chinese. An artist himself, Costantini was also a great patron of Christian art in China. In 1927 he founded a religious order for men known as the "Congregatio Discipulorum Domini" (Congregation of the Disciples of the Lord). The Cardinal died on October 17, 1958 in Rome (catholicnewsagency.com Aug. 10; *Fides* Oct. 6, 2016; Oct. 13; *UCAN* Aug. 31; Oct. 17).

October 21/24, 2017:

Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) comments on Sino-Vatican relations – "Prospects are good," but problems cannot be solved in a short time

On the occasion of the 19th Party Congress, SARA Director Wang Zuo'an spoke twice with the *Commercial Radio Hong Kong* channel. In the first interview, Wang said that Pope Francis has repeatedly expressed his desire to visit China, which shows his positive attitude, and he has on several occasions expressed his respect for the leadership in Beijing and the Chinese people. Wang stated that Beijing is sincerely seeking to improve bilateral relations. He cited China's usual conditions – breaking off ties with Taiwan and noninterference in China's internal affairs, including religious ones.

In the second interview, Wang confirmed that the communication channels between China and the Vatican were functioning without obstruction. However, some problems are not easy and cannot be solved in a short time, sincerity and real deeds from both sides are needed, Wang said. He declined concrete information on the method of episcopal nominations. He said that no visit to China by the Pope was currently in the planning, but stressed that the prospects for Sino-Vatican relations are good.

In the Taiwanese media, Wang's statements sparked concern over the future of Taiwan's diplomatic relations with the Vatican (according to tw.appledaily.com Oct. 21, 24; *AsiaNews* Oct. 21, 26).

Beginning of November 2017:

Former Vatican spokesman Lombardi comments in *La Civiltà Cattolica* on the path to a "fully Chinese and fully Catholic" Church

Fr. Federico Lombardi SJ, now President of the Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict XVI Foundation, has published his article in No. 4017 of the journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, whose articles are viewed and approved by the Vatican Secretariat of State prior to publication. *Vatican Insider* brought a summary of the article which is not freely accessible on the net.

According to this summary, Lombardi writes that, among other things, Pope Francis, as a non-European and as a Jesuit, enjoys some advantages in the eyes of the Chinese leadership over his predecessors and that his empathy, etc., has helped to create a new climate between the two sides. But Lombardi also emphasizes the "clear continuity" between Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI. Lombardi stresses that the latter, in his 2007 "Letter to the Church in China," called for compassion and reconciliation on the way to the unity of the Chinese Church. The Catholic Church in China was born and works in Chinese reality, writes Lombardi; if she wanted to be there for China and offer her the gospel, she would have to be fully Chinese, but at the same time also fully Catholic, i.e., unseparated from the Universal Church and inspired by the roots of the common faith tradition. To create the conditions for this is what the Sino-Vatican dialogue is all about, Lombardi says. He also writes that Pope Francis invites people to "healthy realism" – a notion that Cardinal Secretary of State Parolin had already applied to talks with China (*Vatican Insider* Nov. 2).

Lombardi's article is at least the third in a series of contributions to *La Civiltà Cattolica* that flank the Holy See's dialogue with China, after articles by Joseph You Guo Jiang SJ in late May and Joseph Shih SJ in late October 2017 (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 17-18; No. 4, p. 19).

November 10, 2017:

Hong Kong: Cardinal Zen sharply criticizes the Vatican's China diplomacy

At a memorial service in the Church of St. Jude in Hong Kong for Father Wei Heping, who died in unclarified circumstances two years ago, Joseph Cardinal Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, asked God to rescue the Holy See "from the brink of the precipice and not sell out the faithful Church [to the Chinese government]." The Cardinal said that he had learned via several sources that there was "an evil" plan afoot in the negotiations process to ask loyal bishops to resign in order to make way for illegitimate bishops. That is shocking, Zen said. Dialogue is necessary, he said, but one should not be too optimistic in dealing with the communist regime and there must be a bottom line in the negotiations (*AsiaNews* Nov. 11; *UCAN* Nov. 21.).

November 10, 2017:

Underground Bishop Joseph Han Zhihai from Lanzhou installed as official bishop

The installation Mass of Bishop Joseph Han Zhihai in the Lanzhou Cathedral in northwestern Gansu Province was presided over by Bishop Yang Xiaoting of Yulin (Shaanxi), one of the Vice Chairmen of the official Chinese Bishops' Conference, which is not recognized by Rome. Bishop Han Jide of



Bishop Han Zhihai in the year of 2009. Photo: China-Zentrum.

Pingliang and Diocesan Administrator Zhao Jianzhang of Tianshui (both Gansu Province) concelebrated. Bishops Yang Xiaoting and Han Jide are recognized as bishops by both the Pope and the state. Also present for the installation were party cadres from the local Bureau for Religious Affairs and United Front Department. *AsiaNews* reported that during the ceremony, the letter of approval from the official Bishops' Conference was read out.

According to *UCAN*, some of the priests and members of the faithful in Lanzhou had their doubts about the canonical validity of the ceremony. Of the 38 priests in the Diocese of Lanzhou, 12 (including priests studying abroad) did not participate in the installation, and only two of the three congregations of Sisters in the diocese sent representatives. One priest even expressed concern to *UCAN* that the diocese might be in danger of splitting should Bishop Han follow the government line too closely in the future. A Father Paul from Lanzhou told *UCAN* that Bishop Han himself had said he had informed Rome about the upcoming installation and that Rome had been pleased. Father Paul said that he believes that government recognition of the bishop will be good for the diocese in the end. As reported by *AsiaNews*, religious officials had previously described the Bishop's installation to priests and Sisters of Lanzhou as a result of negotiations with the Vatican. A round of talks did take place in October 2017, according to *AsiaNews*.

The day after his installation, Bishop Han Zhihai, together with nearly 80 Gansu priests and Sisters, visited the Jinggangshan revolutionary memorial in Jiangxi Province.

Bishop Han Zhihai, born in 1966, was secretly ordained in 2003 as Bishop of Lanzhou. That same year, he called for unity in the Chinese Church in an open letter (a German translation of which can be found in *China heute* 2003, No. 6, pp. 214-215). According to *AsiaNews*, he had been in contact with Liu Bainian, the then head of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, for at least ten years and later allowed his two vicars-generals to become members of the Patriotic Association, although he himself until now – thus *AsiaNews* – has not yet joined the association (*AsiaNews* Nov. 10; china.ucanews.com Nov. 10; *UCAN* Nov. 15).

Twice Bishop Han gave an interview to *Vatican Insider* (published on Feb. 4, 2015, and Nov. 17, 2017, respectively).

November 16, 2017:

Official installation of secretly consecrated Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Sun Jigen of Handan

Bishop Sun Jigen, born in 1967, belongs to the official part of the Diocese of Handan in Hebei Province (the old diocese of Yongnian continues in the underground). As bishop-candidate, he had both the papal mandate and, in principle, the approval of the Chinese authorities. On July 21, 2011, however, he allowed himself to be consecrated earlier than scheduled and in secret as a strategic maneuver to avoid having the illegitimate Bishop Guo Jincai take part in the consecration, something upon which the government was insisting. That was the reason why Sun so far had not been recognized as bishop by the government.

At the official installation Mass of Bishop Sun Jigen on November 16, Bishop Feng Xinmao of Jingxian and Coadjutor Bishop An Shuxin of Baoding concelebrated. Both of them are approved by the Pope and by the government. Before the Mass, the letter of approval of the official Bishops' Conference was read out. According to *UCAN*, since the government at the last moment made arrangements to have Bishop Guo Jincai, who is not recognized by Rome, as a concelebrant, only 55 priests of the diocese, 20

Sisters and 60 lay people took part in the ceremony. 42 priests of the diocese (including three currently studying abroad) kept their distance and avoided taking part in the Mass. It turned out, however, that Bishop Guo could not be present for the installation because his mother had just died, so in the end only bishops recognized by Rome were present at the installation. The installation Mass took place in a small rural church in Shexian County.

Anthony Lam of the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong described the public recognition of Bishops Han Zhihai and Sun Jigen as a "good thing" and a normal practice, which had actually been due long ago. As Handan's Vicar General, Fr. Li Anping, told *UCAN*, Bishop Sun can now publicly do many things that were not possible before – such as, to confer the sacrament of confirmation, to ordain priests or to celebrate the solemn Chrism Mass during Holy Week. Handan is a lively and energetic diocese with around 150,000 faithful (*AsiaNews* Nov. 16; china.ucanews.com Nov. 16).

November 21, 2017:

"Art Diplomacy": China and the Vatican announce "simultaneous exhibits"

At a specially convened press conference in the Press Office of the Holy See, it was announced that two parallel exhibitions will be mounted in the Vatican Museums and at the Palace Museum in Beijing in the spring of 2018. The director of the Vatican Museums, Barbara Jatta, spoke on behalf of the Vatican while the Chinese side was represented by Zhu Jiancheng, secretary-general of the China Culture Investment Fund (which according to Zhu, is a government-sponsored NGO launched in 2011), and artist Zhang Yan, who donated several works of art to Pope Francis. Jatta spoke of the novelty of a collaborative exhibition between the Vatican Museums and Chinese cultural institutions. She also spoke of the universal language of beauty. According to Zhu, the simultaneous exhibitions "will open a new chapter in the cultural exchanges between the Chinese people and the Vatican," and will favorably impact the normalization of Sino-Vatican diplomatic relations.

According to *AsiaNews*, 40 selected items from the Vatican Museums, including 38 ancient Chinese works of art, will be shown in the Forbidden City. In return, 40 items from China will be exhibited in the Vatican Museums under the heading "Beauty Unites Us." The Chinese *Global Times* wrote that this art exchange which the two museums "are reportedly preparing" is viewed by experts as a sign that both sides are seriously moving to improve relations (*AsiaNews* Nov. 21; Bulletin of the Press Office of the Holy See Nov. 21; *Global Times* Nov. 22; Press Office of the Vatican Museums, Press release).

November 21, 2017:

Radio Free Asia: Chinese Travel Agencies reportedly ordered not to accept clients planning to visit the Vatican or St. Peter's Basilica

As reported by *Radio Free Asia* (*RFA*), several Chinese tour operators confirmed to the broadcaster that they had received a directive on November 16 stating that "Travel agencies are required to cancel any tours that include the Vatican or St. Peter's in the itinerary" and that "Any travel agency found to be advertising these destinations in their promotional literature or other products will be fined up to 300,000 Yuan [around € 39,000]." One tour operator told *RFA* that the order came from the State Tourism Bureau, while an employee of the Guangdong branch of the State Tourism Bureau told *RFA* that the directive came from the central government and that it was a diplomatic problem. However, according to *UCAN*, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said at a press conference on November 23 that he was unaware of such a ban.

AsiaNews commented that the flow of Chinese tourists to the Vatican has grown so much that Catholic and Protestant groups have been observed in St. Peter's square handing out tracts on the Christian faith as well as contact information for their communities. Thus, the ban could be aimed at preventing the evangelization of tourists. Anthony Lam of the Holy Spirit Study Centre of the Diocese of Hong Kong suggested that the ban could be related to the Chinese government's revised Regulations on Religious Affairs and their broad provisions, and that it could eventually affect visits from China to other sacred sites as well. *UCAN* pointed out, however, that it is still possible for people in China to book trips to Italy and then go on to visit the Vatican and St. Peter's on their own (*AsiaNews* Nov. 22; jingtravel.com Nov. 22; *RFA* Nov. 21; *UCAN* Dec. 4).

November 26 to December 2, 2017:

Pope Francis visits Myanmar and Bangladesh – on the return flight he also talks about dialogue with China

China played no direct role in the Pope's recent state and pastoral visit with its difficult questions. The party-friendly Chinese *Global Times* mentioned the Pope's journey. In a November 28 editorial entitled "Pope should avoid complicating Rohingya crisis on visit," the *Global Times* spoke of the Pope's visit as a "religious tightrope walk."

At the on-board press conference during the return flight from Bangladesh, Pope Francis did mention that some Chinese [from mainland China?] had taken part in the [Pope's] Masses [in Myanmar]. He also said that a trip to China was not in the works at present but that it was no secret that he would really like to visit China. Culturally, the talks with China are taking place at a high level, the Pope said with reference to the planned simultaneous exhibitions in the Vatican Museums and the Forbidden City (see the entry of November 21, 2017, above). He was also referring to "professors, priests who teach at the Chinese state university." Pope Francis said that there is also "political dialogue, above all about the Chinese Church, with that history of the patriotic Church and of the clandestine Church, which must be done one step at a time, with sensitivity." He said he thought that a meeting of the Joint Commission will be taking place in Beijing in these days. "And this, with patience. But the doors of the heart are open" (*Global Times* Nov. 28; http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/it.html).

Hong Kong

October 31, 2017:

All mention of the Tian'anmen Massacre to be deleted from Hong Kong's history curriculum

The Hong Kong government is expected to cancel the 1989 Tian'anmen Massacre and 1967 workers' revolt in Hong Kong from the revised lower secondary school history curriculum, with more class hours dedicated to studying the Chinese dynasties instead. Experts see this as a worrying erosion of political independence, according to *UCAN*. It would now be up to teachers and schools to decide whether or not to continue to discuss these two issues. The revised curriculum of October 31 is now set for a second round of public consultation; it is expected to come into effect in 2020. Chief Executive Carrie Lam introduced Chinese history as a compulsory subject for junior secondary students.

The Chinese government has long put pressure on Hong Kong's Education Bureau to promote "patriotism" among the city's students. The program of "national education," which aims at a stronger identification with the mainland, has repeatedly been criticized as "brainwashing" (*UCAN* Nov. 2).

Taiwan

September 18, 2017:

President Tsai Ing-wen: Muslims are important to Taiwan

The Muslim community is a major partner and an indispensable force in promoting the country's New Southbound Policy," Madame President Tsai Ing-wen said at a meeting with members of the Chinese Muslim Association. She also congratulated those present who had taken part in the hajj to Mecca. Tsai wants Taiwan to be a Muslim friendly country at heart so that Muslims will feel at home there even when they are away from home. She pointed to the prayer rooms for travelers that have already been built at airports and bus terminals. Taiwan has been promoting *halal* certification for restaurants.

According to information on its website (www.cmainroc.org.tw), the Chinese Muslim Association 中國回教協會 (not to be confused with the Chinese Islamic Association 中国伊斯兰教协会 founded in the PRC in the 1950s), was founded on the Mainland in Hankou in 1938 and after the events of 1949, when many of its most prominent members had moved to Taiwan, it was formally re-established in Taiwan in 1958. Taiwan's Chinese Muslim Association organizes the annual hajj from Taiwan to Mecca, supports an international conference, an Asian Muslim summer youth camp, and various study courses.

According to government statistics, in Taiwan there are between 50,000 and 60,000 Taiwanese Muslims and more than 200,000 Muslim immigrants and migrant workers mainly from Indonesia and other areas of Southeast Asia (*Taipei Times* Sept. 19).

Willi Boehi

November 12, 2017:

New "Interfaith Party" in Taiwan opens its central office in Taipei

On November 12, a new political party founded on May 16, 2017 by various religious communities in Taiwan opened its central office in the capital, Taipei. The party plans to open other offices soon in other areas of Taiwan. The "Interfaith Union Party" (宗華教信聯盟) is composed of representatives of various religions, such as Buddhism, Daoism, Yiguandao, the Catholic Church, Protestant Churches, the Unification Church, Lijiao (理教) and Tiandijiao (天帝教) – and hopes to be able to win three seats in parliament at the next national elections to be held in 2020.

The Chairman of the new party is Dr. Chu Wuxian. According to Chu, the reason for the founding of the party is that the current government did not understand the true meaning of religious freedom and the pluralistic development of religion.

The party's Catholic representative Catherine Chang said that two important goals of the party are to improve social welfare and to protect religious freedoms. The interplay and cooperation of religions in this new party could also serve to promote improved relations between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, she further noted. Father Otfried Chan, Secretary-General of Taiwan's Bishops' Conference, told *UCAN* that "the move would help provide a unified voice on hot social issues." The party is also, of course, particularly interested in all legislative issues touching on any aspect of religion (china.ucanews.com as reported on chinacatholic.org Dec. 3; cna.com.tw Nov. 12; familyfedihq.org Nov. 16; *UCAN* Nov. 24).

With contributions by Willi Boehi and Isabel Hess-Friemann

This "News Update" was first published in *China heute* 2017, No. 4, pp. 217-224 (in German). Unless otherwise indicated, all source references in the "News Update" refer to the year 2017.