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Religions & Christianity in Today's China

Vol. VIII 2018 No. 2

中國宗教評論



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Editorial

Dear Readers,

Today we can present to you the second issue 2018 of *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* (中国宗教评论).

The number includes the regular series of News Updates on recent events and general trends with regard to religions and especially Christianity in today's China.

We continue with the publication of the “Statistics on Religions and Churches in the Peoples' Republic of China – Update for the Year 2017” by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, with many details and trends on the various numerically measurable developments in the religions of China. This year, among others, the phenomenon of “cyber religion” and the interest of the general public in this topic, the question of popular beliefs in Guangdong Province, the official educational institutes of the Protestant Church and figures for the growth of Protestant Christianity among ethnic minorities in the People's Republic as well as baptisms and priestly ordinations within the Catholic Church are within the focus.

Prof. Dr. R.G. Tiedemann, School of History and Culture, Shandong University, Jinan, in his article “Chinese Female Propagators of the Faith in Modern China – The Tortuous Transition from the ‘Institute of Virgins’ to Diocesan Religious Congregations” gives a vivid insight into the life of those unmarried women in the history of the Catholic Church in China, a topic not much considered in academic research so far. Dr. Tiedemann writes: “Yet while their contribution as a vital force in the preservation of the Catholic faith in beleaguered Christian communities during the years of proscription was acknowledged, with the resumption of evangelization by foreign missionaries in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the European priests [...] began to view the ‘institute of virgins’ in a rather more ambivalent light. They were concerned about the relative independence of these laywomen in Christian communities and wanted them to lead more structured lives.”

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Sankt Augustin, June 2018

The Editors

News Update on Religion and Church in China November 19, 2017 – March 13, 2018

*Compiled by Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, Katharina Feith, Isabel Hess-Friemann
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). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2018, No. 1, pp. 3-19) covered the period September 11 – December 2, 2017.

Politics

End of November 2017:

Mass evictions of migrant workers from their lodgings in Beijing

Toward the end of last year, Chinese media carried articles about the Chinese government’s increasingly harsh treatment of Chinese internal migrant workers living in simple, “illegal” housing in the cities. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, fully 35% of the Chinese work force is made up of internal migrant workers who keep the Chinese economy running with their low wages. Most of them come from the country’s rural areas, so they have no urban residence registration (*hukou*) and, as such, do not enjoy the same rights as other city dwellers.

At the end of November 2017, the government in Beijing began evicting migrant workers living in illegal housing. According to the *South China Morning Post*, one example is Feijia (a neighborhood in northeast Beijing), where entire settlements were torn down within a short time and without any warning. The official explanation was that the demolitions were necessary due to concerns for fire safety in the area. The residents suddenly found themselves homeless in sub-zero temperatures.

BBC Monitoring reported that it was a “city-wide 40-day crackdown” officially aimed at inspecting and razing unsafe buildings, following the deaths of 19 residents of a migrant workers’ shelter in Daxing, Beijing, that went up in flames on November 18. That this action was long in the works, however, can be seen, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, from the fact that immediately after the buildings were razed and the terrain leveled, trucks drove onto the site loaded with young trees to be planted where the migrant housing had stood a few hours before.

Internet users loudly criticized the authorities when it became known that the Beijing municipal government had actually referred to such internal migrant workers as *diduan renkou* (low-end-population) translated by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* as “Abschaum der Gesellschaft” (the scum of society). Even the real estate tycoon, Ren Zhiqiang, a member of Beijing’s Political Consultative Conference, criticized the demolitions. This caused Beijing Party leader Cai Qi to slow down the pace of the evictions, but large

numbers of people were still left out in the streets, homeless (*BBC Monitoring* Dec. 10, 2017; MERICS End of Nov. 2017; *South China Morning Post* Dec. 17, 2017; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* Dec. 2, 2017).

March 11, 2018:

National People's Congress adopts constitutional amendments, including the abolition of term limits for the office of President

The clause restricting the Chinese president to two five-year terms of office has been deleted from China's constitution. This change would allow an indefinitely repeatable prolongation of the reign of Xi Jinping, who is at present at the beginning of his second term as President. The office of Secretary General of the Communist Party, which is actually the more important, has never been limited in time. According to the BBC, the Chinese-language state media did not single out this particular amendment to the constitution, but focused instead on the entire packet of constitutional changes. Other important changes include the establishment of a "National Supervisory Commission" (国家监督委员会), an institution that brings together various state anti-corruption agencies with the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI). Unlike the CCDI, however, the new commission will control not only party members but all state employees and will be superior in importance to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Prosecutor's Office. In addition, the "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想) was included in the preamble of the constitution.

Commentators saw the abolition of the president's term limit as the end of the principle of "collective leadership" introduced by Deng Xiaoping after the end of the Cultural Revolution as a way to prevent any future absolute concentration of power, as there had been in Mao's time (*BBC Monitoring* March 12, 2018; *South China Morning Post* March 12, 2018; *Xinhua* Feb. 25; March 11, 2018, among others).

Religious Policy

November / December 2017:

Coco, a "ghostly film" by Pixar is admitted by Chinese censorship and enjoys unexpected success in China's cinemas

The animated film *Coco* is about a Mexican boy who searches in the afterlife for his great-great-grandfather on the "Day of the Dead" in hopes of realizing his dream to become a great musician. As Rob Cain wrote in the business magazine *Forbes*, the film's admission into China was already unexpected, since censorship laws prohibit showing "ghosts and the supernatural" in films. Since other Pixar films had been unsuccessful in China, the high attendance figures for *Coco* were a real surprise. The "shared cultural value of reverence for one's ancestors" has greatly added to the film's appeal for Chinese moviegoers, who are "constantly defying expectations about their behavior," Cain said (www.forbes.com Nov. 27, 2017; Dec. 11, 16, 26, 2017). – See also the entry of End of November 2017 in the section "Islam".

December 2-3, 2017 / January 20, 2018:

International conference on Falun Gong in Wuhan / According to Falun Gong, 974 of its followers in China have been sentenced to prison in 2017

As reported by the Chinese news agency *Xinhua*, 30 scholars from China, the US, Canada, Australia, Italy, Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka participated in an “International Conference on Cult Problems,” which seems to have been focused mainly on Falun Gong. Several professors who are mentioned by name in the *Xinhua* report [and who can be identified on the websites of their respective universities], were quoted as claiming, among other things, that Falun Gong practitioners refused medical treatment, that the charge of organ removal from imprisoned Falun Gong followers in China was untenable, and that various scholars who had criticized Falun Gong had been threatened by the group.

Falun Gong stated on its website *Minghui.org* on January 20, 2018, that in 2017, a total of 974 of its supporters had been sentenced to prison by courts in the People’s Republic of China, of whom about 320 were in the provinces of Northeast China. The average duration of the imprisonment imposed on those convicted in December was 3.3 years, the report said. In addition to the prison sentences, fines were also imposed.

Falun Gong is defined as a “heretical cult” in the PRC and, as such, is expressly forbidden (*Minghui.org* Jan. 20, 2018; *Xinhua* Dec. 3, 2017).

December 14, 2017:

Joint Conference of official religious organizations says “No to the cults!”

At its 4th meeting, the “Joint Conference of the National Religious Organizations,” a body formed under the aegis of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), addressed the question of how China’s religions should in future be involved in the authorities’ struggle against [what the government defines as] “heretical cults” (*xiejiao* 邪教). As SARA’s director, Wang Zuo’an, said at the conference, “the battle against the cults is difficult and the road is long.” According to SARA’s official report on the meeting, the religions are expected to assist the authorities in, among others, the prevention of cults and the re-education of those damaged by cults. Before concluding the meeting, the assembled religious representatives passed a corresponding appeal (SARA according to *chinaislam.net.cn* Dec. 15, 2017).

January 8, 2018:

National assembly of directors of local religious affairs bureaus – Wang Zuo’an announces that in 2018 provisions regarding religious information services on the Internet will be issued

The conference in Beijing reviewed 2017’s achievements in the field of “religious work” and discussed plans for 2018. As reported by the *Global Times*, Wang Zuo’an, director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, said that provisions regarding religious information services on the Internet should be passed this year. Other provisions governing the management of religious organizations, sites and activities are also to be issued or revised in 2018. Furthermore, the “Measures for the Employment and

Use of Foreign Experts by Institutes for Religious Education,” in force since 1999, are also to be revised. In addition, local governments will have to adjust their respective local religious rules to the revised version of the national “Regulations on Religious Affairs” effective February 1, 2018, Wang said (*Global Times* Jan. 9, 2018; sara.gov.cn Jan. 8, 2018).

January 29, 2018:

State order prohibiting use of strippers at funerals

Since 2015, strippers have been in the crosshairs of Chinese law enforcement officers, concerned as they are about the social fabric of China, who see the nation’s social fabric threatened by immoral actions at funerals. While the government’s efforts in 2015 were limited mostly to the provinces of Jiangsu and Hebei (see *RCTC* Vol. V, 2015, Nos. 3-4, p. 11), on January 29 the Chinese Ministry of Culture announced a new campaign against strippers at funerals as well as at weddings and temple fairs in the provinces of Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Hebei. It condemned such obscene activities which are supposedly designed to attract more visitors to funerals, and to show greater homage to the deceased, as uncivilized and promised to eradicate such customs. The prohibition is meant to remind people that both pornography and public erotica are illegal in China. A hotline has been specially set up so that citizens can contact the authorities if they come to know about such obscene activities.

However, according to the *Global Times*, what these events really demonstrate is a paucity of genuine manifestations of Chinese culture among the rural population. On platforms such as Weibo, many Internet users also complained about the “low culture” of the rural population. According to the Ministry of Culture, more needs to be done to promote the cultural life of the rural population. The *Global Times* reports that the government has set aside 20 billion yuan for the construction of 600,000 “rural bookstores.” It remains to be seen whether this will yield positive results and whether “culture” can be restored through books (*Global Times* Feb. 20, 2018; mcprc.gov.cn Jan. 29, 2018).

February 1, 2018:

Revised version of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” comes into force – More stringent state control of religious life is expected

The revised regulations aim to, among other things, eliminate loopholes for religious freedom in certain legal gray areas which are outside the state’s framework of control. They are also aimed at monitoring more closely the activities of registered religious groups and sites and will give authorities a more concrete tool for tackling infringements. On the basis of the revised regulations, further new provisions governing details of religious life, such as religious activities on the Internet, are expected to be issued. Some recent incidents have already been seen by observers as a consequence of the new regulations, such as the regionally imposed bans on religious instruction for children during the time of the Chinese New Year holidays.

An unofficial English translation of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” can be found at www.chinalawtranslate.com/宗教事务条例-2017/?lang=en. See also the commentary in *China heute* 2017, No. 3, pp. 140-143 [in German] as well as the entries of January 2018 in the section “Islam” and of February 2018 in the section “Christianity.”

February 1, 2018:

SARA issues rules for the implementation of licensing procedures provided for in the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” – Five out of eleven involve contacts with foreign countries

The implementation rules which became effective on February 1 were published on the website of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA). They give details of the application procedures for the approval of certain religious projects, such as the necessary conditions, documents to be provided, the procedure to be followed and deadlines. The document specifies the approval procedures for the following projects: religious education and training; construction of large religious statues; conversion of buildings or new buildings within religious sites; large-scale religious activities; publication and distribution of internal religious publications; founding, changing and abolishing of religious organizations. Five more out of a total of eleven approval procedures concern foreign-related projects, namely: acceptance of donations from organizations and persons from abroad; employment of foreign experts by institutes for religious education; import by foreigners of religious articles for daily use. There are also approval procedures for “exchange with foreign organizations of other [religions] than the five religions represented in China and their members with government agencies and religious circles in China” [this refers, for example, to foreign Orthodox Christians, Jews, Mormons and Baha'is] and “inviting foreign religious personnel who entered China with another status to conduct scriptural interpretation and preaching.” The new provisions replace a previous document from 2006 (text of the 宗教事务部分行政许可项目实施办法 can be found at: www.sara.gov.cn/xwfb/xwj20170905093618359691/577024.htm).

February 4, 2018:

“No. 1 Central Document” announces crackdown on “illegal religious activities” in rural areas

The first political document of each year is issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, and is traditionally seen as a reference to priorities of current policy. “No. 1 Central Document” of 2018, like the documents of the previous years, addresses objectives and measures for the promotion of rural development. This time religious policy measures were also specifically mentioned. The state news agency *Xinhua* published a report under the heading “The No. 1 Central Document says ‘No’ to illegal religious activities in the countryside,” explaining that the document raises the following proposals: “According to law and with increased vigor crack down on illegal religious activities and overseas infiltration in rural villages, according to law stop religious intervention in rural public affairs, and continue to regulate chaotic construction of temples and excessive construction of religious statues in rural villages” (*Global Times* Feb. 5, 2018; *Xinhua* Jan. 4, 2018). – On the one hand, this obviously refers to traditional Chinese forms of religion, on the other hand, non-registered Christian and Muslim groups may also be targeted.

Buddhism

December 12, 2017:

Thousands of pilgrims attend prayer gatherings in Tibetan monasteries for the Ganden Ngachoe festival

According to the International Campaign for Tibet, thousands of Tibetans gathered in various monasteries in the Tibetan areas of the PRC, such as the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Rongwo Monastery in Rebkong (Chinese: Tongren, Qinghai), Labrang Monastery (Gansu) as well as in Dartsedo (Chinese: Kangding) and Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) in Sichuan to celebrate the festival Ganden Ngachoe, during which Tibetan Buddhists remember the death of Tsongkapa, who founded the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism in the 14th century. The current head of the Gelug School of Buddhism is the Dalai Lama. According to the report, the ceremonies at the various monasteries were closely monitored by large numbers of armed police who did not, however, actively interfere. *Radio Free Asia* noted that public gatherings at Tibetan monasteries in the PRC have increased significantly in recent years because Tibetans are intent on reinforcing their national and cultural identity, the broadcaster said (*Radio Free Asia* Dec. 12, 2017; savetibet.org Dec. 18, 2017).

Beginning of March 2018:

Seventeenth Karmapa Lama Ogyen Trinley Dorje talks in video message about personal conflicts with his religious and political role

The now 32-year-old Karmapa Lama complained in his “special message” about his incomplete training in both Tibet and India and lamented the fact that unlike earlier Karmapas he has been separated from the main teachers of his tradition. He talked about the great hopes which had been placed in him and which he could not fulfill. “Many people think to themselves that being the Karmapa, you know, is like some incredible thing, but for me, that hasn’t happened. Even if I am the Karmapa, the situation is still that I really need to try hard.” He had to give up a lot and nothing was easy. “If those around me do not believe in me, then there is no reason to pretend and keep going, so for that reason, I have been depressed.”

Ogyen Trinley Dorje also complained of the mistrust expressed toward him by the Indian government, which at times had suspected him of acting as a spy of the Chinese regime. He then expressed a desire to overcome the split in the Karma Kagyu lineage (there is a second competing reincarnation of the 16th Karmapa, the Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje, raised in India), but said that both sides would have to be open to discuss the issue. He stressed that he had neither the ability nor the desire to be a political leader and that this did not correspond to the traditional role of the Karmapa (some had expected Ogyen Trinley Dorje to replace the Dalai Lama as the spiritual-political leader of the Tibetans in exile). At the end of his speech, he called on the Karma Kagyu community to make a joint effort to support the future of the lineage: “A single pillar cannot hold up a whole building,” he said.

The half-hour video message was first shown to thousands of supporters on March 9 at the end of the Kagyu Monlam, a prayer ceremony in Bodh Gaya, India. According to the *Buddhistdoor Global*, it has caused ripples among Tibetan Buddhists, with some interpreting the Karmapa’s words as signs of a possible resignation.

The Karmapa is the head of Karma Kagyu, one of the four principal schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Karmapa Ogyen Dorje was initially educated under Chinese control in Tibet but fled to India in 2000.

He has been in the US for the past six months (www.buddhistdoor.net/news/the-karmapa-reveals-his-struggles-with-leadership-and-division-in-video-address – with a link to the video; trycicle.org March 12, 2018).

Daoism

January 21, 2018:

***Xinhua*: Rediscovery of the Great Shangqing Palace confirmed**

The great Daoist Shangqing Palace was built during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and was in continuous use until its destruction by a fire in 1930. As *Xinhua* has reported, archaeologists have now been able to confirm the exact location of China's once-largest Daoist temple at the end of a four-year period of excavation. The temple is located at the foot of Longhu Mountain (Jiangxi Province), where, according to tradition, the founder of the Daoist Zhengyi sect, Zhang Daoling (34–156), lived and practiced Daoism. The rediscovered temple was dedicated to him. Remains of the temple were first found in 2014 by laborers in the area of Longhu Mountain who were preparing a scenic area to attract tourists. According to *National Geographic*, archaeologists had to sift through an area of over 176,500 square meters to accurately locate the temple complex measuring 4,600 square meters. Today, only the stone foundation of the once monumental building remains. The excavation site is rich in archaeological finds that help researchers better understand the cultural climate in which this temple was built and existed (*National Geographic* Jan. 26, 2018; *Xinhua* Jan. 21, 2018).

Islam

November 19–21, 2017:

3rd National Conference on “Islam and Chinese Culture” in Beijing

During the conference, the following seven aspects of the “Sinicisation of Islam” were addressed: 1. Islam and traditional Chinese culture; 2. Tradition and renewal of Chinese-Islamic “scripture hall education” (*jingtang jiaoyu* 经堂教育 [the term refers to a form of Islamic education developed in China using Chinese characters to represent the Arabic language]); 3. Islam and Chinese society; 4. the “Muslim Confucians” (*huiru* 回儒) and their Chinese-language translations and writings; 5. Chinese Muslims and the Movement for New Culture [1917–1921]; 6. Theory and practice of religious indigenization; 7. Religious indigenization from an international point of view. The conference was organized by the Institute of World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Chinese Association of Religious Studies. IWR director Zhuo Xinping, Ahong (Imam) Yang Faming, the chairman of the Chinese Islamic Association, and a representative of the State Administration of Religious Affairs opened the proceedings (iwr.cass.cn Nov. 22, 2017).

End of November 2017:

Man accused of spreading anti-Islamic content on the Internet – Court in Northeastern China finds him guilty of “incitement to ethnic hatred”

Li Zhidong, a Han Chinese, was sentenced to two years and six months in prison by the Heping People's District Court in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, for “incitement to ethnic hatred,” according to the December 19, 2017 issue of the *Global Times*, which is under the auspices of party newspaper *Renmin Ribao*. According to the *Global Times*, between 2009 and 2016, Li founded a website and online chat groups, putting up posts that attacked Muslims and insulted Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Hui Muslims in Gansu made a formal complaint in a petition to the government, the *Global Times* said. Experts quoted by the newspaper called the verdict a “lesson” and said that Islamophobia should not be tolerated in China.

Reports of an anti-Islamic sentiment on the Chinese Internet have been accumulating for some time now (see also *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, p. 11). Against this background, it is noteworthy that in January, the film “Secret Superstar” by Indian Muslim producer Aamir Khan became a blockbuster in Chinese cinemas. The film is about a Muslim girl who, despite her father's negative attitude, fulfills her dream of becoming a famous singer by appearing on YouTube disguised with a veil (quartzzy.qz.com Jan. 30, 2018).

December 11, 2017:

Global Times reports on government order to remove unauthorized *halal* logos from restaurants in Urumqi

Restaurants in Urumqi were ordered to remove or hide unauthorized *halal* markings on their signs, the *Global Times* said, citing local officials. According to the same source, only those *halal* markings bearing a serial number issued by the Chinese Islamic Association are considered authorized (*Global Times* Dec. 11, 2017).

January 2018:

Authorities in heavily Muslim Linxia prohibit children from attending religious education during the New Year holiday

Authorities in Guanghe County in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture prohibited children from attending religious education during the New Year holiday in January, *Reuters* reported on February 17. Similar measures had been reported from Linxia City, *Reuters* said. In a previous report it was even said that children were forbidden to enter religious sites.

The Linxia Prefecture government, which oversees both Linxia City and Guanghe County, responded to questions from *Reuters* saying that the Chinese constitution required the separation of religion and education. It was unclear whether the ban would continue after the holidays. The Information Office of the State Council told *Reuters* that China guarantees citizens' rights to religious freedom under the law, including children, adding, however, that China is determined to “prevent and severely crackdown on the use of religion to carry out illegal activities.” Li Haiyang, an imam from Henan, told *Reuters* that such prohibitions had previously been issued orally but were often ignored; this time, however, the authorities seem to be serious about their implementation, the imam said.

Thus far, the Hui Muslims had a rather relaxed relationship with the authorities; but now they fear that the government wants to use the same kind of measures against them as it is already doing against the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, according to *Reuters*. There are many Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims living in Linxia Prefecture, and more than 50% of the population in Linxia City, also known as the “Chinese Mecca,” are Hui.

The *Global Times*, citing local Communist Party website chinalxn.net, reported that on January 19, 2018, Communist Party members on the Linxia Prefecture Party Committee had signed a pledge not to have any religious beliefs. In November 2017, the *Global Times* had portrayed Islam in Ningxia as an obstacle to poverty reduction (*Global Times* Jan. 23, 2018; *Reuters* Jan. 17; Feb. 17, 2018; see: *RCTC* 2018, No. 1, p. 10).

For similar prohibitions affecting Christian children see the entry of February 2018 in the section “Christianity.”

January 29, 2018:

Citing the policy of the separation of education and religion, the *Global Times* reports critically on holiday courses for “left behind” Muslim children in Yunnan

Mosques in Yunnan during the winter holidays teach Arabic, Quran and Islamic culture to Muslim children and teenagers “left behind” by their parents working in far-flung cities, the *Global Times* reported. An employee of the Islamic Association of Yunnan confirmed this to the newspaper. Then, the report quotes Xiong Kunxin of Minzu University of China as saying this is “inappropriate,” because the worldview of teenagers has not yet been established and it is therefore “dangerous to brainwash them with religion.” The *Global Times* was referring to the provision in Article 36 of the Constitution, “No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that [...] interfere with the educational system of the State,” along with a similar passage in the Education Law (*Global Times* Jan. 20, 2018).

March 10, 2018:

Chairman of the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) demands that society’s concerns about excessive use of *halal* thought not be ignored

According to a *Global Times* report, the CIA’s chairman Yang Faming said that Islam has caused concerns in China that should not be ignored, such as Chinese mosques strikingly imitating foreign architecture, or excessive use of *halal* thought in some regions of China. He spoke of religion interfering “with the secular lives of the people, with some people paying more attention to religion than to national laws” and calling themselves believers rather than citizens. Yang made these comments during the meeting of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference in Beijing, according to the *Global Times*. The paper also quoted Shen Guiping of the Central Institute of Socialism as saying that overemphasizing religious ways of life would lead to religion spreading to other social realms and leading to the separation of a group from the rest of society, which would be a “public problem.”

The *Global Times* has reported on several occasions that there is a growing sense of displeasure among the Chinese Internet public opinion about an expansion of *halal* thought perceived as excessive. On the other hand, according to Lanya Feng in a post in *The McGill International Review*, some non-Muslim consumers in China consider *halal* foods safer. The *halal* food sector thus gains a competitive

advantage and the imams who ritually participate in the production of food have a certain economic and political power, Lanya Feng argued (*Global Times* March 11, 2018; mironline.ca Feb. 5; see: *RCTC* 2018, No. 1, p. 9).

Christianity

From February 2018:

Henan Province: Ban on Christian New Year's couplets and increasing pressure on Christians



In principal a fine example of the “Sinicization” of Christianity: Dismantled New Year's couplets with Christian motifs. Photo: *UCAN*

According to statements by various Catholic priests working in the province quoted by *UCAN*, Catholic and Protestant households have been requested to remove traditional New Year's couplets with Christian content from all front doors in several places in Henan in the areas of the Xinxiang and Puyang Dioceses. The order was partly in writing, partly oral. According to one report, the village party cadres prevented the faithful personally from hanging the banners outside their homes.

A priest by the name of Fr. Paul from the Diocese of Luoyang told *UCAN* that he had been informed that small meeting places would be closed unless they could show an official registration certificate and that priests who did not have a certificate for religious personnel would no longer be allowed to perform religious rituals. Another priest, this time from Anyang Diocese, told *UCAN* that his diocese had received official notice that no further training courses would be allowed for adult believers and that religion classes for minors would be absolutely forbidden. He was of the opinion

that these measures were directed primarily against the rapidly growing Protestant communities, with the Catholics being caught, as it were, in the crossfire.

The US-based China Aid organization also reported that Christians in Henan were coming under increasing pressure from the government. It said that since the beginning of February, local security and religious authorities have been threatening members of house churches with fines. In Nanyang, all religious gatherings in private homes were explicitly banned; participants or hosts of any such meetings held outside of registered religious sites will be subject to a fine of 30,000 Yuan (US\$ 4,750), China Aid reported. The organization linked such increasing pressure with the entry into force of the above-mentioned revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs” (*chinaaid.org* March 3, 7, 2018; *china.ucanews.com* Feb. 21, 2018).

Protestantism

December 8, 2017:

Six Christians in Yunnan Province sentenced to prison on charges of cult involvement

According to China Aid, six Christians in Yunnan Province were sentenced by the People's Court of Yun County to prison terms ranging from four to 13 years on the charge of belonging to the "Three Grades of Servants," of organizing secret meetings and of establishing a secret organization. The Three Grades of Servants are a Heilongjiang-based religious group with a Christian background that is considered by the authorities to be a "heretical cult" and is banned as such. China Aid has reported that the six Christians deny belonging to this group and have appealed against the verdict. The report also indicated that in Yunnan Province's 2016 campaign against the Three Grades of Servants dozens of Christians were also arrested who had nothing to do with the group (chinaaid.org Feb. 14, 2018; *Radio Free Asia* Jan. 18, 2018).

December 29, 2017:

National Assembly of Chinese YMCA / YWCA

At the National Assembly of Chinese YMCA and YWCA Associations in Beijing, Wu Jianrong was again appointed Secretary General of the YMCA, and He Xiaoqing became General Secretary of the YWCA. The meeting was held under the motto: "To serve society with concentrated power, to give a new witness amid the realization of the magnificent 'Chinese dream.'" The associations of the YMCA and YWCA all over the country were encouraged to study the principles of the 19th Congress and to act in their spirit (sara.gov.cn Dec. 29, 2017).

Isabel Hess-Friemann

January 9, 2018:

Protestant megachurch demolished by authorities

In Linfen City, Shanxi Province, the Chinese authorities have razed the "Golden Lampstand Church" despite intense protests on the part of the church's members. With powerful excavators and jackhammers, workers soon reduced the huge building to rubble. According to China Aid, the church has been under government pressure since its construction in 2009 and church leaders have been imprisoned repeatedly. According to *America Magazine*, the *Global Times* had said that the accusation had been made that the church had been "secretly built" and in violation of building codes. The church was demolished as part of the government's campaign to "remove illegal buildings" from urban centers, thus *Global Times*. Eight members of the church were arrested in 2009 for "illegally occupying farmland" and "disturbing traffic order." There were many expressions of concern that these and similar measures might be linked to the revised "Regulations on Religious Affairs" that came into effect on February 1, 2018 (*America Magazine* Jan. 25, 2018; *The Guardian* Jan. 11, 2018; *UCAN* Jan. 11, 2018).

January 7–16, 2018:

World Council of Churches visits China

To mark its 70th anniversary, representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC) visited the People's Republic of China in a bid to strengthen relations between the WCC and the CCC (Chinese Christian Council). In addition to Secretary General Olav Fykse Tveit and two other delegation participants, WCC Asian President Sang Chang also took part in the visit. With stops in Shanghai, Nanjing and Beijing, the WCC group met with representatives of the Three-Self Movement, the Christian Council and also with faculty and students from various educational institutions. In addition, they also held discussions with representatives of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA).

Since its participation in the WCC's 1991 world assembly in Canberra, the Chinese Christian Council has been a full member of the WCC. Following an historic first visit by leaders of the WCC to China in November of 2016, this stay sends a signal to the regime highlighting the importance of the community of Christians in China in the eyes of the world. Secretary General Tveit stressed the particular relevance of the Chinese churches for the Christian witness and its future development in global ecumenism (oikoumene.org Jan. 12, 2018).

Isabel Hess-Friemann

February 21, 2018:

Death of Billy Graham – Reactions in China

The death of the American evangelist Billy Graham at the age of 99 was received with great sympathy in the People's Republic. Billy Graham visited the country twice – in 1988 and 1994. His wife, Ruth Bell Graham, was born in China as the daughter of a missionary and spent her youth there. Gao Feng, President of the China Christian Council, and Fu Xianwei, Secretary General of the Three-Self Movement, issued a letter of condolence calling Billy Graham a dear friend of the Chinese Church and one of the most influential Christian leaders in the world. Representatives of the State Administration of Religious Affairs were present as guests at the funeral ceremonies (www.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/10174 [text of the letter of condolence]; chinachristiandaily.com Feb. 23, 2018).

Isabel Hess-Friemann

March 8–13, 2018:

Six Chinese Christian Council members attend the WCC World Mission Conference in Arusha, Tanzania

A delegation of six, headed by Lin Manhong, Deputy Secretary General of the Chinese Christian Council, participated in the World Mission Conference in Arusha, Tanzania. The motto under which the 1,024 delegates shared together in forums and workshops was "Moved by the Spirit – Called to be transformed." The gathering in Tanzania was the 13th conference of its kind organized by the WCC since the beginning of the ecumenical movement in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910. On the podium in front of representatives of all the Asian churches, Pastor Lin emphasized the need to embed proclamation of the Gospel in the modern day context in order to make it effective as a prophetic leitmotiv (ccctspm.org March 12, 2018).

Isabel Hess-Friemann

Catholicism

December 7, 2017:

Underground Bishop Matthias Yu Chengxin of Hanzhong has died

Bishop Yu, almost 90 years old, was retired Coadjutor Bishop of Hanzhong in Shaanxi Province. He was buried on December 12. The Requiem Mass and burial were celebrated by the official Bishop of Hanzhong, Luis Yu Runshen.

Bishop Yu Chengxin was born into a Catholic family on February 28, 1928. He was the younger brother of Bishop Bartholomew Yu Chengti, also Bishop of Hanzhong. All three of the bishops Yu were recognized by Rome, but only Luis Yu has the recognition of the Chinese government.

Young Matthias Yu entered the Hanzhong Minor Seminary in 1950 and from 1956 continued his studies in the regional seminary of Kaifeng, which, however, was closed only two years later. During the Cultural Revolution, Matthias Yu was initially under house arrest and then spent a long time in a labor camp. He was ordained in the underground Church in 1981 and worked as a spiritual director and Latin teacher at the Hanzhong underground seminary. He was considered a happy man who made his rounds to the villages by bicycle in order to administer the sacraments.

On December 12, 1989, he was secretly ordained Coadjutor Bishop of Hanzhong after his brother Bartholomew, the then Underground Bishop of Hanzhong, had been arrested in November following the attempt to establish a bishops' conference for China's underground bishops. In 2005, there was a reconciliation between the diocese's official and underground sides, after Rome granted its own approval to official (state approved) Bishop Luis Yu shortly before the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005. Bartholomew was the Ordinary of the diocese until his death in 2009, when Luis took over the leadership.

Bishop Matthias Yu himself never exercised his episcopal ministry. Already in 2007 he was severely limited by a stroke. In addition to his poor health, *AsiaNews* reports that, according to a reliable source, Bishop Matthias did not want to endanger the unity in the diocese following the death of his brother.

In a statement signed by all the priests of Hanzhong and read out at the funeral, it says, "He never exercised his episcopal ministry and never allowed others to call him bishop, nor did he ever appear with the episcopal insignia, in private or in public. He has always considered himself and has always served the Church as a priest" (Quote from: *AsiaNews*) (*AsiaNews* Dec. 13, 2017; *Fides* Jan. 30, 2018; *UCAN* Dec. 14, 2017).

December 16, 2017:

Shanghai Cathedral reopened after restoration – but without Bishop Ma Daqin

After two years of renovations, the 112-year-old Neo-Gothic St. Ignatius Cathedral in the Xujiahui District of Shanghai reopened on December 16 with a solemn Mass. The Mass was presided over by Fr. Wu Jianlin, Chancellor of the Diocese of Shanghai, with 50 Chinese and foreign priests from Shanghai and other dioceses concelebrating. About 2,000 of the faithful were present for the Mass.

Absent from the celebration was Bishop Thaddäus Ma Daqin, who has been under house arrest in Sheshan Seminary since 2012, but who for some time has been allowed to move about a bit more freely. There was some speculation that had he been permitted to be the main celebrant for the Mass, it could have been interpreted as a sign that he was now allowed to resume his episcopal ministry. This, however, was not the case. That morning Bishop Ma posted a picture of himself on WeChat with the words: "I am here at Sheshan Seminary."

In June of 2016, an open letter from Bishop Ma, in which he expressed regret for his earlier resignation from the Patriotic Association at his episcopal ordination on July 7, 2012, caused a good deal of irritation. Three months later, he was re-admitted to the Patriotic Association and given two official posts. At Easter of 2017, Bishop Ma concelebrated in the Diocese of Mindong with the illegitimate Bishop Zhan Silu, whom he had rejected laying hands on during his episcopal ordination. All this was interpreted as a sign of Bishop Ma's reconciliation with the authorities, and as a sign of hope that he could soon exercise his episcopate, a hope which seems, however, to have been premature.

The Shanghai Cathedral was built in 1905 and since 2013 has been recognized by the State Council as part of China's cultural heritage. Water damage and structural defects eventually required major renovations (*AsiaNews* Dec. 18, 2017; *UCAN* Dec. 21, 2017).

December 27, 2017:

Parishioners' protests accompany the demolition of the only Catholic church in Zhifang

In Zhifang, a village near Xi'an, Shaanxi, shortly after Christmas, the only Catholic church in the town was demolished by the authorities, *UCAN* reported. During the demolition, some of the Catholic faithful protested in front of the local municipality building because the police would not allow anyone near the church itself. The priest blogger Shanren told *AsiaNews* that the church was built in 1999 as more and more people from the surrounding hill areas moved down into the Laoyu Valley. Over time, this region has developed economically and Father Shan believes that it is really economic reasons that lay behind the demolition. According to community sources, the church was legally built 20 years ago, after all the necessary permits had been obtained. The property, *AsiaNews* reports, has been used consistently by the Catholic community for pastoral purposes.

The authorities had informed the community of their plans just one week before the demolition date. The reason for the government's action was the allegedly illegal claim to the property on the part of the Church. *UCAN* based its report on information from one WeChat user who confirmed what Father Shan had told *AsiaNews*: The government had designated this former municipality as a "scenic spot" for tourists. This change in classification as well as the recent completion of a nearby highway had already multiplied the value of the land many times over (*AsiaNews* Dec. 28, 29, 2017; *UCAN* Jan. 5, 2018).

January 27, 2018:

Wenzhou Bishop Shao Zhumin returns to his diocese after seven months of enforced disappearance and house arrest

Underground Bishop of Wenzhou, Bishop Shao Zhumin, recognized by Rome but not by the government, was "taken away" by officials on May 18, 2017. His whereabouts were not known for a long time. In September, he sent a WeChat message saying that he was in a hospital in Beijing, where he was undergoing an operation on an ear. After that he was known to be under house arrest in Xining, in Qinghai Province. He was released at long last on January 3.

According to both *AsiaNews* and *UCAN*, during his detention, the authorities in vain placed considerable pressure on him to join the Patriotic Association. In early December he reportedly was instructed to sign a document listing four conditions for his recognition as bishop by the authorities; these conditions included support for the principle of an autonomous and independent Church in China, support for the self-election and self-ordination of bishops, as well as concelebration with an illegitimate bishop. According to *AsiaNews* and *UCAN*, he refused, however, to cave in to the government's demands. In

June of 2017, both the German Ambassador in Beijing and the Vatican intervened with public statements calling for Bishop Shao's release. On December 18, Bishop Shao's own Diocese of Wenzhou launched a diocese wide campaign of prayers for his release.

According to *UCAN*, on December 29, 2017, Fr. Lu Danhua, an underground priest from the small diocese of Lishui, which is administered by the Diocese of Wenzhou, was abducted by officials of the local Religious Affairs Bureau. After more than a week, his whereabouts were still unknown. According to one source, he had been brought to Wenzhou for reeducation (*AsiaNews* Dec. 19, 2017; Jan. 31, 2018; *UCAN* Jan. 10, 2018; see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 3, pp. 11-12 and 18; No. 4, p. 16).

Beginning of February 2018:

There are reports that churches in some areas now have put up signs that say: "Minors are prohibited from entering"



Metal sign announcing "No access for minors" on the lower right of the entrance gate to this Catholic church in Nanle County, Henan Province. Photo: *UCAN*.

Citing information obtained from a local priest, *UCAN* reports that authorities have urged Catholic underground communities in some areas of Hebei Province to put up signs of "access forbidden to minors" at their churches and places of worship, with threats that they would be prevented from using the churches at all if they failed to comply. There have also been reports from Henan Province about the posting of such prohibitions on churches there.

Fr. Thomas from Henan told *UCAN* that after the Chinese New Year, he was visited by officials who ex-

plained, among other things, that party members and minors were expressly forbidden to enter church buildings. A man by the name of Peter, a Catholic layman from central China, told *UCAN* that he had personally seen such signs at Catholic churches in Xinjiang (where minors are also prohibited from entering mosques). He said that local legislation prohibiting minors from setting foot in religious sites lacks any legal basis and is unconstitutional, since the Constitution guarantees citizens' freedom of belief. The Law on the Protection of Minors also states that children and adolescents should not be discriminated against because of their religious beliefs, Peter said (*china.ucanews.com* Feb. 8, 2018; *UCAN* Feb. 8, 2018).

Beginning of February 2018:

Catholic youth camps forbidden in Shanxi and Inner Mongolia

According to *AsiaNews*, several priests in Shanxi, Inner Mongolia and other parts of China received a warning in early February that they would no longer be permitted to hold youth camps in future; some parishes had in fact received a letter to that effect from the local Religious Affairs Bureau. As Chinese New Year (February 16) was imminent and many congregations use the New Year holiday as well as summer vacations to gather children and young people for catechesis, this order was all the more criti-

cal. *AsiaNews* saw it as arising out of the revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” which went into effect on February 1. There had already been reports on local prohibitions of Christian education as far back as August of 2017 (*AsiaNews* Feb. 3, 2018; see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 4, p. 12).

According to a survey carried out by Renmin University’s China Religion Survey on the situation of registered religious sites, published in 2016, 32.2% of the Catholic and 16.3% of Protestant sites surveyed offered summer camps for the youth in 2013; for the other three religions, the percentage was below 5% (see *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, p. 29).

February 5, 2018:

Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (FICS) for the first time publishes countrywide baptismal statistics for the entire year

According to the survey conducted by the FICS together with the official Catholic governing bodies’ Chinese Catholic Research Center, in 2017 a total of 48,556 people were baptized in mainland China’s Catholic communities. The report said that the numbers were incomplete. Baptisms in the underground parishes are probably only partially recorded (*Xinde* Feb. 5, 2018). For further details see the “Statistics on Religions and Churches in the People’s Republic of China” presented in the current issue of *RCTC*).

February 8, 2018:

SARA visits Catholic bodies – Chairman of the official Bishops’ Conference announces a 2018 conference on “60 years of self-election and self-consecration of bishops”

Director Wang Zuo’an and other officials from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) visited the headquarters of the (official) Chinese Bishops’ Conference and of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, in order to convey their New Year’s greetings to those leaders of the two bodies who reside at the bodies’ headquarters in Beijing. According to the report on the website of the two bodies (neither of which are recognized by Rome), Bishop Ma Yinglin stated that the Patriotic Association and the Bishops’ Conference are making preparations for a 2018 conference to mark the 60th anniversary of self-election and self-consecration of bishops in the Chinese Church. He further said that with the implementation of the “Five-year Plan for the Sinicization of the Catholic Church” as a central theme and the implementation of the “Three Systems for the Democratic Management of the Church” as a goal, they wanted to raise the work of the two bodies to a new level (*AsiaNews* Feb. 10, 2018; china-catholic.cn Feb. 8, 2018).

Sixty years ago, on April 13, 1958, two Chinese priests, the future Bishops Dong Guangqing (Hankou) and Yuan Wenhua (Wuchuan), were elected bishops by the Patriotic Association which had been founded in 1957, and consecrated without a papal mandate. Before their consecration, the Vatican had rejected the request of the Patriotic Association for recognition of their chosen candidates.

The “Three Systems for the Democratic Administration of the Church” are three controversial statutes of the official Catholic bodies of 2003; they are statutes for the Joint Assembly of the two bodies (中国天主教爱国会、中国天主教主教团主席联席会议制度), for the administration of the dioceses (中国天主教教区管理制度) as well as for the work of the Patriotic Association (中国天主教爱国会工作条例). They can be found online at: www.chinacatholic.cn/html/category/14050346-1.htm.

February 21, 2018:

Solemn opening of the “Year of Youth” in the Diocese of Taiyuan



Year of the Youth in Taiyuan Diocese.
Photo: chinacatholic.org.

The Diocese of Taiyuan, which is located in Shanxi Province, has proclaimed a “Year of Youth.” The special year opened on February 21 in the Xiliulin Church under the leadership of Bishop Meng Ningyou, with the participation of 2,000 young people, 60 priests, 28 sisters, 5 deacons and 24 seminarians. The motto for the opening day was “Seek.”

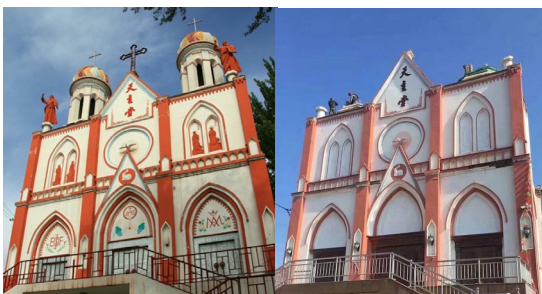
In his homily, Bishop Meng Ningyou referred to the upcoming World Bishops’ Synod in Rome in October of 2018, which will be held under the motto “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.” At the opening ceremony, Father Li Yonglong said that the goal of the Year of Youth in Taiyuan is to bring together the youth of the diocese so that they can better witness to the faith. A young woman, representing the young people of the diocese, called on the diocese to set up a Youth Ministry Office. The opening program also included a solemn inaugural procession through the village with the participants bearing great icons and relics of saints, among them two saints from Xiliulin village, St. Wu Anbang and St. Zhao Quanxin, both of whom were killed during

the Boxer Uprising. According to the secretary general of the diocese, Father Lü Xufeng, the holy martyrs should be both role models and encouragement for young Catholics today.

Other events planned during the course of Taiyuan’s “Year of Youth” include an event for the promotion of vocations to the priestly and religious life, one on “Church knowledge” and a singing competition called the “Alleluia Cup.” A youth pilgrimage is also being planned as an important part of the year (chinacatholic.org March 23, 2018).

February 27 and March 8, 2018:

Crosses, statues and bell towers removed from churches in Xinjiang and Henan Provinces



The Catholic Church in Yining before and after the destructive measures. Photo: UCAN.

The first case occurred at a church in Yining, Xinjiang Province. Not only were the crosses removed from the roof on February 27, but the twin bell towers over the church façade were also completely dismantled, and all identifiably Catholic elements removed from the façade, leaving only the words “Catholic Church” and a small bas-relief image of a dove representing the Holy Spirit. UCAN’s website carries photos that document these events.

The removal of the crosses and also the artistic images of the “Stations of the Cross” along the

church's inside walls took place not only in Yining, but also in Manas and Hutubi in Xinjiang. *UCAN*, citing unnamed sources, said that these actions had been launched under the slogan "Sinicization" of the religions in China.

The second case occurred in Shangqiu, Henan Province. On March 8, ten crosses were taken down from various buildings on the site of the Shangqiu Cathedral ("South Church") by order of the Road Bureau and District Committee. Believers reported the incident to both the People's Congress and the Provincial Political Consultative Conference. As a result of these protests, authorities later permitted three smaller crosses to be put up again on the cathedral, one above the door of the Cathedral and one cross on the small church next door to it. In Henan Province, in addition to this first case of cross removal, there were also reports of other "anti-Church" actions (see the entries from February 2018 in the section "Christianity" and at the beginning of February in this section).

In Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, the faithful have secretly re-installed red crosses on three churches, which they then guarded through around the clock prayer vigils. "There's something fundamentally wrong with a church building not having a cross," *World Magazine* cites a believer from one of the communities affected (*AsiaNews* March 2, 2018; *UCAN* March 1, 13, 2018; *World Magazine* Jan. 29, 2018).

Sino-Vatican Relations

Christmas 2017:

Vatican lends its support to emergency relief work by Jinde Charities

According to the *Vatican Insider*, just before Christmas and "with the Pope's placet", the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development gave US\$ 100,000 to fund projects benefitting poor mountain communities of Hebei and Guizhou Provinces. The sum was handed over to the Catholic Jinde Charities in Shijiazhuang, which supported the projects as one of their main initiatives in 2017. On June 3, 2017, Jinde Charities organized a charity concert at the Beijing Cathedral, which was also attended by representatives of both the United Front and the State Administration of Religious Affairs SARA (*Vatican Insider* Feb. 13, 2017).

January 22, 2018:

AsiaNews reports that the Vatican has asked the legitimate underground bishops of Shantou and Mindong to step down as Ordinaries so that two illegitimate bishops can be recognized by the Holy See and appointed Ordinaries (diocesan bishops)

Before a – reportedly almost finalized – agreement between the Vatican and Beijing on future episcopal appointments can be signed, both sides are negotiating the future role of the 7 bishops, who were consecrated without the consent of the Pope and whom the Church therefore considers illegitimate. Beijing is demanding that the Church recognize them and the Church, in turn, is seeking recognition from the government of the 30 or 40 bishops of the underground who are still unrecognized by the government. In two cases, that is, in the dioceses of Shantou and Mindong, the dioceses are "doubly" staffed by an underground bishop recognized only by Rome and by an official bishop recognized only by the government (in a third case, Qiqihar / Heilongjiang, there are overlaps). The problem is that

according to ancient Church tradition there can only be one diocesan bishop in a diocese since the Ordinary is the “head” of the Church in any given place and there can only be one head.

AsiaNews, citing local sources, reported on January 22, that on December 18-22, 2017, government officials escorted 88 year old underground Bishop Zhuang Jianjian from Shantou in Guangdong Province, southern China, to Beijing. There, on December 21, he first met three officials of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, followed by a meeting with a delegation of the Holy See. According to the *AsiaNews* report, the Vatican delegation asked Bishop Zhuang to step down as diocesan bishop so that Bishop Huang Bingzhang, born in 1967, could become the local Ordinary and legitimate bishop of Shantou. Huang, in turn, was ordained bishop without papal approval in 2011, after which the Vatican announced his automatic excommunication; the government considers him to be the diocesan bishop of Shantou.

Then, according to *AsiaNews*, the Vatican delegation met another bishop unrecognized by the papacy in the Diocese of Mindong (Fujian Province), 57 year old Bishop Zhan Silu, whom the government considers to be the bishop of Mindong. The diocesan bishop recognized by the Pope is 59 year old Bishop Guo Xijin, who belongs to the underground community of Mindong Diocese, which in this diocese is in the majority. *AsiaNews* reported that the Vatican delegation asked Bishop Guo to accept a reduction of rank to the position of either Auxiliary Bishop or Coadjutor Bishop to Bishop Zhan.

This far, this description of events has not been officially confirmed by the Vatican. Secretary of State Parolin did, however, mention in a general way in an interview (see below) the possibility that “someone is asked to make a sacrifice, small or great.” *America Magazine* cited an anonymous Vatican source that essentially corroborated the events described (see below). Bishop Zhuang confirmed to *UCAN* that the meeting in Beijing with the Vatican delegation had taken place but without going into any details. Bishop Guo Xijin spoke to Ian Johnson of the *New York Times* and said that if he received a verifiably genuine document from the Vatican, “then we must obey Rome’s decision,” thus indirectly confirming the process (*America Magazine* Feb. 2, 2018; *AsiaNews* Jan. 22, 2018; *New York Times* Feb. 1, 2018; *UCAN* Jan. 26 and Feb. 1, 2018; *Vatican Insider* Jan. 31, 2018).

On this topic see also the entries of January 29, 2018, January 31, 2018 as well as of February 1 and 2, 2018 in this section.

January 25, 29, 30 and 31; January 2, 5; February 9; as well as March 11, 2018:

Chinese *Global Times* reports on developments in Sino-Vatican relations

The English-language *Global Times*, which appears under the umbrella of the party newspaper *Renmin Ribao*, but sometimes represents somewhat more independent views, reported in detail on the developments, always with one eye on the revelations of the non-Chinese media. An editorial on February 5 said that Pope Francis had made “substantive concessions to China” regarding episcopal nominations. It said that some Western media and “a few radical religious groups” that “have no right to intervene in bishop appointments” are unhappy with the Holy See’s attempts to settle the conflict with Beijing. The deal, if wrapped up, will be “tremendously beneficial to Catholics,” the editorial claimed, predicting that “sooner or later” Beijing and the Vatican would enter into diplomatic relations. It further said that the Chinese public “generally respects each pope,” and that Pope Francis has a positive image.

January 29, 2018:

Cardinal Zen reveals that he has given the Pope a letter from Bishop Zhuang and relates what the Pope said to him about the negotiations

In a post on his blog, former Hong Kong bishop Joseph Cardinal Zen – who has long been warning the Vatican against too much compromise towards China, which he attributes, however, not to the Pope himself but to his co-workers – wrote that on January 10, at the end of the public audience in the Vatican, he handed the Pope a letter from Bishop Zhuang, together with a translation and an accompanying letter of his own. The Cardinal further related that on the evening of January 12, he was able to speak with the Pope about “the worries of his faithful children in China.” According to Cardinal Zen, the Pope told him: “Yes, I told them (his collaborators in the Holy See) not to create another Mindszenty case” (<http://oldyosef.hkdavc.com/?p=967>).

József Mindszenty was Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest. Because of his resistance to Communism, he was imprisoned several times and lived in asylum at the US Embassy in Budapest from 1956 until he went into exile in 1971 at the request of the Holy See.

The revelations of *AsiaNews* and Cardinal Zen caused great confusion in the Church, both inside and outside of China, and in part also incomprehension and disappointment with the Vatican; others expressed approval for the Vatican’s dialogue initiative.

January 30, 2018:

Vatican denies “presumed difference” on China issues between the Pope and his collaborators

The director of the Holy See’s press service, Greg Burke, said that the Pope was in constant contact with his collaborators, especially the Secretariat of State, on issues concerning the Church in China and was informed in detail. He added that it was regrettable that people within the Church are fostering confusion and controversy by claiming the opposite (<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/01/30/0089/00168.html>).

January 31, 2018:

Secretary of State Pietro Parolin explains in an interview why the Vatican is in dialogue with China – the main objective is the preservation of communion

As Head of the Secretariat of State, Cardinal Parolin is responsible for negotiations with China. In an interview with *Vatican Insider*, he said that the main purpose of the dialogue with China is to maintain the communion of all the Bishops of China with the Bishop of Rome and to reconcile the two communities within the Church in China on the path towards unity. It is a matter, he said, of finding “realistic pastoral solutions that allow Catholics to live their faith and to continue together the work of evangelization in the specific Chinese context.” The concern of the Holy See is that the Church in China could be “fully Catholic and, at the same time, authentically Chinese.” There are still many wounds that can only be healed with the balm of mercy, Cardinal Parolin said. He affirmed that the Church “will never forget the past and present trials and sufferings of Chinese Catholics,” but asked that “no

one should cling to the spirit of opposition to condemn his brother or use the past as an excuse to stir up new resentments and closures.” Parolin also asserted that the Pope himself is personally following up contacts with the Chinese authorities. “All his collaborators act in concert with him. No one takes private initiatives” (www.lastampa.it/2018/01/31/vaticaninsider/eng/inquiries-and-interviews/parolin-why-we-are-in-dialogue-with-china-C8mlJsD0PDNsmsx7db6ZIJ/pagina.html).

February 1 and 2, 2018:

Unidentified “senior Vatican source(s)” give details on events surrounding Bishops Zhuang and Guo to media – Agreement on episcopal appointments has been achieved, but “it is not a great agreement”

Speaking to *America Magazine*’s Vatican expert Gerard O’Connell, a “senior Vatican source” who wishes to remain anonymous, called the January 22 report of *AsiaNews* “substantially accurate,” adding that since the beginning of negotiations, Beijing has insisted that all 7 illegitimate bishops had to be legitimized and recognized by the Holy See as the ordinary bishops of their respective dioceses. The 5-member Vatican delegation in December was led by Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, *America Magazine* said. According to the magazine’s report, Celli assured Bishop Zhuang that Beijing had agreed to recognize him as bishop emeritus and not force him to sign a document regarding the independence of the Church. In tears, Bishop Zhuang agreed to obey the Pope, but after returning home he seems to have changed his mind. The magazine further reported that during his meeting with the delegation, Bishop Guo strongly opposed the proposal but said that he would obey the Pope. After the conversation with the two underground bishops, at the next meeting sometime after Chinese New Year, a papal decree for the pardon and legitimacy of the 7 bishops could be handed over to the Chinese negotiating team for the Beijing authorities and, in a next step, the agreement would be ready for signing, the report said. However, the Vatican source did not see the signing as assured, as there are those in the PRC who “do not want it to happen.”

On February 1, *Reuters* also cited a high-ranking Vatican source as saying that an agreement on bishop appointments was ready and could be signed “in a few months.” “It is not a great agreement, but we don’t know what the situation will be like in 10 or 20 years. It could even be worse,” the source said. After that, “we will still be like a bird in a cage but the cage will be bigger;” suffering would continue (*America Magazine* Feb. 2, 2018; *Reuters* Feb. 1, 2018).

February 2, 2018:

Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, exalts the Chinese as “the ones who best realize Catholic social teaching today”

In an interview with *Vatican Insider*, the Argentinean Curia Bishop said he had found an extraordinary country during his trip to China: the common good was paramount, there were no slums or drugs, and politics were not dominated by the economy as in the US. Beijing “defends the dignity of the person,” the bishop said.

Several commentators found that such an idealization of China simply went too far; Bernardo Cervellera wrote in *AsiaNews* that this is an “ideological affirmation that makes a laughing stock of the Church

and harms the world.” According to *UCAN*, also Chinese Catholics were very critical of the bishop’s statement.

Already in August of 2017, when Bishop Sorondo was attending a conference in China on organ donation and transplantation, the Chinese *Global Times* quoted him as saying that “China could be a model we need today to respond to globalization, a model for the dignity and freedom of human being” (*AsiaNews* Feb. 7, 2018; *UCAN* Feb. 12, 2018; *Vatican Insider* [Spanish edition] Feb. 2, 2018; see also: *RCTC* 2017, No. 4, p. 17).

Beginning of March, 2018:

Several official bishops in China comment on the state of Sino-Vatican relations and speak in favor of an agreement

During the time of the annual sessions of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, starting on March 3) and the National People’s Congress (NPC, starting on March 5), several Chinese bishops made comments towards various media. According to summaries of these comments by *UCAN* and *AsiaNews*, Bishop Fang Jianping of Tangshan, an NPC member, said he hoped that Sino-Vatican relations would have a good result this year, and he also said he was confident that the two parties could reach an agreement on the appointment of bishops. Excommunicated Bishop Lei Shiyin of Leshan, a CPPCC member, said that diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican would have a positive impact on China’s overall influence internationally. Zhan Silu, illegitimate bishop of Mindong (see entry of January 22, 2018 in this section), said that a breakthrough in relations had been achieved and that there were no obstacles, “as long as everyone just thinks of the benefit of the Church for the sake of peace.” Asked how the Underground Church should be administered in the future, he said that joint management was necessary, and that believers, priests and sisters should unite for this purpose. Bishop Shen Bin of Haimen, another CPPCC member, admitted that the topic was sensitive.

These bishops all hold leading positions in the official Catholic governing bodies, and comments on the subject by so many of them were very unusual. Three Chinese bishops are elected delegates to the NPC (*AsiaNews* March 13, 2018; *UCAN* March 12, 2018).

March 12–13, 2018:

Representatives of China attend conference on organ trafficking held in the Vatican

According to *AP*, Wang Haibo, deputy head of the China Organ Transplant Response System, which regulates the official allocation of organ donation in the People’s Republic of China, said at a press conference on March 14, that China is working hard to prevent the underground trade in organs that takes place in remote, non-medical facilities which are not easy to identify. Among other things, the authorities are trying to track down communications between potential buyers and sellers, he said. In the past 10 years, he continued, 220 arrests have been made for illegal organ trafficking and 100 victims have been rescued. During the closed-door Vatican conference, the media were not admitted to the sessions.

Since January 1, 2015, there has been a regulation in force in China according to which only organs from volunteer donors may be used for transplants (instead of organs of executed prisoners). China, however, has rejected independent inspections (*AP* according to the *Washington Times* March 14, 2018; *Global Times* March 11, 2018).

On February 7–8, 2018, Chinese representatives have for the first time attended a conference on organ trafficking inside the Vatican. In August of 2017, the director of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Bishop Sorondo, had attended a conference on organ donation in Kunming, China (see: *RCTC* 2017, No. 2, p. 18; No. 4, p. 17).

Taiwan

December 7, 2017:

Delegates from the Taiwanese National Council of Churches visit Pope Francis

In his address to them during an audience in the Vatican, Pope Francis encouraged a delegation from the National Council of Churches of Taiwan to work for greater unity and active Christian charity and to promote educational projects for young people. Recalling his recent trip to Asia, he said that he was “able to experience the vitality and the enterprise that mark the peoples of Asia, but also the suffering face of a humanity all too often deprived of material prosperity and social well-being.” Since the establishment of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan in 1991, the Catholic Church, thus the Pope, “through the Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference, has been committed ... to promoting greater unity between believers in the Lord.” According to the Pope, young people should be educated in the art of dialogue “so that they can become protagonists of a much-needed culture of harmony and reconciliation.” This would encourage them “to pursue, with God’s help, the path that leads from conflict to communion, a path that has shown itself so fruitful in the ecumenical journey” (*AsiaNews* Dec. 7, 2017).

February 10, 2018:

Buddhist Prayer beads now on a smartphone App

The Taiwanese technology group Acer wants to bring the ancient Buddhist prayer practice of turning prayer beads in the hand into the 21st century, reports Anne Wisman of *Buddhistdoor Global*. The prayer beads, known as *mala*, have been used for centuries to keep track of the recitation of certain Buddhist prayers. According to the tradition, the higher the number of prayers recited using the beads, the more good karma that can be gained. Acer is promoting its “smart prayer beads” with the claim that now those who pray would no longer be distracted by having to count the number of recitations and could focus more on the prayers themselves. The company’s advertising for the App implies that the quality of prayer can be increased through the innovative use of their smart technology. Following the current trend of using smartphone apps for statistical observation of everyday life, these advances in prayer life can then be documented with the help of an App supplied by Acer. These devotional advances in acquiring karma are then noted on one’s online account as “online,” the *Taiwan News* reported. Some Buddhist Internet commentators, however, are skeptical of this development simply because the tech giant has an obvious commercial ambition in gaining access to the considerable Buddhist consumer base in Taiwan (*Buddhistdoor Global* Feb. 13, 2018; *Taiwan News* Feb. 10, 2018).

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Statistics on Religions and Churches in the People's Republic of China – Update for the Year 2017

Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

With a contribution¹ by Isabel Hess-Friemann

The annual compilation of figures and dates concerning the life of the religions in the People's Republic of China begins this time with surveys made by Chinese academics on the phenomenon of “cyber religion.” They attempt a review of this comparatively young form of dissemination of religion and analyze the interest of the general public in this topic on the Internet. The question of popular beliefs continues to occupy Chinese researchers; we bring an example from the Province of Guangdong. In addition we present the official educational institutes of the Protestant Church and figures for the growth of Protestant Christianity among ethnic minorities in the People's Republic. In the Catholic Church of China the numbers of baptisms were compiled for the entire year for the first time. There was an unusually high number of priestly ordinations in 2017 but not a single bishop was consecrated, although nine bishops died during the year and many dioceses are vacant.

The statistical update on China's religions is supplemented by data from older surveys, official information and estimations. Depending on the source, the details often vary widely. Unless otherwise stated, the figures refer to Mainland China.

1. Religions on the Internet

For the religions in China which otherwise have very limited access to the general Chinese public, the Internet and later the social media, due to their broad prevalence among the Chinese population, have opened up new possibilities for internal networking and reaching the secular society. The religious policy of the state has recently been searching for appropriate ways to regulate and control the development of “religion on the Internet” (*wangluo zongjiao* 网络宗教 or also “cyber religion”). The revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” which came into effect on February 1, 2018, include for the first time provisions for online religious information services.² On this basis the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) plans to set up, together with other authorities, detailed

1 The section on the Protestant Theological Seminaries and Bible Schools on pp. 38-39.

2 In §§ 47 and 48 of the revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs;” an unofficial English translation of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” can be found at www.chinalawtranslate.com/宗教事务条例-2017/?lang=en.

regulations for these information services,³ most probably with a restrictive character. Not least in this context of religious policy, there has for some time been intensive research in China on the subject. Shortly before publication of the draft revision of the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” in September 2016, a series of studies on religions on the Internet appeared in *Shijie zongjiao wenhua*, a journal on religious studies which is published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Although the figures contained therein are in part already outdated by the rapid developments in this area, they nevertheless show clear tendencies and will, together with other studies, certainly influence the development of the legal norms for religion on the Internet. They are therefore presented below.

1.1 Commissioned by the SARA: Trying to Take Stock of Religions on the Internet

The article of researchers Zhang Hua (Center for Ethnic and Religious Studies of Jiangsu Province) and Zhang Zhipeng (Anhui University of Technology) on new forms of religion in the age of Internet Plus is the intermediate result of a research project of the SARA.⁴ Using various methods they searched the prevalence of religion on websites and in online communities; the data acquisition finished on September 30, 2015. The authors discovered that part of the websites connected to religion underwent constant change, i.e. accessible today, closed tomorrow.⁵ The main focus of the study was the domestic Internet (statistical data on China without Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), the physical location of the server being decisive for the assignment. After completing their data acquisition, the researchers organized their findings and came to the following assessment:

1.1.1 Presence of the Five Religions on the Domestic Internet and on WeChat

Websites that are significant from the point of view of the propagation and dissemination of religions (the authors speak literally of “mainstream dissemination websites” [*zhuliu xuanchuan wangzhan* 主流宣传网站]): In China there are at present around 4,000 websites of this kind – that is the result of the study according to Zhang Hua and Zhang Zhipeng. This number includes both the web presence of official religious bodies as well as unofficial pages and websites of groups considered illegal. Almost all real religious activities are reflected on the Internet, the authors conclude. In their view “religious activities on the Internet” contribute strongly to the growth of real religions.⁶ For the five state recognized religions the authors describe the situation as follows:⁷

3 Wang Zuo'an, Director of the SARA, stated this at the beginning of January 2018; cf. “China to Draft Online Religious Information Regulation,” *Global Times* Jan. 9, 2018.

4 Theme of the project carried out in 2015 was “Research on the Problem of Religion on the Internet,” Project Authorization No. GK1504B; cf. Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, p. 21, note.

5 Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, pp. 22–23. – This was also seen in March 2018 in the partially unsuccessful attempts to access the websites named by Zhang Hua and Zhang Zhipeng.

6 Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, p. 23.

7 The following information is reproduced from Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, pp. 23–24. Websites are only cited here by name if they were still accessible in March 2018. URLs have been added by the author (K. Wenzel-Teuber).

Protestantism: Of the 4,000 religious “mainstream dissemination websites” investigated, the authors ascribe 1,300 (32.5%) to Protestantism. Among others they name the websites *Jidujiao Zhongwen wang* 基督教中文网 (www.jidujiao.com) and *Fuyin shibao* 福音时报 (www.gospeltimes.cn). In addition the authors found that almost 6,000 pastors disseminate Christian ideas in their own microblogs (Weibo 微博).⁸

Islam: 900 (22.5%) of the “mainstream dissemination websites” are associated by the authors with Islam. Among these they count *inter alia* the website *Yisilan wangzhan zhi jia* 伊斯兰网站之家 (www.yisilan.net) – a kind of home page with links to numerous other Islamic websites.⁹ According to the authors’ observation, Muslim websites use audio and video posts especially often; these are easy to use and thus contribute much to a rapid dissemination of the Islamic culture.

Buddhism: 700 (17.5%) of the “mainstream dissemination websites” are Buddhist; the authors instance among others *Fojiao zaixian* 佛教在线 (www.fjnet.com) and *Zhongguo fojiao wang* 中国佛教网 (www.zgjf.cn). The large online portals such as Tencent, Sina, NetEase and the satellite TV broadcaster Phoenix also have channels on Buddhism; in addition Phoenix has an official Buddhist Weibo with 100,000 followers. There are blogs of famous Buddhist masters.

Daoism: The authors ascribe 600 (15%) of the identified websites to this religion. Among others they name *Daojiao zhi yin* 道教之音 (www.daoisms.org) and *Longhushan daojiao* 龙虎山道教 (<http://lhdsj.org>). Large web portals such as Phoenix have a Daoist channel. Almost 4,500 adherents of Daoism run a Sina Weibo microblog.

Catholicism: 500 (12.5%) of the “mainstream dissemination websites” are ascribed by the authors to Catholicism. In first place they name the website *Zhongguo tianzhujiao* 中国天主教 (www.chinacatholic.cn),¹⁰ in second place *Tianzhujiao zaixian* 天主教在线 (www.ccccn.org).¹¹ As “main page for the dissemination of Catholicism with 50,000 members” they name the website *Tianzhujiao changqing jiayuan* 天主教长青家园 [which in the meantime, following various problems, has apparently changed its name]. The dioceses often have their own sites with local news.

Religions in the Instant Messaging Groups: Here the authors concentrate on WeChat, the popular, multi-functional chat service of Tencent. In the search for public WeChat accounts (微信公众号) with a connection to religion, they found 197 relating to Buddhism,

8 In January 2014, the researcher Zhao Bing calculated the following figures after accessing the Weibo Platforms of the Chinese firms Sina and Tencent: On Sina Weibo he found 45,773 Buddhist, 11,536 Protestant, 3,648 Daoist, 505 Muslim and 5,405 Catholic users, on Tencent Weibo 12,823 Buddhist, 5,484 Protestant, 2,509 Daoist, 9,693 Muslim and 1,038 Catholic users; Weibo users were counted in whose profile the term “religion” or the name of a specific religion turned up. Zhao Bing 2015, p. 102, reported according to Wenzel-Teuber 2017, pp. 32-33.

9 The authors also name *Lüse Zhonghua* 绿色中华 (Green China, www.xaislam.com), a website founded in 2002 by a native missionary movement whose aim is the spread of Islam across ethnic boundaries among the whole population of China (cfl. *China heute* 2013, No. 3, pp. 143-144). That site, however, could not be accessed in March 2018.

10 *Zhongguo tianzhujiao* is the official website of the state supported Catholic governing bodies, i.e. the Patriotic Association and official Bishops’ Conference; due to this political role it is probably not the first choice of information website for many Chinese Catholics.

11 *Tianzhujiao zaixian*, originally founded by persons from the Catholic Underground and reckoned to be accepted by the faithful, frequently changes the URL; about this website cf. *China heute* 2015, No. 4, p. 208.

193 relating to Protestantism, 180 relating to Daoism, 129 relating to Islam and 28 relating to Catholicism.¹²

The authors realize that instant messaging groups increase the influence of the religions by spreading their doctrine via multimedia and interactively, answering questions of the faithful and dispersing doubts. Online instruction and sermons strengthen the feeling of belonging, according to the authors. Online prayers of blessing are carried out – according to Zhang Hua and Zhang Zhipeng all religions do that during major natural catastrophes, also with the result of spreading the religions. In the Buddhist arena traditional offline rituals such as Sutra recitation, releasing living beings or the offering of lamps are offered online, religious donations are requested and transferred online.¹³ Instant messaging groups also offer various services, e.g. in connection with religious articles, Buddhist vegetarian or Islamic food, *fengshui*, weddings or health care – the latter, according to the authors is a topic with which especially Daoism and Buddhism court attention.¹⁴

1.1.2 Categorizing the Websites relating to Religions according to Aspects of the Government Administration of Religions

Here the authors distinguish four categories of websites which they describe as follows:

a) Websites of the government departments for religious affairs: The authors found almost 200 websites of government departments for religious affairs, of which 25 were of departments at the provincial level, 148 at the city level, 17 at the county level and 7 at the district level. Only 67.5% of these governmental websites had an ICP (Internet Content Provider License, that is, a permit for China-based websites to operate in China). According to the authors' opinion, many of these websites are updated only infrequently and lack in-depth content with regard to theory and research.¹⁵

b) Websites of religious organizations, sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education within the country: These websites (and the bodies running them) are legally registered and represent a large basis of believers, but do not necessarily possess a correspondingly great power of attraction, according to the authors. They found a total of 347 websites of the "religious circles," of these, 113 websites were of religious

12 Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, p. 24.

13 For Buddhism and Daoism, this meanwhile has been very much limited to the official area, through the document signed by the SARA and other authorities on November 3, 2017: "Some Views on the Further Regulation of the Problem of Commercialization of Buddhism and Daoism" (*Guanyu chuli sheji fojiao simiao, daojiao gongguan guanli youguan wenti de yijian* 关于处理涉及佛教寺庙、道教宫观管理有关问题的意见); Point 5 states: "Platforms for religious information on the Internet that are not set up by religious organizations, institutes for religious education or religious individuals may not organize any religious activities, may not carry out activities such as 'offering incense on the Internet,' 'worshipping Buddha on the Internet,' raising money through Internet offering boxes or selling products relating to Buddhism or Daoism [on the Internet], nor accept any religious donations. When accepting religious donations, platforms for religious information on the Internet set up by religious organizations, institutes for religious education or religious individuals must keep to the relevant regulations [...]." A German translation of this document will appear in *China heute*.

14 Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, pp. 24-25.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

organizations (*zongjiao tuanti* 宗教团体), 211 websites of sites for religious activities and 23 websites of institutes for religious education. 60.23% of these websites of religious organizations, sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education were Buddhist, 17% Protestant, 12.68% Daoist, 6.3% Catholic and 3.4% Islamic. The authors remark that the Catholic websites, although few, are regionally systematically distributed. 73.77% of the websites have an ICP. Mainly – according to the authors – only information and no further services are offered; only 34.58% of the websites are interactive, only 29.1% are regularly updated. Some of the websites of sites for religious activities and institutes for religious education carry out online religious acts and activities. The authors esteem a clear explanation by these websites of religious doctrine and the instructions for legal and sensible religious activity as a positive contribution to society.¹⁶

c) Unofficial (*minjian* 民间) religious Internet media: By these the authors understand Internet services whose founders and operators are not [registered] religious organizations, sites for religious activities or institutes for religious education but also not “illegal religious organizations”; rather they are unofficial, non-governmental (*minjian*) entities of information and research, experts or academics. Pages of this type, according to the authors, are not there to spread religion but to give news, comments and analyses.¹⁷ They distinguish 3 types:¹⁸

- Religion Boards of large web portals such as Phoenix – these have especially large numbers of visitors, they are the main originators of reports on religious events that cause headlines in the Internet.
- Some specific websites of unofficial religious Internet media, mainly founded and operated by a group of adherents of a religion. Websites of this kind enjoy great influence in the respective religion, according to the authors. Among others they mention here the Buddhist *Fojiao zaixian*, the Protestant websites *Fuyin shibao* and *Jidu shibao* 基督时报 (www.christiantimes.cn) as well as the Catholic website *Xinde wang* 信德网 (Faith, www.chinacatholic.org).
- Websites concentrating on religious studies such as *Zhongguo zongjiao xueshu wang* 中国宗教学术网 (<http://iwr.cass.cn>)¹⁹ and the website of the Pu Shi Institute for Social Science (www.pacilution.com).

According to the authors the unofficial religious Internet media tend to attract a more educated readership, they also receive international attention. They advance the nonprofit function of a bridge between society, government and religions.

16 Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, pp. 26-28.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 28. – For the categories c) and d) the authors give no figures. But websites of these two categories apparently form the overwhelming majority of the 4,000 religious “mainstream dissemination websites.”

18 The following description of the unofficial religious websites is reproduced from *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

19 A website that is rather more official since it belongs to the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

d) **“Illegal” religious Websites:** According to the authors, “illegal websites in the name of religion” are often operated from abroad. They distinguish three kinds:²⁰

- Dissemination of religion on the Internet by foreign religious organizations, house churches, privately established (not registered) Protestant gathering places and privately established temples. These last two, according to the authors, are fairly active on the Internet, but less often with websites, rather with QQ-groups, via WeChat or microblogs.
- Dissemination of religion on the Internet by religious individual religious believers.
- Websites of groups that the government has defined as “heretical cults” and forbidden, as e.g. the “Church of Almighty God.” In the opinion of the authors, the Internet makes it possible for such groups to continue to exist, even if the authorities repeatedly take action against them.

In their summary Zhang Hua and Zhang Zhipeng come to the conclusion that an effective governmental regulation of religion on the Internet will only be possible after a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of these four very different categories of online religious presence.²¹

1.2 Interest of the Internet Public in Protestantism and Catholicism

To find out which aspects of Protestantism and Catholicism interest the Internet public in China, the researcher Wang Shu (King’s College, London) used “big data” from search questions of the Internet users. Via the Chinese search engine Baidu he analyzed the Internet users use of long-tail keywords, i.e. search questions composed of several terms, that contained either the term *jidujiao* 基督教 (Protestantism) or the term *tianzhujiao* 天主教 (Catholicism). The date of the data retrieval was June 15, 2016.²²

Wang found that in Baidu the number of searches for the term *jidujiao* was three times higher than searches for the term *tianzhujiao*.

He drew up a list of the 100 most frequently searched long-tail keywords, that contained the term *jidujiao*. Top of the list is *jidujiao gequ* 基督教歌曲 (Protestant songs) with on average 4,854 searches per day, even ahead of the plain *jidujiao* (4,069 searches per day) and *jidujiao jiangdao shipin* 基督教讲道视频 (Protestant sermon videos, 2,515 searches per day). Wang comes to the conclusion that in 40% of these 100 most frequently searched long-tail keywords it has to do with dissemination of religion (*chuanjiao* 传教), and in this category he placed among others sermons and Christian literature. 34% of the searches concerned songs, 10% dance (*wudao* 舞蹈), 16% “other.” From that he concludes that with regard to Protestantism the interest of the Internet user is more for the religious

20 The following description of religious websites categorized by the authors as “illegal” is reproduced from Zhang Hua – Zhang Zhipeng 2016, p. 29. From the point of view of non-registered sites and groups, the assignment by the authors of these to the same category as the “heretical cults” forbidden and persecuted by the state would be disturbing.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

22 That is the day on which Wang gathered the data from the search engine optimization tool, not the period in which the Internet users entered the search questions. In one place in the text it states that the number of searches given refers to the daily average of the last 30 days (Wang Shu 2016, p. 48).

culture (i.e. music and dance, with a total of 44% of the searches) than for the doctrine or writings. For a non-believer the religious culture is especially attractive and is therefore an effective means of arousing interest in Christianity, Wang argues.²³

The result for Catholicism is clearly different. Wang's list of the 36 most frequently searched long-tail keywords that contained the term *tianzhujiao* is headed by the plain *tianzhujiao* (1,520 searches per day). 9 of the 36 long-tail keywords listed with the main term *tianzhujiao* are variations of the question regarding the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. Wang concludes that this is because the term *jidujiao* is unclear [it can mean both Protestantism or Christianity as religion in a general sense]. In connection with *tianzhujiao* there are frequent searches for historical church buildings in China that are of interest for tourism.²⁴

Secondly Wang wanted to find out what role the religious websites play in the spread of Protestantism and Catholicism. Wang writes that according to general Internet behavior, the website which appears at the top on the first page that opens after a search is the one on which is most often clicked. Wang now found out that the search engine Baidu gave a religious website in only 29% of the searches for *jidujiao*; 52% of the top matches landed on websites of Baidu itself (like the online encyclopedia Baidu Baike) and 19% on various other websites. For searches on *tianzhujiao* only 11% of the top matches came to religious websites. Wang concluded from this that the public is more likely to become informed about religions through non-religious websites.²⁵ An effective dissemination of religion on the Internet occurs in Wang's opinion more readily via the freer social media to which, therefore, the authorities should pay more attention.²⁶

1.3 Shamanism on the Internet

Shamanism in China comes under the category of popular belief and is not recognized as a religion. Wang Wei (CASS) addressed this rather special topic. His article deals with Shamanism (*samanjiao* 萨满教) in a broad sense, especially with the *saman*-belief (*saman xinyang* 萨满信仰) and the *chumaxian*-belief (*chumaxian xinyang* 出马仙信仰). According to Wang *saman* is the term originally used in the Manchu-Tungus languages, while Han Chinese in Northeast China describe persons who communicate with the gods as *chuma* 出马, *chuma dizi* 出马弟子 or *chumaxian* 出马仙.²⁷

To find the level of attention for Shamanism on the Internet, Wang Wei analyzed the results of searches with the Microsoft search engine Bing for the search terms *saman* and

23 Wang Shu 2016, pp. 46-49.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 49. – Here one can suspect that users who wished information about Christianity in general rather than about one Christian confession would more probably use the term *jidujiao*. – The third most often searched Catholic long-tail keyword in Wang's list is *Tianzhujiao zaixian*, which is also the name of the popular Catholic website already mentioned above in the study of Zhang Hua and Zhang Zhipeng. Wang, however, does not point to this.

25 Wang did admit to the limiting factor that the SEO technology he used only included the first two matches on the first page of the search results; he said that in fact, however, the entire first page with its ten matches would influence the users.

26 Wang Shu 2016, pp. 49-50.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 38 and 40.

chumaxian. A large number of the matches for *saman* had to do with popular online games, films or music – which, according to Wang, shows that the shaman as a figure has in the meantime found entry into secular society [for instance in pop culture]. The matches for *chumaxian*, on the other hand, were clearly more often actually concerned with the *chumaxian* belief.²⁸

Wang found Internet forums on Shamanism with up to 30,000 participants on Baidu Tieba, the Baidu communication platform. Also in the social media, writes Wang, the Shaman culture is widespread.²⁹

On the Internet auction portal Taobao (similar to Ebay) belonging to Alibaba, Wang's search for *saman* and *chumaxian* brought up 80 Taobao shops. 49 of them offered shamanist services (*kan shi* 看事) with regard to marriage, assets, health and children, as well as fortune telling, for prices from several tens to several hundred Yuan. According to Wang, clients wishing to make use of these services usually had to give their birthdate according to the moon calendar, a photo and name and address.³⁰

Wang Wei came to the conclusion that on the Internet the traditional *saman* belief, which is at home among ethnic minorities, is less represented than the *chumaxian* belief, and that the latter is popular not only in Northeast China but also in other parts of China. Among the *chumaxian* in the virtual space the traditional shamanist practices such as possession no longer play a role; they take care of their services via WeChat or telephone and, unlike the traditional clan-based shamans, ask fixed prices. Their credibility is difficult to estimate. According to Wang the Internet has extended the outward forms of shamanism and he sees this as a challenge for the policies on religion.³¹

2. Buddhism, Daoism and Popular Belief

For this largest sector of religious life in China, older surveys, such as the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey (CSLS) of 2007, still give a certain orientation.³² It came among other things to the following results:

- 185 million consider themselves Buddhists, i.e. 18% of the population above the age of 16.
- 17.3 million have taken the triple refuge (in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), i.e. have formalized their adherence to Buddhism through ritual.
- 12 million of the adult population clearly identify with Daoism.
- 173 million have exercised some Daoist practices or taken part in such, but these are difficult to distinguish from popular belief.

28 Wang Wei 2016, pp. 38-40.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 40-42.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

32 For the CSLS, from May to July 2007, a sample of 7,021 individuals aged 16 to 75 years was interviewed in 56 selected localities of different size as to their religious self-identification. In July 2010, Yang Fenggang from the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University (West Lafayette, USA) presented the results of the study in Beijing. For CSLS see also Wenzel-Teuber 2012, pp. 30-36.



Incense offerings at the Buddhist Lama Temple in Beijing. Photo: Sim Chi Yin.

2.1 Buddhism

34,100 registered Buddhist sites for religious activities (SARA database 2018),³³ of which:

- 28,538 Han-Chinese Buddhism (+ 268)
- 3,857 Tibetan Buddhism (– 5)
- 1,705 Theravada Buddhism (+ 0)

222,000 Buddhist religious personnel who are officially recognized and reported for the records (monks and nuns) (SARA 2017), of whom:

- 72,000 Han-Chinese Buddhism
- 148,000 Tibetan Buddhism
- 2,000 Theravada Buddhism

36 Buddhist academies (SARA database 2018)³⁴

2.2 Daoism

8,349 registered Daoist sites for religious activities (SARA database 2018), of which:

- 4,011 Quanzhen Tradition (+ 56)
- 4,338 Zhengyi Tradition (+ 15)

ca. 40,000 Daoist religious personnel (monks / nuns and priests *daoshi* 道士) (SARA 2017)

10 Daoist Academies, of which 4 are in preparation (SARA database 2018)

33 SARA database “Basic Data on the Sites for Religious Activities” at www.sara.gov.cn/old/csjbxx/index.htm, accessed on Feb. 27, 2018. The figures in parenthesis show the difference from the last search on March 28, 2017 (Wenzel-Teuber 2017, pp. 34-35). The results of a detailed search conducted on March 17, 2016 which also takes into consideration the distribution according to province is found in Wenzel-Teuber 2016, p. 27, Table 1.

34 That is the same number as in the previous year. Diverging from that SARA 2017 states 41 Buddhist institutes for religious education.



Map: d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=27749&lang=de

Provinces, Direct-Controlled Municipalities and Autonomous Regions of China – Map and List of Abbreviations

AH Anhui, BJ Beijing, CQ Chongqing, FJ Fujian, GD Guangdong, GS Gansu, GX Guangxi, GZ Guizhou, Hain Hainan, HB Hubei, Heb Hebei, Hen Henan, HL Heilongjiang, HN Hunan, JL Jilin, JS Jiangsu, JX Jiangxi, LN Liaoning, NM Inner Mongolia, NX Ningxia, QH Qinghai, SC Sichuan, SD Shandong, SH Shanghai, SN Shaanxi, SX Shanxi, TJ Tianjin, XJ Xinjiang, XZ Tibet, YN Yunnan, ZJ Zhejiang.

2.3 Popular Beliefs in the Province of Guangdong

A report on popular belief in the Province of Guangdong and its administration is found in the “Blue Book of Religions” published in 2017 (Qiu Yonghui 2017). Like earlier reports³⁵ it stresses that traditional folk religiosity – not counted as officially recognized religion – has far more adherents than the 5 recognized religions all together.

From 2009 on, the Commission for Ethnic and Religious Affairs (CERA) of the Guangdong provincial government carried out field researches on popular beliefs in Guangdong, in which the authors of the report, Chen Xiaoyi (CERA Guangdong) and Chen Jinguo (CASS), state they participated. Their report has the following figures:

In Guangdong the 5 major religions together have 2,757 sites for religious activities, while there are in the Province far more – namely over 11,000 – sites for activities of popular beliefs. Of these 11,000 sites for popular belief activities, the majority are in West Guangdong (5,000), followed by East Guangdong (2,300) and the Pearl River Delta (2,300); in North Guangdong there are only a few. The sites for popular belief activities vary greatly

35 Cf. e.g. the study of Chen Jinguo and Lin Minxia 林敏霞 on popular beliefs in Zhejiang Province in the “Blue Book of Religions” of the previous year that is presented in Wenzel-Teuber 2017, pp. 35-37.

in size, the largest having an area of up to 15,000 sq.m., while the smallest are only a few sq.m. in size.³⁶

The number of persons in Guangdong describing themselves as belonging to one of the 5 major religions at the end of 2008, according to statistics of the CERA cited by the authors, was 1,959,388. According to the authors the number of believers of the popular religions is much higher and is, for example, in the City of Jieyang 90% of the population, in the City of Yangjiang 20% of the population, in the City of Zhangjiang 66% of the population and in the City of Maoming 33% of the population; in the City of Zhaoqing there are 1.2 million adherents of popular religions and in the City of Huizhou 500,000.³⁷ The authors do not explain how these figures were obtained.

Folk religiosity in the Province of Guangdong is very varied, according to the authors. It comprises traditions that arose locally, as well as forms brought by migrants from other parts of China historically or recently. Among the deities venerated are deities of nature, saints, ancestor divinities, as well as deities of Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist origins.³⁸

3. Islam

In the multi-ethnic State of the People's Republic of China, ten ethnic groups are considered Muslim. In the statistics presented by Chinese authorities and academics their population numbers are generally equated with that of the Muslims in China. According to the census of 2010, approximately 23 million people belong to the 10 ethnic groups rated as Muslim, that is 1.74% of the total population,³⁹ distributed as follows:

Table 1: Muslim Population according to Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Population in 2010 (persons)	Percentage of the total Muslim population (%)
Hui	10,586,000	45.74
Uighur	10,069,000	43.51
Kasakh	1,462,600	6.32
Dongxiang	621,500	2.69
Kirghiz	186,700	less than 1
Salar	130,600	less than 1
Tajik	51,100	less than 1
Uzbek	10,600	less than 1
Bao'an	20,000	less than 1
Tatar	3,556	less than 1

Data: 2010 census. Table compiled according to Liu Xiaochun 2014, p. 71.

³⁶ Chen Xiaoyi – Chen Jinguo 2017, p. 163.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁹ Liu Xiaochun 2014, pp. 70-71. – In 2014, Liu Xiaochun published an analysis of the population structure of the members of ethnic groups rated as Muslim, based on the data of the last, 6th, national population census in China of 2010. It was presented in Wenzel-Teuber 2016, pp. 30-34.

Furthermore in the People's Republic of China there are
 35,000 larger and smaller mosques (SARA 2014)
 40,000 mosques, of which 24,000 are in Xinjiang, as well as around a hundred
 mosques for women⁴⁰
 50,000 ahongs (imams) and mullahs (SARA 2014)
 10 Qur'an institutes (SARA database 2018)

4. Christianity

4.1 Survey: Attitude of Christians toward Ancestor Veneration⁴¹

This survey used the rather formless and for China unusual method of an ecumenical reader survey. A questionnaire with 10 questions on the veneration of ancestors was drawn up for the survey by the institute for religious studies of Fudan University and the Catholic Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (FICS).⁴² The Catholic newspaper *Xinde* 信德 (*Faith Weekly*) and the Protestant paper *Jidu shibao* 基督时报 (*Christian Times*) published this questionnaire on their WeChat sites. The survey ran from March 21 to April 3, 2017.

The return for *Xinde* amounted to 2,013 questionnaires, 86% of the responders were Catholics; for *Jidu shibao* there were 966 questionnaires, the proportion of Protestants among the responders lay around 82%. From that it could be concluded – as *Jidu shibao* wrote – that the *Xinde* response “predominantly reflected the attitude of Catholic Christians” and the *Jidu shibao* response “predominantly the attitude of Protestant Christians.”⁴³ Both papers published the results of the survey with analyses and reader comments on their websites. Some of the results are found in Table 2. In addition there were questions regarding practiced forms of commemoration of the dead (such as prayers, offerings of flowers, fruit or incense, bowing, etc.). The Christians questioned were also asked if they took part in specific folk customs at the burial of non-Christians and, if so, how they felt about that.

The survey took place in the context of the discussion around sinicization and inculturation of Christianity. Veneration of the ancestors is a basis of Chinese religiosity from time immemorial. As a result of the Chinese Rites Controversy it was forbidden for Chinese Catholics by the Pope in 1704. The ban was lifted in 1939 – although if we look at the questionnaire itself, 73% of the Catholics in China are not aware of that.

40 Figures according to: “Quanguo zhengxie weiyuan Guo Chengzhen: Zhongguo musilin zongjiao xinyang ziyou dedao qieshi baozhang” 全国政协委员郭承真: 中国穆斯林宗教信仰自由得到切实保障 (Member of the Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese People Guo Chengzhen: Freedom of Religion of the Chinese Muslims receives full protection). *Xinhua* March 2, 2016, www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-03/02/c_1118215655.htm.

41 The following text with Table 2 was slightly revised and adopted with a correction from *China heute* 2017, No. 2, pp. 72-73.

42 Cf. “Li Madou yu Nanchang: Jiaohui Zhongguohua ji bendihua’ yantaohui zai Gan juban” “利玛窦与南昌: 教会中国化暨本地化” 研讨会在赣举办 (Conference “Matteo Ricci and Nanchang: Sinicization and Inculturation of the Church”), in: *xdb* April 9, 2017.

43 Wang Xinyi 2017. *Xinde* with a slight deviation names a *Xinde* return of 2,025 questionnaires, of which 86% Catholics; cf. “Guanyu jidutu jizu wenti de wenjuan diaocha’ de jieguo, liuyan zhaixuan ji fenxi” 2017.

Table 2: Excerpt from the Results of the Questionnaire-Survey on the “Problem of Ancestor Veneration by Christians” (基督徒祭祖问题)

Question	Xinde		Jidu shibao	
	yes	no	yes	no
Have you ever venerated the ancestors during Qingming or at the Spring Festival?	62%	38%	44%	56%
Do you plan to visit the graves of deceased relatives and friends this year, to venerate the ancestors and to sweep?	54%	46%	37%	63%
Have you set up ancestor tablets at home?	7%	93%	8%	92%
Do you think that there is a necessity for Christians to honor the ancestors beyond prayer (for Catholics: beyond a Mass donation)?	71%	29%	42%	58%
Did you know that the Holy See announced in 1939 that veneration of ancestors has no religious character and is therefore permitted for the faithful?	27%	73%	10%	90%

Table according to “Guanyu jidutu jizu wenti de wenjuan diaocha’ de jieguo, liuyan zhaixuan ji fenxi” 2017.

4.2 Protestant Church(es)

Believers

- 20 million Protestant Christians, of whom 70% are in rural areas, according to the information of the official Protestant bodies – Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council.⁴⁴
- 23.05 million consider themselves Protestant Christians (independently of whether they belong to an official or an unofficial group), of these 67.5% are baptized – according to a household survey conducted in 2008/2009 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS 2010).⁴⁵ SARA 2014 also gives the figure of 23 million.
- 23–40 million Protestant Christians (1.7–2.9% of the population) is the figure given by the state-run *Global Times* as the consensus of academic experts at a symposium held in Shanghai on 5/6 August 2014 for the 60th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China.⁴⁶
- 58.04 million Protestant Christians (4.3% of the population) is the estimate of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (PFRPL 2011).
- Some international estimates of differing origin are even higher. One example is the evangelical mission organization Asia Harvest which arrives at 83.5 million Protestant Christians in Mainland China.⁴⁷

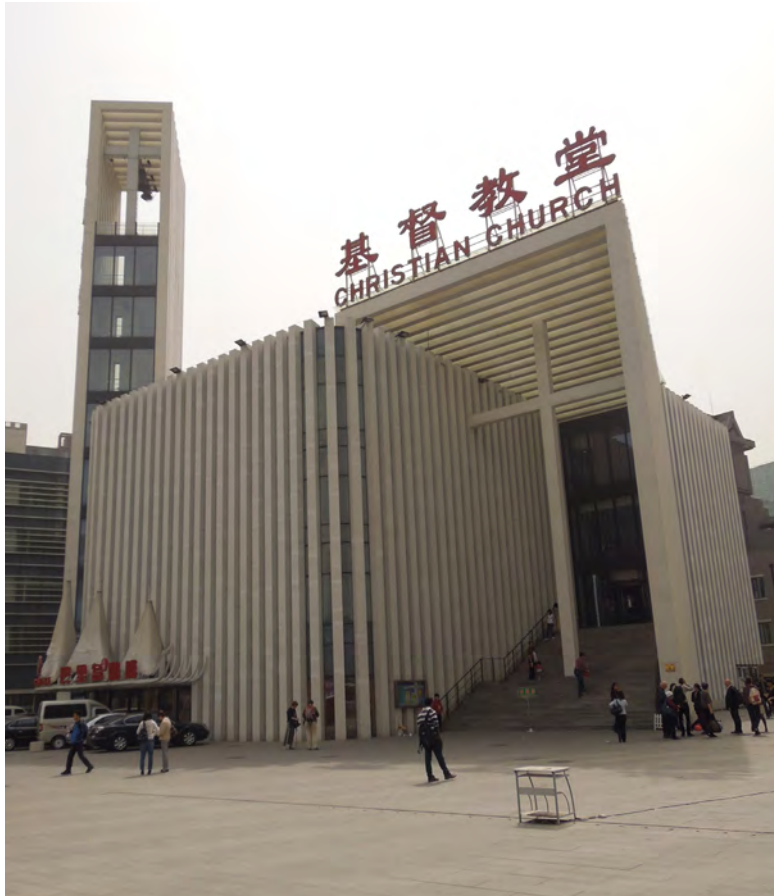
44 These figures have for some years been on the website of the official Protestant bodies; the relevant texts were re-installed on their newly designed website at the end of 2017: www.ccctspm.org/departments (last accessed March 3, 2018).

45 The results of the CASS Study were presented in Malek 2011, pp. 32–33 and 51–53. For the resulting discussion cf. Wenzel-Teuber 2012, pp. 30–32.

46 Chang Meng, “Protestants in China Estimated at 23–40 Million,” *Global Times* Aug. 7, 2014, www.globaltimes.cn/content/874757.shtml.

47 <https://asiaharvest.org/wp-content/uploads/christians-in-china/China.htm> (last accessed March 9, 2018). Asia Harvest gives 84 Mio. Protestants for China incl. Hong Kong and Macau; after subtracting the numbers given by Asia Harvest for Hong Kong and Macau, 83.5 Mio. remain for Mainland China. In the same table the number of Catholics in China is given as 21.3 Mio. (Mainland China 20.8 Mio.) It was apparently created around 2011.

Furthermore in the Protestant Churches of China there are
 56,000 churches and meeting places (SARA 2014)
 48,000 male and female pastors and preachers (SARA 2014)
 50 hospitals and other health facilities as well as
 180 homes for the aged (SARA 2017)⁴⁸



Haidian Christian Church in
 Beijing.
 Foto: Archiv China-Zentrum.

Theological Seminaries and Bible Schools⁴⁹

The following Table 3 gives the official educational institutes of the Protestant Church in China. Their respective status is recognized by the State authorities for religious affairs and over the years, under the guidance of good leadership, often progresses from Bible School to Theological Seminary with the entitlement to offer a four-year undergraduate degree in Theology with a Bachelor's degree valid within the Church. Currently great efforts are being made to raise the level of education. To this end at many institutes the men and women lecturers are at the same time engaged in studying for a doctoral degree, which they either acquire at the Jinling Seminary or, more often, in Hong Kong, Singapore or overseas in the west.

⁴⁸ Among the hospitals and homes for the aged, those of the Amity Foundation were apparently not included. The Foundation is Christian inspired but is not subject to the church governing bodies.

⁴⁹ The following section on the theological seminaries and Bible schools, together with the summary in Table 3, was compiled by Isabel Hess-Friemann (China InfoStelle, Hamburg).

The majority of the data comes from the official Internet site of the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). SARA database 2018 lists the same 21 Protestant educational institutes. The Bible School in Hunan was added as it does not appear on either of the two sites, although the commencement of building of the large, new campus in 2010 was reported on the website of the CCC and the TSPM.

Table 3: Students, Graduates and Teaching Body of the Protestant Theological Seminaries and Bible Schools in Mainland China

	Current number of students	Number of graduates since (reference year) ¹	Current teaching staff ² (PhD)
National Theological Seminary			
Jinling (Nanjing)	374	2,700 (1981)	18 (4)
Regional Theological Seminaries			
Yanjing (Beijing)	116	900 (1986)	16 (4)
Huadong (Shanghai)	150	1,185 (1985)	17 (0) ³
Zhongnan (Wuhan)	300	1,929 (1985)	24 (not specified)
Dongbei (Shenyang)	240 ⁴	1,700 (1982)	23 (not specified)
Theological Seminaries at the Provincial Level			
Guangdong (Guangzhou)	180	1,154 (1986)	13 (4)
Anhui (Hefei)	170	2,000 (1986)	12 (2)
Zhejiang (Hangzhou)		(1984)	33 (2)
Shandong (Jinan)	225	1,692 (1987)	31 (2)
Heilongjiang (Harbin)	160	(1996)	33 (2)
Yunnan (Kunming)	169	782 (1989)	24 (not specified)
Sichuan (Chengdu)		700 (1984)	15 (not specified)
Fujian (Fuzhou)	200	1,201 (1983)	14 (1)
Jiangsu (Nanjing)	210	1,300 (1998)	33 (5)
Bible Schools			
Jilin (Changchun)	90	(2005)	
Hebei (Shijiazhuang)		800 (1995)	15 (1)
Guizhou (Guiyang)	132	(1989)	10 (not specified)
Inner Mongolia (Hohhot)		1,103 (1987)	18 (not specified)
Shaanxi (Xi'an)	145	(1988)	11 (1)
Jiangxi (Nanchang)		1,364 ⁵ (1993)	12 (not specified)
Henan (Zhengzhou)	280 ⁶	3,000 (1989)	
Hunan (Changsha)		1,200 (1990)	14 (0)

1 The reference year from which the total number of graduates was counted is in brackets. Only those numbers are taken that appear since 1981. For Jinling and Yanjing the numbers of graduates refer to the faculty of Theology. At other teaching institutes one-year advanced courses for male and female pastors in service as well as studies in Church music are included.

2 Teaching staff means the number of permanent, own lecturers; in addition often external specialists come, who give individual courses but who otherwise work at other educational institutes.

3 More than 40 further lecturers give additional classes, partly professors from the Fudan University.

4 Further students are attending a technical high school, training in sacred music or absolving correspondence courses.

5 Of these 533 are pastors and 831 other church collaborators.

6 People who live in the school.

Sources: www.ccctspm.org/church/2; <https://baike.baidu.com/item/湖南圣经学校> (Bible School Hunan); SARA database 2018.

Prevalence of the Protestant Faith among the Ethnic Minorities in China

Alongside the Han, who make up almost 92% of the population, there are 55 further state recognized ethnic groups in the PR China. Since the reform and opening in the 1980s, the number of Protestant Christians⁵⁰ among the ethnic minorities of the PR China is increasing, even among members of those minorities that were formerly never reached by missionary work – write the researchers Zhang Qiaogui (Dali University *inter alia*) and Sun Haoran (Zunnan Minzu University) in an article on new developments with regard to Protestant Christianity among the ethnic minorities, that appeared in the last edition of the “Blue Book of Religions” (Qiu Yonghui 2017). In the meantime there would be practically no ethnic groups that have not come into contact with Protestant Christianity, the authors say. Their essay gives the following examples:

Among the ten ethnic groups of China that are considered Muslim, Christianity began mainly at zero at the beginning of the reform and opening, state the authors. According to their data, there are in China today 200 ethnic Kazakhs, 300 Tajiks, 50 Kirghiz and 40 Yugur who are Protestant Christians. In churches of the Han Chinese in Xining, Qinghai, there are a few Salar Christians, and some Protestant parishes in Yunnan have pastors of Hui nationality.⁵¹

Also among some ethnic groups, which the foreign missionaries formerly considered impossible to evangelize, today, according to the authors, there are Protestant Christians, as among the Oroqen, Dagur and Hezhen in Heilongjiang, as well as among the Pumi, Jino and Mosuo in Yunnan. Before 1949 the Zhuang in Guangxi were also considered by the foreign missionaries difficult for mission work and at the time there were only a few hundred Christian Zhuang. Today, by contrast, among the Zhuang in Guangxi there are already more than 40,000 Protestant Christians.⁵²

Wherever the number of Protestants in an ethnic group reaches a specific size, they found their own ethnic churches (*minzu jiaohui* 民族教会), as Zhang and Sun report. Thus the Buyi and Tujia, among whom the number of Catholics was formerly greater than that of Protestants, today both number almost 1,000 Protestant Christians who have founded their own ethnic churches. Also Tibetans in Diqing (Tibetan Deqen, YN), Lhasa and Lithang (SC) as well as Dai in Xishuangbanna (YN) have their own respective churches.⁵³

In some minority areas Zhang and Sun even find “mature Christian cultural circles.” Thus according to them the number of Christians among the members of some subgroups of the Miao, Lisu, Nu, Lahu, Wa and Hani peoples in Yunnan is around 50%. In many towns in the Nujiang valley, according to Zhang and Sun, the Protestant members of ethnic minorities are even 80% of the total population; here, the authors state, one could speak of “Christianization.” If bringing the Protestant Christianity to indigenization and

50 The text uses the terms *jidutu* 基督徒 and *jidujiaotu* 基督教徒 (literally “Christians” or “followers of Christianity”) which are predominantly but not exclusively used for Protestant Christians. This text is evidently concerned with Protestant Christians.

51 Zhang Qiaogui – Sun Haoran 2017, p. 172.

52 *Ibid.* – According to Wikipedia in Guangxi there are around 14 million Zhuang. 40,000 Zhuang Christians would therefore barely be 0.3% of the entire Zhuang population of Guangxi (own calculation).

53 Zhang Qiaogui – Sun Haoran 2017, p. 172.

ethnicization fails, it will influence and dominate the ethnic society at the basis and form a latent social risk, thus the authors' warning. In fact, they say, the structure of the Party and neighborhoods at the base in some minority areas is already being affected by the rapid growth of Christianity.⁵⁴

4.3 Catholic Church

The following figures regarding the Catholic Church in Mainland China in 2017 are based on the data of the Holy Spirit Study Centre (HSSC)⁵⁵ of the Diocese of Hong Kong, which specializes in studies of the Catholic Church in Mainland China. Also taken into account are the data of the official Catholic governing bodies, specifically their work report presented in 2016 at the 9th National Assembly of Representatives of the Chinese Catholic Church (Ma-PA-BiCo 2016). Other important sources are the Catholic newspaper *Xinde* 信德 (Faith) (*xdb*), based in Shijiazhuang (Hebei Province) and its website www.china-catholic.org (*xdo*) and the Faith Institute for Cultural Studies (FICS) that works under the same roof, as well as the Chinese Catholic Research Office (中国天主教研究室) of the Patriotic Association and official Bishops' Conference, and various Chinese Catholic websites.

Faithful

- ca. 10 million total number of Catholics, including both the official part of the Church and the Catholics in the underground, according to the estimate of the HSSC.
- over 6 million number of Catholics according to the official Catholic governing bodies (Ma-PA-BiCo 2016).
- 5.7 million number of Catholics according to SARA 2014.
- 9 million Catholics (0.7% of the population) according to estimates by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (PFRPL 2011).

Dioceses

- 144 (112 Dioceses and 32 other administrative regions) (according to HSSC, corresponding to the status of the Catholic hierarchy in 1951)
- 96 according to numbers of the official Church (HSSC)

Bishops

- 101 (77 in ministry, 24 not in ministry) (HSSC), of whom
 - 65 bishops in the official Church (58 in ministry, 7 not in ministry) (HSSC)
 - 36 bishops in the underground Church (19 in ministry, 17 not in ministry) (HSSC)

⁵⁴ Zhang Qiaogui – Sun Haoran 2017, pp. 172-173.

⁵⁵ We thank the Holy Spirit Study Centre for making available their figures for the Catholic Church in Mainland China (as of the end of 2017) quoted in the following.

7 of the 101 Chinese bishops are not recognized by the Pope. Around 40 dioceses have no bishop.

Priests

2,550 in the official Church (HSSC)
1,320 in the underground Church (HSSC)

Seminaries and Seminarians

8 major seminaries (theological seminaries) – one less than in the previous year⁵⁶ – with a total of 398 seminarians (HSSC)
10 minor seminaries with a total of 300 seminarians (HSSC)
6 underground seminaries with a total of around 100 seminarians (HSSC)

Sisters

3,170 in the official Church, in 87 congregations (HSSC, figures from 2015)
1,400 in the underground Church, in 37 congregations (HSSC, figures from 2015)

Churches

over 6,000 churches and oratories (Ma-PA-BiCo 2016)

Social Engagement

259 non-profit charity organizations, including 121 homes for the aged, 8 hospitals, 99 outpatient clinics, 10 orphanages, 13 kindergartens, 8 charitable foundations (Ma-PA-BiCo 2016)⁵⁷

Baptisms

For the first time the FICS compiled statistics of baptism for the entire year. For 2017, 48,556 newly baptized were listed there for the Catholic dioceses in Mainland China (see Table 4). The survey was made in collaboration with the dioceses and parishes and with the support of the Chinese Catholic Research Office.

In past years the FICS gave results of baptisms at Easter – the most significant baptismal period of the year. According to that, at Easter 2017, 19,087 persons were baptized in the dioceses of Mainland China (Easter 2016: 19,615 persons). Baptisms at Easter in 2017 were thus barely 40% of the baptisms of the entire year.

The FICS called the year's survey for 2017 "incomplete" – presumably baptisms in underground parishes were at most partially recorded. Should one take it that in the Underground as many people again were baptized, one would almost reach the 100,000 baptisms per year that the official Catholic governing bodies gave for years as the number of yearly baptisms for all of Mainland China. According to the reckoning of Anthony Lam of the HSSC, however, the Catholic Church in China would need 210,000 new faithful every year

⁵⁶ According to various sources of information, the major seminary for central and south China in Wuhan was closed in 2017. The SARA database of 2018 still includes it.

⁵⁷ SARA 2017 gives the same numbers, but does not mention the orphanages and kindergartens.

Table 4: Baptisms in the Dioceses of Mainland China in 2017

Province / Metropolis	Diocese	Number	Province / Metropolis	Diocese	Number
Anhui		750	Jiangxi		392
Beijing		1,099	Jilin		900
Chongqing	Chongqing	355	Liaoning		1,488
	Wanzhou	852	Inner Mongolia total 1,349	Bameng	329
Fujian total 1,082	Fuzhou	560		Baotou	190
	Minbei	46		Chifeng	246
	Mindong	115		Hohhot	335
	Xiamen	361		Jining	249
Gansu total 306	Lanzhou	142	Ningxia		128
	Pingliang	14	Qinghai		54
	Tianshui	150	Shaanxi total 3,254	Ankang	66
Guangdong total 2,978	Guangzhou	200		Fengxiang	396
	Jiangmen	140		Hanzhong	74
	Meizhou	578		Sanyuan	265
	Shantou	1,125		Weinan	315
	Shenzhen	424		Xi'an	630
	Zhanjiang	511		Yan'an	748
				Zhouzhi	760
Guangxi total 516	Beihai	85	Shandong total 2,450	Heze	235
	Guilin	15		Jinan	675
	Nanning	406		Liaocheng	127
	Wuzhou	10		Linyi	687
Guizhou		1,090		Qingdao	92
Hainan		38		Weifang	100
Hebei total 11,899	Baoding	317		Yantai	51
	Cangzhou (incl. Langfang)	1,560		Yanzhou	150
	Chengde	230		Zibo [Zhoucun]	333
	Handan	3,059	Shanghai		1,271
	Hengshui	1,230	Shanxi total 2,618	Changzhi	180
	Shijiazhuang	616		Datong	80
	Tangshan (incl. Qin-huangdao)	754		Fenyang	490
	Xingtai	3,645		Jinzhong	280
	Zhangjiakou	488		Linfen	306
				Shuozhou	309
				Taiyuan	658
Heilongjiang		602		Xinzhou	51
Henan total 3,032	Anyang	1,199		Yuncheng	264
	Kaifeng	54	Sichuan total 3,432	Chengdu	1,014
	Nanyang	765		Leshan	883
	Puyang	200		Nanchong	825
	Shangqiu	150		Xichang	365
	Xinxiang	112		Yibin	345
	Xinyang	146	Tianjin		477
	Zhengzhou	308	Tibet Auton. Region		11
	Zhumadian	98	Xinjiang		66
Hubei total 921	Chibi	160	Yunnan total 760	Dali	130
	Jingzhou [Shashi]	45		Kunming	306
	Wuhan	328		Zhaotong	324
	Xiangfan	120	Zhejiang total 2,143	Hangzhou	307
Hunan	Yichang	268		Ningbo	739
		287		Taizhou	4
Jiangsu total 1,956	Haimen	450		Wenzhou	1,093
	Nanjing	478	Total		48,556
	Suzhou	398			
	Xuzhou	630			

Source: xdb Feb. 5, 2018, online at www.xinde.org/News/index/id/41521.html.



Newly baptized
in the Shigulu
Church in Nanjing
at Easter 2017.
Photo: xdo.

just to offset the natural population decrease.⁵⁸ Therefore it is not surprising that the FICS regarded the numbers of baptisms as too low, in spite of local highlights. It called on the parishes to increase their efforts towards evangelization and in accord with Church tradition to keep appropriate registers for the administration of the sacraments (*xdo* 7.02.).



Pastor Pang Rui with
newly baptized in
Jiujiang, Province of
Jiangxi, April 2017.
Photo: xdo.

With regard to regional distribution, the Province of Hebei, with its comparatively high proportion of Catholics, has with 11,899 newly baptized almost a quarter (24.5%) of all persons who received baptism in the year 2017. The report gives no details regarding the age of the baptized; in past years the majority of persons baptized at Easter were adults.

In the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong around 3,000 adults received the Sacrament of Baptism at Easter 2017.⁵⁹

58 However, in the same essay Lam estimated the total number of annual baptisms in the official Church as only 30,000–35,000 per year. See Lin Ruiqi 林瑞琪 [A. Lam], “Zhongguo jiaoyou renshu biandong yu shengzhao weiji” 中國教友人數變動與聖召危機 (Changes in the Number of Chinese Catholics and Vocation Crisis), in: *Ding Ding / Tripod*, Winter 2015, No. 179, pp. 37–45, here pp. 39–40; cf. also Wenzel-Teuber 2016, pp. 39–41, here p. 41.

59 Cardinal John Tong, “Easter Greetings from Our Bishop,” dated March 20, 2017, here from *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* April 15, 2017.

Priestly Ordinations

In 2017, 97 deacons were ordained priests in Mainland China (see Table 5) – many more than in the previous years. In 2016 there were 61, in 2015 there were 59, in 2014 there were 78, in 2013 there were 66 and in 2012 there were 78 priestly ordinations. The number was taken from different sources and is certainly incomplete, so ordinations from the Underground Church could be added.

Why the number of priestly ordinations is so much higher than in other years is not clear; one reason could be (as appears from the reports) that in 2017 a number of men were ordained who had to interrupt their studies when the major seminary in Shanghai was closed in 2012 and had to finish them elsewhere. Overall the number of priestly vocations is decreasing.



Priestly ordination in the Cathedral of Shenyang, November 2017. Photo: Diocese of Shenyang.

As the Table shows, for the 39 ordinations in 35 dioceses, 13 dioceses had to invite bishops from elsewhere for the ordinations – that means around 37% of the dioceses where priestly ordinations took place in 2017. This number throws a spotlight on the situation where many dioceses in China either have no bishop, or the bishop cannot bestow (public) ordinations, because he is under house arrest (as in Shanghai) or working in the “Underground.”

Tabelle 5: Priestly Ordinations in the Catholic Church of Mainland China in 2017

Province / Metropolis	Diocese	Number of ordained	Date of ordination	Ordaining bishop*	Names of those ordained
Anhui	Hefei	2	Nov. 18	Liu Xinhong**	Fan Jianhong 范建红, Zha Luhong 查鲁鸿
Beijing	Beijing	5	June 24	Li Shan	Gao Shuai 高帅, Han Ming 韩明, Niu Ning 牛宁, Ren Panji 任盘基, Shuai Jie 帅杰
Fujian	Xiamen	3	Sept. 8.	Cai Bingrui	Li Jiaofeng 李姣峰, Wu Xinfei 吴新飞, Yang Yibao 杨义宝
Guangdong 10	Guangzhou	1	April 25	Gan Junqiu	Zhang Jie 张杰
		5	Nov. 30	Gan Junqiu	Cheng Zhifei 程智飞, Du Haizhuo 杜海卓, Gao Peng 高鹏, Hu Yongtao 胡永涛, Zhao Pan 赵攀
	Shantou	1	April 30	Huang Bingzhang**	Li Zhechao 李哲抄
	Shaoguan	2	Febr. 2	Gan Junqiu (Guangzhou)	Li Weidao 李伟导, Xian Hailong 羡海龙
		1	Nov. 30	Gan Junqiu (Guangzhou)	Zhou Yongjie 周永杰
Hebei 20	Jingxian (Hengshui)	3	March 25	Feng Xinmao	Hao Jianling 郝建岭, Zhang Weiwei 张卫卫, Zhang Zhengzhou 张郑州
		1	Nov. 30	Feng Xinmao	Zhang Dingding 张丁丁
	Xianxian (Cangzhou)	4	Aug. 24	Li Liangui	Tang Wujie 唐武杰, Xiao Wenquan 肖文泉, Yang Cha-qian 杨超见, Yuan Junfeng 苑俊峰
	Zhaoxian	3	Aug. 9	Not specified	Dong Feibo 董飞波, Du Xiaoqiang 杜晓强, Li Weihao 李伟浩
		7	Aug. 10	Not specified	Cui Bingsong 崔丙松, Li Qiufeng 李秋峰, Liu Jichen 刘吉晨, Ren Yuqi 任玉琦, Wu Xiaoke 吴晓科, Zhang Weiduo 张伟铎, Zhang Yulong 张玉龙
	Zhengding (Shijiazhuang)	2	July 11	Li Liangui (Xianxian)	Dong Xiaojian 董晓建, Shen Qilong 申奇龙
Henan 6	Kaifeng	2	Dec. 5	Zhang Yinlin (Anyang, Hen)	Yan Hui 闫辉, Qi Xiaoming 齐晓明
	Shangqiu	1	Dec. 5	Zhang Yinlin (Anyang)	Zeng Liangliang 曾亮亮
	Xinxiang	1	Dec. 5	Zhang Yinlin (Anyang)	Zhang Ying 张应
	Zhengzhou	2	Dec. 5	Zhang Yinlin (Anyang)	Li Gang 李刚, Liu Wendu 刘文都
Jiangsu 3	Haimen	1	May 9	Shen Bin	Zhao Honggang 赵鸿罡
	Xuzhou	2	Dec. 15	Wang Renlei	Chen Shuaishuai 陈帅帅, Li Hao 李浩
Jiangxi	Nanchang	1	May 13	Li Suguang	Wang Keyong 王克勇
Jilin	Jilin	3	May 13	Pei Junmin (Shenyang)	Han Bing 韩冰, Han Muhua 韩牧华, Jiang Tiexin 姜铁新
Liaoning	Shenyang	5	Nov. 15	Pei Junmin	Guo Liang 郭亮, Qiao Lichao 乔立超, Teng Lin 腾林, Xu Wei 徐伟, Zhang Shoujie 张守杰
Neimeng 2	Hohhot	1	April 4	Meng Qinglu	Zhang Zhihai 张志海
	Jining	1	Nov. 30	Meng Qinglu (Hohhot)	Yang Hailong 杨海龙
Ningxia	Ningxia	2	Oct. 13	Li Jing	Li Mou 李谋, Wang Xiang 王翔
Shanghai	Shanghai	4	June 7	Shen Bin (Haimen)	He Xiangxi 何祥喜, Ren Yaning 任亚宁, Wu Yongtao 武永涛, Wu Zhiqiang 武志强
Shaanxi	Yulin	5	Nov. 16	Yang Xiaoting	Han Shuai 韩帅, He Dayuan 何大院, Li Bo 李博, Wang Tianping 王田平, Wu Pengtao 吴朋涛
Shanxi 14	Changzhi	6	Nov. 10	Ding Lingbin	Cui Dawei 崔大伟, Li Chao 李超, Li Wei 李伟, Tian Peng 田鹏, Wu Biao 吴彪, Yang Lujun 杨路军
	Fenyang	2	May 1	Huo Cheng	Gao Jianguo 高建国, Sun Zhibiao 孙志彪
	Hongdong	1	April 26	Huo Cheng (Fenyang)	Shang Xiaowei 商小伟
	Jinzhong (Yuci)	2	Feb. 22.	Wu Junwei (Yuncheng)	Kang Jinjun 康晋君, Yue Chaochao 岳超超
	Yuncheng	3	Nov. 30	Wu Junwei	Li Liang 李亮, Zhang Fan 张凡, Zheng Baolong 郑保龙
Sichuan 5	Nanchong	3	May 16	Chen Gong'ao	Feng Zhipeng 冯志鹏, Liu Xujie 刘许杰, Yao Yuanqiang 姚远强
	Yibin	2	June 29	Luo Xuegang	Chen Zongtao 陈宗涛, Cui Peng 崔鹏
Tianjin	Tianjin	1	Nov. 18	Li Liangui (Xianxian)	Jia Aoding 贾奥定
Zhejiang 6	Hangzhou	1	Nov. 21	Cao Xiangde	Han Biao 韩彪
	Ningbo	3	Aug. 19	Hu Xiande	Wang An 王安, Wang Deguang 王德光, Wang Shengnian 王圣年
	Wenzhou	2	Dec. 10	Han Yingjin (Sanyuan SN, also place of ordination)	Jiang Xianmin 蒋贤敏, Luo Tongfei 罗童飞
Total		97			

* The diocese is named here only if the ordaining bishop is not the competent local ordinary of the diocese where the ordinations took place but was invited from another diocese to administer the ordination.

** Bishop not recognized by Rome

Sources (2017): catholic-bj.org June 24.; chinacatholic.cn Feb. 7; May 8,9,31; gzcatholic.com Dec. 1; jstzj.org Dec. 21; Injq.org March 2; xdb Sept. 3; xdo Jan. 4; April 9; May 15, 18; June 7; July 4, 12; Aug. 24; Sept. 10; Oct. 15; Nov. 11, 16, 18, 22, 30; Dec. 1, 3, 11; xianxiancc.org Nov. 30; www.sohu.com/a/130345367_280071; http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_500cf6040102wnt1.html (list); and private information.

Bishops Who Died in Mainland China in 2017

Hu Xiande 胡贤德, Matthew (1934–2017), Ningbo (ZJ)
 Li Jiantang 李建唐, Silvester (1925–2017), Taiyuan (SX)
 Li Jingfeng 李镜峰, Lucas (1921–2017), Fengxiang (SN)
 Liu Shigong 刘世功, John (1928–2017), Jining (Wumeng) (NM)
 Tu Shihua 涂世华, Anthony (1919–2017), Puqi (HB)
 Wang Chongyi 王充一, Anicetus (1919–2017), Guiyang/Guizhou (GZ)
 Wang Milu 王冕录, Casimir (1943–2017), Tianshui (GS)
 Xie Tingzhe 谢庭哲, Paul (1931–2017), Urumqi (XJ)
 Yu Chengxin 余成信, Matthias (1927–2017), Hanzhong (SN)

Bishops' Consecrations in Mainland China in 2017

As far as is known, no bishops were consecrated in 2017.

Official Installation of Bishops Consecrated Secretly

In 2017, the following bishops consecrated with papal mandate but without government permission were publicly installed as local ordinaries recognized by the government:

Han Zhihai 韩志海, Joseph (b. 1966, episcopal consecration 2003), Lanzhou (GS), November 10

Sun Jigen 孙继根, Joseph (b. 1967, episcopal consecration 2011), Handan (Heb), November 16

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Chinese Female Propagators of the Faith in Modern China The Tortuous Transition from the “Institute of Virgins” to Diocesan Religious Congregations

R.G. Tiedemann

A more discerning look at the history of Christianity in China reveals quite clearly that the foreign faith would have found it extremely difficult to persist without the vital role played by various Chinese facilitators. Indeed, the first missionaries to enter the Chinese mainland were rather fortunate to arrive at a time when the intellectual climate of the late Ming encouraged some prominent literati (*wenren* 文人) to challenge the teachings of the imperially sanctioned version of Neo-Confucianism. In other words, China's scholars were more open to new ideas, especially with regard to science and knowledge. As Ronnie Hsia has shown so eloquently, it was the network of friends and acquaintances that enabled Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇 (1552–1610) and his companions to overcome the many obstacles during their difficult journey to Beijing in 1601.¹ Crucial to Ricci's early Christianizing endeavours was the conversion of several influential Confucian officials. Much has been written in recent decades about the so-called “Three Pillars of the Catholic Church,” namely Paulus Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562–1633), Leo Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630)² and Michael Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1557–1627).³ These as well as some other early “Christianized Confucians” certainly were important to the initial implantation of Christianity

Prof. Dr. R.G. Tiedemann is a historian with special interest in the history of Christianity in China and the Boxer Movement (義和團運動). Following his retirement from the University of London, he has been teaching in the School of History and Culture, Shandong University, Jinan, China. The following text is his contribution to the international Workshop “‘I have called you by name’ – Contribution of Chinese Women to the Church,” Sankt Augustin, Germany, September 25–26, 2014. A conference report was published in *Religions & Christianity in Today's China* V (2015) 1, pp. 30–38. A publication of the workshop papers in English language by the Steyl Institute of Missiology and the Institute Monumenta Serica in cooperation with the China-Zentrum, all Sankt Augustin, Germany is in preparation. The Monumenta Serica Sinological Research Center, Taipei, Taiwan will publish a volume of the workshop papers in Chinese language. [Editors' note.]

- 1 R. Hsia Po-chia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552–1610*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012. It is sometimes forgotten that Ricci did not travel alone to Beijing. He was accompanied by the Spanish Jesuit Diego de Pantoja 龐迪我 (1571–1618), as well as by the Chinese Jesuit lay brothers Zhong Mingren 鐘鳴仁 (鐘巴相, a.k.a. Sebastian Fernandes; 1562–1622) and You Wenhui 游文輝 (a.k.a. Manoel Pereira; 1575–1633).
- 2 Li Zhizao was a Chinese mathematician, astronomer, geographer as well as an early Catholic convert. He had assisted in the production of Ricci's world map of 1602.
- 3 Nicolas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China: His Life and Thought*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1988.

in the Chinese Empire. For one thing, they played an essential role in various translation projects and the production of Chinese Christian literature.

However, as the historical record demonstrates so clearly, by the early Qing the scholar-official class was adopting a more orthodox Neo-Confucian approach, rejecting the foreign religion and generally showing less interest in Western learning. After the Yongzheng Emperor's 1724 imperial edict proscribed the "Teaching of the Lord of Heaven" as a heterodox cult, Christianity began to suffer severe restrictions. Especially in the second half of the eighteenth century, when most foreign priests had been expelled, the few remaining missionaries not based at the Court in Beijing had to secretly visit their flocks and minister to the faithful in what had essentially become an underground church in China's vast countryside. It is, indeed, important to recognize the precarious position of the foreign clergy in the Celestial Empire. Since Chinese priests were also in very short supply at this time, the Catholic presence could be preserved only by relying on a variety of Chinese lay personnel. These believers not only protected and materially supported foreigners concealed in Catholic communities; they also managed Church affairs as well as promoted evangelization. It was largely as a result of native agency without sacerdotal supervision that Christianity survived in the Middle Kingdom during the long century of proscription and sporadic persecutions. As a matter of fact, even after the imposition of the so-called "unequal treaty system" in the middle of the nineteenth century, which gave foreign priests legal access to the Middle Kingdom and the Catholic faithful many advantages, the missionary enterprise could not have flourished without the continued reliance on certain groups of indigenous lay people at every step of the way.

It is fair to say that ordinary believers contributed in their own ways to the preservation of the Catholic faith. This essay focuses, however, on local Catholics with particular functions. They were, on the one hand, the leaders of local Catholic congregations (*huizhang* 會長),⁴ and, on the other hand, the itinerant catechists (*chuanjiaoyuan* 傳教員, *chuanjiao xiansheng* 傳教先生 or *chuandao xiansheng* 傳道先生).⁵ Of particular interest is the fact that many of the catechists' religious functions were also being performed by Catholic women in China. Indeed, female catechists (*nü chuanjiao xiansheng* 女傳教先生) had played an important part in the propagation of the Catholic faith since the seventeenth century. In consequence of the strict custom of segregating the sexes in traditional Chinese society, the conversion of women presented a particular challenge for male evangelists. Thus, the task of propagating the faith amongst women, instructing girls, and administering baptisms fell to certain Christian women. While often widows were engaged in such work, especially as baptizers (*quanxi xiansheng* 權洗先生),⁶ we are here interested

4 The *huizhang*, referred to as *administrateurs* in the French missionary literature, appear to be more or less identical to the "sedentary catechists" mentioned by some authors.

5 On the important role played by catechists, see Joseph Schmidlin, *Catholic Mission Theory (Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss)*, Techny, Ill.: Mission Press, S.V.D. 1931, pp. 311-312. He also mentions, with reference to the expanding missionary enterprise of the late nineteenth century, the priest's personal attendants (*shenfu kai huoji* 神父慨伙記).

6 *Quanxi* 權洗 refers to baptism administered by a lay person in case of necessity.

in a particular group of women, namely the Chinese Catholic “virgins” (*tongzhen* 童貞; *zhennü* 貞女 or *shouzhennü* 守貞女, i.e. “chaste women”).⁷

Yet the vital contributions made by ordinary Chinese Christians were for a long time not adequately reflected in the academic literature. Indeed, it is only during the last couple of decades or so that scholars have paid greater attention to the crucial role played by indigenous agents in the introduction, preservation and subsequent reinvigoration of Christianity in the late imperial and republican periods in China. However, as far as the so-called “institute of virgins” is concerned, the scholarly literature has, with a few exceptions, largely remained silent on their dedicated activities.⁸ Nearly twenty years ago I did undertake some preliminary research in this field and presented my findings at a workshop in 2001, but it took several years to get the paper on Chinese “virgins” published. Yet it would seem that this publication is not easily accessible, for more recent research into the history of women in the Catholic Church in China has failed to mention it.⁹ Perhaps it will be useful to approach once more the subject of unwed Chinese Catholic women in the service of the Church, taking cognizance of more recent research. This paper traces, therefore, the origins and progress of virgins who lived either individually with their families or in some cases in small groups of unmarried women near the local place of worship (*gongsuo* 公所 or *xiaotang* 小堂). Yet while their contribution as a vital force in the preservation of the Catholic faith in beleaguered Christian communities during the years of proscription was acknowledged, with the resumption of evangelization by foreign missionaries in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the European priests – now able to play a

7 A fuller selection of terms, especially in early modern Fujian province, is found in Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China*, Cambridge, Mass.: distributed by Harvard University Press 2009, pp. 316-318.

8 The earliest contributions to the study of Chinese women in the Catholic apostolate for the modern period were made by Ortrud Stegmaier (1978) and Sue Bradshaw (1982): Ortrud Stegmaier SSpS, *Missionsdienst am eigenen Volk. Die Herausbildung einheimischer Ordensfrauen durch Steyler Missionare und Missionsschwestern*, Steyl 1978. First published as “Die von den Steyler Missionaren und Missionsschwestern gegründeten einheimischen Schwesterngenossenschaften,” in: *Verbum SVD* 1975–1977. The original, unpublished doctoral dissertation contains more detailed information. Sue Bradshaw (Sister), “Religious Women in China: An Understanding of Indigenization,” in: *The Catholic Historical Review* 68 (January 1982) 1, pp. 28-45. For introductory academic studies of the “institute of virgins” before 1800, see Robert E. Entenmann, “Christian Virgins in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan,” in: Daniel H. Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996, pp. 180-193 and 402-405; Eugenio Menegon, “Christian Loyalists, Spanish Friars, and Holy Virgins in Fujian during the Ming-Qing Transition,” in: *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003), pp. 335-365; Miguel Ángel San Román, “Cristianos laicos en la misión dominicana del norte de la provincia de Fujian, China, en el siglo XVII,” Ph.D. diss., Gregorian University, Rome 2000, pp. 169-178 and *passim*. More recently, Professor Kang of Hubei University has published her findings on the phenomenon of Catholic virgins: Kang Zhijie, “The Yeast of Evangelization: A Study on the Contribution of the Virgin Catechists,” in: *Tripod* 33 (Autumn 2013) 170, pp. 12-30. Translated by Eleanor Foo. The original Chinese version is in the same issue: Kang Zhijie 康志杰, “Tamen shi fuchuan de jiaomu: zhennü chuandaoyuan pingshu 她們是福傳的酵母: 貞女傳道員評述,” in: *Tripod* 33 (Autumn 2013) 170, pp. 12-26. Her more comprehensive monograph on this phenomenon has been published as: Kang Zhijie 康志杰, *Jidu de xinniāng: Zhongguo tianzhujiao zhennü yanjiu* 基督新娘: 中國天主教貞女研究 [Bride of the Christ: The New Research on Chinese Catholic Virgins], Beijing 北京: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社 2013.

9 My initial research was eventually published: R.G. Tiedemann, “Controlling the Virgins: Female Propagators of the Faith and the Catholic Hierarchy in China,” in: *Women's History Review* 17 (September 2008) 4, pp. 501-520. Because of the protracted nature of getting this article into print, I produced another article on this topic: R.G. Tiedemann, “A Necessary Evil: The Contribution of Chinese ‘Virgins’ to the Growth of the Catholic Church in Late Qing China,” in: Jessie Gregory Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility*, Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press 2010, pp. 87-107.

dominant role in Catholic Church life in China – began to view the “institute of virgins” in a rather more ambivalent light. They were concerned about the relative independence of these laywomen in Christian communities and wanted them to lead more structured lives. Thus, from about the middle of the nineteenth century the idea of creating Chinese religious sisterhoods began to emerge, especially after the first European female religious congregations to provide appropriate supervision were beginning to be accommodated in the Middle Kingdom in the late 1840s. The essay will, therefore, conclude with some comments on these emerging Chinese communities of women religious.

The Early History of the “Institute of Virgins” in China

It has long been established that certain Chinese Christian women were from an early date actively involved in the life of the Church. The most prominent among them is no doubt the widow Candida Xu 徐甘弟大 (1607–1680), granddaughter of Xu Guangqi. The Jesuit missionary Philippe Couplet introduced her to European readers in 1688¹⁰ and she has received considerable attention in the recent scholarly literature.¹¹ It is, however, rather more difficult to determine when the first unmarried Chinese Catholic women consecrated their lives to the service of God and took a vow of chastity. Eugenio Menegon has established that Dominican friars transmitted the Spanish tradition of the cloistered beatas (“blessed women”) via the Philippines to the important early Christian communities in the Fu’an 福安 area of Fujian.¹² Referring to a report by the Spanish Dominican Francisco Varo 萬濟國 (1627–1687), Menegon adds that Chinese beatas were living “in their natal homes, rigorously respecting the fasts, penances, and other mortifications of the Third Order of Penance, and that their parents or brothers gave them a special room to do their pious exercises.”¹³ According to Benno Biermann OP, there were twelve Christian virgins in Fu’an in 1649, twenty-four in 1695 and fifty in 1714.¹⁴ In spite of Qing official opposition and social abhorrence of the existence of unmarried females in a society where all women were expected to marry and produce male heirs, there were said to be over two hundred Christian virgins in Fu’an county alone in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁵

10 Philippe Couplet, *Histoire d'une dame chrétienne de la Chine où, par occasion, les usages de ces peuples, l'établissement de la Religion, les manières des Missionnaires & les Exercices de Piété des nouveaux Chrétiens sont expliquez*, Paris: Estienne Michallet 1688.

11 Note, *inter alia*, Noel Golvers, “Le role de la femme dans la mission catholique au dix-septième siècle au Jiangnan: Philippe Couplet et sa biographie de Candida Xu (1607–1680),” in: *Courier Verbiest*, Bulletin Trimestriel, X (June 1998); Gail King, “Candida Xu and the Growth of Christianity in China in the Seventeenth Century,” in: *Monumenta Serica* 46 (1998), pp. 49–66; idem, “Christian Women of China in the Seventeenth Century,” in: Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, pp. 55–86; Claudia von Collani, “Lady Candida Xu: A Widow between Chinese and Christian Ideals,” in: Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, pp. 224–245.

12 Eugenio Menegon, “Child Bodies, Blessed Bodies: The Contest between Christian Virginity and Confucian Chastity,” in: Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, pp. 108–140, here pp. 118–125.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

14 Benno Biermann, *Die Anfänge der neueren Dominikanermission in China*, Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung 1927, pp. 113, 163 and 165.

15 Menegon, “Child Bodies, Blessed Bodies,” p. 112.

Whereas the phenomenon of celibate Christian women in Fujian is closely related to the *beata* system of the Philippines,¹⁶ recent research has shown that unwed Christian women were already present in the Jiangnan 江南 region prior to the arrival of Spanish Dominicans in China. Although there may already have been some Christian virgins in Nanjing during the first decade of the seventeenth century, Zhao Huaqing found in his doctoral research that *zhennü* 貞女 who preserved their chastity can definitely be traced to 1627, for in that year Agnes Yang, the daughter of Yang Tingyun, opened a “virgins house” (*zhennüyuan* 貞女院) in the southern imperial capital.¹⁷ How this phenomenon was introduced in the Lower Yangzi region remains, however, an issue for further research.

In Sichuan province lay celibacy, practiced by men as well as women, first appeared without close supervision or influence by Catholic clergy. The task of establishing a so-called “institute of Christian virgins” was initiated by the Italian Dominican Luigi Maria Maggi (died 1743), who had been elected coadjutor vicar apostolic of Sichuan in 1738 and vicar apostolic in 1742. He began to draft regulations for celibate women, based on rules established by the Dominicans in Fujian. As a matter of fact, the link between Fujian and Sichuan, where secular priests of the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) were primarily in charge, appears to have been quite strong. According to Robert Entenmann, “One of the Chinese priests in Sichuan, Antonius Dang Huairan [黨懷仁], had served in Fujian in the 1720s, where his duties included supervising a group of ‘virgins dedicated to Christ.’”¹⁸ In this connection, it should also be noted that the MEP maintained a missionary outpost in Fujian at Xinghua 興化 (now Putian 莆田) well into the early nineteenth century. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that the priests in Sichuan were familiar with the *beata* phenomenon in the Dominican mission of Fujian. After Maggi’s death in 1743, the vicar apostolic of Yunnan and administrator of Sichuan, Hu-Guang (Hubei and Hunan), and Guizhou, Joachim Enjobert de Martiliat MEP 馬青山 (1706–1755) completed and published the first detailed rules of conduct for virgins in a pastoral letter in 1744. His twenty-five rules constantly draw attention to the “virgins of Europe [who] live in a separate dwelling, well cloistered and surrounded on all sides by high walls, in such a way that they have no communication with the outside, nor are they able to leave the threshold

16 In the Philippines quasi-religious communities came into being in the seventeenth century for indigenous women and women of mixed ethnicity (*mestiza*) seeking lives of spiritual perfection. These pious women, many of whom had been accepted as tertiaries by one of the mendicant orders, had hitherto lived in solitude or with their families. Opting for lives of rigorous penitence and contemplation, the *beatas* also assisted with the work among the poor and sick, with the instruction of girls and with various other menial tasks for the Church. Eventually, the *beatas* were permitted to wear a habit and profess what in effect were private vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. R.G. Tiedemann, “Christianity in East Asia,” Chapter 13, in: Stewart J. Brown – Timothy Tackett (eds.), *Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. 7: *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 453–454.

17 Zhao Huaqing, *Die Missionsgeschichte Chinas, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bedeutung der Laien bei der Missionierungsarbeit (ca. 16.–19. Jh.)*, Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag 2012, pp. 200–201. Zhao culled the information concerning the involvement of Agnes Yang from the work of the Chinese Jesuit Joseph Xiao Jingshan 蕭靜山 若瑟, *Tianzhujiao chuanxing Zhongguo kao* 天主教傳行中國考 [Examination of the Propagation of the Catholic Religion in China], Xianxian 1937, p. 262. Zhao adds, however, that, according to Louis Pfister, it was the Portuguese Jesuit Rui de Figueiredo 斐樂德 (1594–1642) who established the “virgins house” in Nanjing, which was maintained by “Agathe, fille du célèbre Dr Michel Yang.” Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l’ancienne mission de Chine 1552–1773*, Vol. I, Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique 1932, p. 159.

18 Entenmann, “Christian Virgins in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan,” p. 404 note 24.

even with half a step.”¹⁹ Although it was not possible to establish convents in eighteenth-century China, the *Rules* of 1744 expected celibate Chinese Catholic women to live similarly cloistered, contemplative lives, but within the household of their own family. Indeed, no female would be admitted to the “institute of Christian virgins” unless her family could support her.²⁰ Because those who preserve their virginity and are, therefore, “among the Christians who are superior to all the rest,” these “fragrant flowers in the garden of the Church” were expected to lead exemplary lives.²¹ As Martiliat pointed out in the introduction to the *Rules for Virgins* (*Tongzhen xiugui* 童貞修規):

*It is proper for the virgins to maintain their purity unto death, both internally and externally, that their hearts be innocent of all carnal desire, and their bodies pure of all shameful acts, that they think of nothing but of heavenly things, and live separate from the world. Virginity is excellent, but it has many enemies; the burden is heavy, and the road of life is long, and for that reason it will be necessary to set forth rules by which the virgins may be directed on that road ...*²²

The introduction of a rule for virgins by Martiliat was no doubt an attempt by the foreign missionary enterprise to provide guidance as well as regulate and control the lives of celibate laywomen in Sichuan. In theory, at least, failure of the virgins to “follow all the above regulations exactly” would have consequences. Thus, “if they do not mend their ways ... they will be expelled from the Society of Virgins.”²³ Living up to the ideals of the rule was, however, not easily achieved in the eighteenth century. In the absence of a comprehensive Christian institutional infrastructure (convents, orphanages, schools) and the acute paucity of priests, close supervision of what essentially remained a loose association of celibate women living under a common rule was not easily achieved. In 1746, two years after the *Rules* had been introduced, a persecution forced Martiliat and other missionaries to leave China. For the next ten years the Chinese priest Andreas Ly 李安德 (1693–1774) was the senior clergyman in the entire province of Sichuan, assisted by two other indigenous priests. During these difficult times, the Catholic Church had to rely to an even greater extent on native agency in Sichuan and elsewhere. Besides the few priests, Christian lay people – including the virgins – were called upon to work toward the preservation of the faith in their communities (referred to as *chrétientés* in the French missionary literature).

It was under the bold apostolate of the French priest Jean-Martin Moÿe MEP 梅慕雅 (1730–1793) that the innovative activist role of virgins was developed and expanded after

19 Martiliat is obviously referring to European contemplative “nuns” rather than externally active apostolic “sisters.” Sadly, these days this important distinction between “nuns” and “sisters” is rarely made in the academic literature.

20 See Entenmann, “Christian Virgins in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan,” pp. 184–185. For an English translation of the *Rules for Virgins* of 1744, see Robert Entenmann, “Christian Virgins in Early Qing Sichuan,” in: Lutz (ed.), *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, pp. 141–158, here pp. 147–155. Entenmann has translated the Latin version that is available in the Archives of Propaganda Fide and was reprinted in Adrien Launay, *Histoire des Missions de Chine. Missions du Se-tchouan*, Paris: Tequi 1920, Vol. 2, “Appendices,” pp. 13–20. Note also that Zhao Huaqing, *Die Missionsgeschichte Chinas*, pp. 210–218, has summarized the *Rules* based on the Chinese version: Ma Qingshan 馬青山 [Martiliat], *Tongzhen xiugui* 童貞修規 [Rules for Virgins], 1744, reprinted Chongqing 1921.

21 Passages from Martiliat’s pastoral letter of 1 November 1744, translated text in Entenmann, “Christian Virgins in Early Qing Sichuan,” p. 146.

22 Quote in *ibid.*, p. 147.

23 Martiliat’s Rule 25, in *ibid.*, p. 154.

his clandestine arrival in Sichuan in 1773. Among the several non-sacerdotal duties the celibate women were expected to perform instead of priests, their role of baptizers took on particular significance in remarkably new ways. Moÿe, who had been greatly influenced by the French Lazarist theologian Pierre Collet (1693–1770),²⁴ attached much importance to the baptism of infants *in periculo mortis*. During the great famine which started in eastern Sichuan in 1777 and was followed by deadly plague, he sent a significant number of these unmarried Chinese women into the villages to baptize children “in danger of death.” It is thought that as many as 27,000 youngsters were thus spared the horrors of eternal damnation. Naturally, Moÿe praised the sacrifices and “supernatural powers and courage” of these devoted women who had freely undertaken this labour by supporting themselves through practical work. Even after the crisis was over by 1779, Moÿe declared that the virgins were eager to carry on baptizing in more distant places, because “in China there are always sick children in danger of death.”²⁵

It is, of course, remarkable that these virgins, presumably with bound feet, were able to travel such long distances in a society where women, especially unmarried women, were expected to stay at home. Moreover, according to Martiliat’s *Rules for Virgins*, these unwed women were to lead “cloistered” lives, yet Moÿe was able and willing to employ them outside their family homes. It should also be noted that he aimed to create awareness in Europe of the high infant mortality rates in non-Christian China, insisting that it was the duty of “charitable souls” to provide material support for this endeavour to save the souls of children *in periculo mortis* through (often surreptitious) baptism. It has in fact been argued that his actions and appeals in the 1770s found concrete form in the establishment in 1843 of the Society of the Holy Childhood (Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance).²⁶

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the virgins’ valuable participation in the external apostolate was acknowledged by the Church authorities in Europe. When François Pottier MEP 梅若翰 (1726–1792), the vicar apostolic of Sichuan since 1767, voiced some concerns about the vulnerabilities to which the virgins were exposed as a result of Moÿe’s activist approach, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) responded by recognizing the “institute of virgins” in 1784. Moreover, the rules concerning the formation of character, cultivation of a religious life and Christian virtues, especially chastity, were approved.²⁷ At the same time, these instructions prohibited virgins from preaching or reading at gatherings where men were present. In 1793, Propaganda Fide’s instructions were communicated to the *chrétientés* of Sichuan in a pastoral letter by Pottier’s successor, Jean-Didier de Saint-Martin (1743–1801). Further elaborated by the

24 Georges Tavad, *L'expérience de Jean-Martin Moye: mystique et mission, 1730–1793*, Paris: Beauchesne 1978, pp. 91–92.

25 Moÿe (later written Moyë), letter to the “charitable souls of Europe,” dated 7 October 1779, reprinted in: *Annales de l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance* 10 (1858), pp. 183–184.

26 Georges Goyau, *Un devancier de l'œuvre de la Sainte-Enfance Jean-Martin Moye, missionnaire en Chine (1772–1783)*, Paris: Editions “Alsatia” 1937). Note also that Moÿe was the founder of the Sisters of Providence (of Portieux) 普照修女會 in France in 1762. The first Sisters from this religious institute arrived in China in 1875 and were engaged in religious labour in the MEP mission in southern Manchuria.

27 “Instructio S. C. de Propaganda Fide ad Vicarium Apostolicum Sutchuen. Romae, 29 Aprilis 1784,” in: *Collectanea S. C. de Propaganda Fide*, Romae 1907, Vol. 1, pp. 350–356, with the “De Regulis pro Societate Virginum Christianarum” on p. 351.

Sichuan Synod of 1803²⁸ and subsequently approved by Propaganda Fide in Rome, the rules for virgins were made applicable to all of China by decree in 1832. They remained, with certain later revisions, in force well into the twentieth century. Not only was the essential value of the virgins to the apostolate recognized, but these celibate women were often regarded as the true pillars of the faith in the scattered rural Catholic refuges during the difficult years of sporadic persecution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the process, they had achieved an unusual degree of religious authority and autonomy in various *chrétientés*.

Assertion of Missionary Control

The Catholic revival movements in Europe in the early decades of the nineteenth century in response to the secularizing tendencies of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution also spawned a strong interest in overseas missions. Consequently, an initially modest but nevertheless steady stream of foreign priests began to arrive on the China mission fields. However, the resumption of missionary activities did not always proceed smoothly, because some of the by now relatively autonomous local Catholic communities considered the arrival of the European clergy an unwelcome intrusion. Nowhere was the conflict between foreign priests and Chinese clergy, catechists and lay leaders greater in the 1830s and 1840s than in the *padroado* (保教權) diocese of Nanjing. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the Jiangnan region of the lower Yangzi River was the most literate and prosperous region of China. Here, in the virtual absence for several decades of European priestly supervision, members of the wealthy Christian elite (rich peasants and merchants) had assumed leadership in Church affairs in their respective localities. Moreover, lay societies of Chinese Christians (confraternities or 聖會) had been introduced in the Shanghai-Songjiang area in earlier times.²⁹ Consequently, there was considerable resistance to the imposition of foreign missionary power in the 1840s. In particular, the *huizhang*, who were exercising complete financial autonomy, refused to yield it to the foreign priests.³⁰

Serious tensions had already arisen in the 1830s between the tiny contingent of Portuguese Lazarists and the local Catholics in Jiangnan involving Church discipline and a complex set of other issues. However, the contest between the leaders of the local churches

28 This synod was conducted in Chongqing by Bishop Gabriel-Taurin Dufresse MEP 徐德新 (1750–1815) together with 13 Chinese and one other European priest (2 Europeans and 6 Chinese, living in remoter parts of Sichuan, were not able to attend). For details, see Josef Metzler, *Die Synoden in China, Japan und Korea 1570–1931*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 1980, pp. 43–55. For an English translation of the 1784 Chinese text of the “Rules for the Institute of Virgins,” as printed in 1910, see Entenmann, “Christian Virgins in Early Qing Sichuan,” “Appendix II,” pp. 155–157.

29 For details, see Louis Pfister 费赖之 SJ, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine. 1552–1773*, Vol. 1: *XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, Chang-hai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique 1932, pp. 226–227. For a detailed discussion of confraternities in China, see Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724*, Cambridge, Mass. – London: Harvard University Press 2007, Chapter 9: “A Good Method of Order.”

30 Eric O. Hanson, “Political Aspects of Chinese Catholicism,” in: James D. Whitehead – Yu-ming Shaw – Norman J. Girardot (eds.), *China and Christianity: Historical and Future Encounters*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 1979, p. 138.

and Count Ludovico de Besi 羅類思 (sometimes also 羅伯濟, 1805–1871)³¹ in the mid-1840s was particularly acrimonious. De Besi was an Italian secular priest who had been sent to China by Propaganda Fide in 1833. In 1839 he became vicar apostolic of the newly established vicariate apostolic of Shandong and the Apostolic Administrator (代理主教) of what at least in theory was still the Portuguese *padroado* diocese of Nanjing.³² David Mungello argues that Bishop De Besi “was a poor choice for this assignment. His arrogance, rigidity and difficult nature produced disagreements with all parties in China.”³³ The ecclesiastical situation in Jiangnan was further complicated, against the background of the Holy See challenging Portugal’s role in the ecclesiastical affairs of China, by the arrival in 1842 of a hurriedly assembled group of priests from the “new” Society of Jesus to replace the rather small number of Lazarist missionaries who had been trying to gain a foothold in the diocese in the 1830s. The prevailing situation was further complicated by the arrival of the Jesuit priests while the First Opium War was raging in the Jiangnan region. The local population would have been even less welcoming of missionaries. The foreign religion was, after all, still outlawed.³⁴ Two additional factors help us to understand the impending confrontation. Firstly, developments in Europe (the creation of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith 傳信會 in France in 1822 and the Society of the Holy Childhood 聖嬰會 in 1843 as effective fund-raising bodies) generated secure and regular income for the missionary enterprise in China. As a result, foreign priests were no longer dependent on support from and subordinate to influential Chinese Christian protectors. Secondly, with the introduction of the treaty system and the French Religious Protectorate in the wake of the First Opium War, missionaries were no longer forced to lead clandestine and precarious existences in China’s hinterland. In other words, these developments encouraged the foreign priests to act more assertively in their attempts to impose European ecclesiastical models on China’s Catholics.

In the mid-1840s, Bishop De Besi soon provoked bitter opposition of local Christians when he sought to impose missionary control over them. In his pastoral letters (主教勸諭), he accused certain administrators (*huizhang* 會長) of having usurped temporal and even spiritual matters. The behaviour of the Catholic virgins of the Jiangnan region also came in for criticism. While they had done much to ensure the preservation of the

31 De Besi’s given name is often rendered as “Lodovico,” but I have adopted the spelling of the street named after him in his native city of Verona. In French texts he is called “Louis,” which was then sometimes re-translated into Italian as “Luigi.”

32 De Besi had entered the Chinese mainland in 1834 and worked as a missionary, subsequently as provicar, in the Hu-Guang (Hubei and Hunan) mission. On 3 September 1839 Pope Gregory XVI appointed De Besi vicar apostolic of the newly erected vicariate apostolic of Shandong and titular bishop of Canope; on 19 December 1839 he also appointed him Administrator of the diocese of Nanjing.

33 D. E. Mungello, “The Return of the Jesuits to China in 1841 and the Chinese Christian Backlash,” in: *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal* 27 (2005), p. 13.

34 The Savoyard Jesuit Claude Gotteland (南格祿, 1803–1856) and the French Jesuit François Estève (艾方清, 1807–1848) reached Wusong on 11 July 1842. The French Jesuit Benjamin Brueyre (sometimes Bruyère; 李秀芳, 1810–1880), who had remained on Zhoushan Island – which had been recaptured by British forces on 1 October 1841 – to act as chaplain among Irish soldiers, joined them on 22 October 1842. For a wider contextual discussion, see Jeremy Clarke, “The Chinese Rites Controversy’s Long Shadow over the Restored Society of Jesus,” in: Robert A. Maryks – Jonathan Wright (eds), *Jesuit Survival and Restoration: A Global History, 1773–1900*, Leiden: Brill 2015, pp. 315–330.

faith in the Christian communities, these unmarried women had achieved a degree of independence in the process. There had already been some criticism of the virgins in the late 1830s. Pierre Lavaissière (石伯鐸, 1813–1849), a French Lazarist in Jiangnan since 1839, was intent on eliminating night visits by the virgins and compelling them to show less familiarity with their relatives and neighbours. The newly arrived missionaries were particularly incensed by the virgins' liturgical and religious role in the *chrétientés*. In Songjiang a confrontation between missionaries and Chinese arose over virgin participation in religious services. "In more than one village, a virgin had usurped the administrator's functions; almost everywhere they conducted prayer chants at church, offered pious readings, admonished offenders."³⁵

The local Christians, on the other hand, were outraged when Count de Besi insisted that the prayers in church were to be recited by the entire congregation, men and women alternately. They regarded this kind of public exchange between men and women morally inappropriate.³⁶ Indeed, as far as the virgins' involvement is concerned, Martiliat's Rule 14 of 1744 was very clear on this matter:

*Whether in their home or in a public chapel, ... Virgins should pray in a place separated from men by a curtain. It is particularly the duty of men to chant prayers in a loud voice; therefore, the Virgins should not usurp that function. If, nevertheless, only relatives are present, brothers for example, this is not prohibited to them.*³⁷

In Europe, the insistence on the seclusion of women religious had been determined by the Council of Trent two centuries earlier. According to Entenmann, "In this matter, in China, the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church accorded with Chinese norms."³⁸ Yet De Besi wanted to change these arrangements.

In response to the bishop's critical pastoral letters, the Jiangnan Christians issued a 38-page *Open Letter* (*Zhaoran gonglun* 昭然公論) on 30 January (Ash Wednesday) 1846 to voice their criticisms of the way in which De Besi and his Jesuit vicar-general (代牧) Claude Gotteland had administered the diocese. The Chinese priests, catechists and leading Christians reacted strongly to what they perceived to be interference in local religious

35 Joseph de la Servière, *Histoire de la Mission du Kiang-nan. Jésuites de la Province de France (Paris) (1840–1899)*. Vol. 1: *Jusqu'à l'établissement d'un vicaire apostolique jésuite 1840–1856*, Zikawei, Shanghai, "Preface" dated 1914, p. 24. The Chinese text of De Besi's pastoral instructions (本主教羅思類) of ca. 1845 is available in Nicolas Standaert – Adrian Dudink – Huang Yi-Long – Chu Ping-Yi (eds.), *Xujiahui cangshulou Ming Qing tianzhujiao wenxian* 徐家匯藏書樓明清天主教文獻 [Chinese Christian Texts from the Zikawei Library], Taipei xian 臺北縣: Furen daxue shenxueyuan 輔仁大學神學院 1996, Vol. 5, pp. 2027–2038. Note that the characters in De Besi's Chinese name are arranged in a different sequence.

36 This particular contest between local Catholic interest groups, including Chinese priests, local *huizhang*, and virgins on the one hand and the bishop on the other, has been mentioned in several publications. See e.g. Eric O. Hanson, "Political Aspects of Chinese Catholicism," p. 139; and more recently D. E. Mungello, "The Return of the Jesuits to China in 1841," pp. 9–46. For details from a Jesuit perspective, see La Servière, Vol. 1, pp. 91–92; Mungello, *The Catholic Invasion of China: Remaking Chinese Christianity*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2015, Chapter 2: "Spiritual Domination by European Catholics in Nineteenth-Century China." A critical review of this last-mentioned work by Fr. Patrick Taveirne CICM, based partly on Professor Ku Weiyong's corrective comments, is in *Tripod* 37 (Autumn 2017) 186, pp. 106–112. See also Paul Rule, "Restauration or New Creation? The Return of the Society of Jesus to China," in: Robert A. Maryks – Jonathan Wright (eds.), *Jesuit Survival and Restoration: A Global History, 1773–1900*, Leiden: Brill 2015, pp. 271–275.

37 Quoted in Entenmann, "Christian Virgins in Early Qing Sichuan," p. 151.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

affairs and a failure to understand Chinese culture by De Besi and the Jesuits. These and other criticisms, along with the point-by-point refutation by Gotteland's *Wubang lun* 誣謗論 [On Slander], have been discussed in some detail by both Huang Xiaojuan and David Mungello.³⁹ My approach is focused on the failure of the European priests to comprehend the importance of the strict separation of the sexes in Chinese society – and hence in the Chinese Church. Whereas the newly arrived Jesuits could be excused for their unawareness of this delicate issue, it is more difficult to understand why De Besi, who had already been in China for a decade or so, insisted that both men and women take part in “chanting the liturgy” (念經) in church. It is, therefore, plausible that the Chinese clergy criticized the bishop and Gotteland so severely in this regard, accusing them of treating the Chinese like animals.⁴⁰ While hyperbole is a characteristic aspect of the traditionally adversarial nature of Chinese dispute management, it is nevertheless easy to see why the problematic treatment of the Catholic virgins by the Europeans received such harsh criticism.

Still, there is reason to believe that the *Open Letter* and Gotteland's refutation do not fully reveal the true nature of the dispute between the Jiangnan Catholics and De Besi. It can be assumed that new, incriminating facts, recently discovered by Paul Mariani SJ in the Jesuit archives in Rome, had a bearing on the Christians' hostile attitude toward the bishop. The archives indicate that while Joseph de la Servière was writing his *Histoire de la mission du Kiangnan*, he decided to leave out of the book concerning De Besi's behaviour.

*Servière admitted that de Besi was an “administrator,” a “diplomat,” and an “apostle,” yet he was also guilty of “committing grave faults against morals, especially with the virgins,” even those from the “best Christian families,” and the events risked schism as the Chinese priests refused him obedience.*⁴¹

When De Besi left for Europe on 21 November 1847, never to return to China, the Jesuit missionaries had the Jiangnan field to themselves.

It can be argued that this acrimonious exchange in the 1840s was also a power struggle between influential local Catholic interests and the missionaries' insistence on imposing European hierarchical ecclesiastic structures on the Church in China. At the same time, the language of the *Open Letter* also reveals a sense of Chinese cultural superiority. This deeply entrenched self-confidence among Jiangnan's Catholics would, however, be shattered a few years later, along with the local Church autonomy that had emerged during the previous century when China's Christians were largely left to their own devices. The devastations during Taiping Rebellion in the Lower Yangzi Region caused great hardship among the Catholic believers, making them more dependent on the support of the French

39 Huang Xiaojuan, “Christian Communities and Alternative Devotions in China, 1780–1860,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University 2006; Mungello, “The Return of the Jesuits to China in 1841.” *Zhaoran gonglun* and *Wubang lun* have been included in Standaert *et al.* (eds.), *Xujiahui cangshulou Ming Qing tianzhujiao wenxian*, pp. 2039–2077 and 2079–2119.

40 Mungello, “The Return of the Jesuits to China in 1841,” p. 37.

41 Paul Mariani SJ, “The Phoenix Rises from its Ashes: The Restoration of the Jesuit Shanghai Mission,” in: Robert A. Maryks – Jonathan Wright (eds.), *Jesuit Survival and Restoration: A Global History, 1773–1900*, Leiden: Brill 2015, pp. 304–305.

Jesuits. Furthermore, the treaty system and the French Religious Protectorate created conditions that were quite different from those that had existed before the First Opium War.

Subordination of the Virgins

One significant consequence of the treaty arrangements, and especially of the French version of the Beijing Convention of 1860, was the fact that the Catholic Church in China became visible. In the century and a half before the treaties, Christianity had kept a low profile in the countryside. Now, with a gradual return to urban centres, missionary power could be displayed quite prominently in the form of churches, schools, orphanages, dispensaries, hospitals and convents. The last-named institutions are of particular relevance to this paper, for it now became possible not only to bring European sisters to the Middle Kingdom⁴² but also to encourage communal religious life for Chinese virgins. More favourable conditions in mid-nineteenth century China saw an increase in the conversions of non-Christians. According to La Servière, there was also a significant rise in the number of celibate women who consecrated their lives to serving God and the missions.⁴³ The missionaries viewed this development with ambivalence. On the one hand, in consequence of the strict custom of segregating the sexes in traditional Chinese society, they appreciated the virgins' desire not to marry but to remain celibate and devote themselves to the indispensable apostolate among Chinese women. On the other hand, the foreign priests were concerned that most virgins, especially those in the remoter rural parts of the country, were living in a "pagan" environment, without solid religious formation, regular spiritual guidance and sacerdotal supervision – as well as without sacraments. As late as 1880, some rather negative opinions were voiced at the first regional synods in China, as summarized from the synodal reports by Gaetano Cardinal Alimonda (1818–1891). The virgins were accused of being quarrelsome, noisy and disobedient, as well as "proud, ignorant and some of them cause much scandal" by roaming about, giving rise to the rumour among non-Christians that they were the priests' concubines.⁴⁴

Given the virgins' relative independence, religious initiatives and weak corporate identity, it is not surprising that from around the middle of the nineteenth century the European clergy promoted the idea of establishing Chinese religious sisterhoods to cultivate their religious lives and establish proper ecclesiastical control over them. There were, however, other factors that encouraged the formation of communal bodies. For one thing, we

42 The first foreign missionary sisters came to China in 1848, namely the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres (沙爾德聖保綠女修會). In the same year the first Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (仁愛修女會) arrived in Macao, but the obstructive Portuguese authorities forced them to transfer to Ningbo in 1852. In subsequent decades women religious from other European congregations settled in various treaty ports from where they spread to major stations in the interior.

43 For details on motives, background and procedures for the acceptance of virgins, as well as regulations concerning vows, see Tiedemann, "Controlling the Virgins," for the modern period. For the pre-modern period, see the comprehensive work by Zhao Huaqing, *Die Missionsgeschichte Chinas*, especially pp. 228–235.

44 Sacra Congregazione de Propaganda Fide, Ponente l'Eminentissimo e Reverendissimo Signor Cardinale Gaetano Alimonda. Ristretto con sommario e voto sulle deliberazioni Sinodali dei Vicari Apostolici delle cinque regioni ecclesiastiche dell'impero Cinese. Dicembre 1881, Voto 94, quoted in Johannes Beckmann SMB, *Die katholische Missionsmethode in China in neuester Zeit (1842–1912). Geschichtliche Untersuchung über Arbeitsweisen, ihre Hindernisse und Erfolge*, Immensee: Verlag des Missionshauses Bethlehem 1931, p. 85.

should not underestimate the possibility that some young Catholic women, including virgins, actually desired to live in such environments. At the same time, we should not forget that from the middle of the nineteenth century, the Holy See increasingly insisted on the formation of genuinely indigenous churches, including the creation of religious institutes. In any case, celibate Chinese women also had the option to join European congregations of women religious – where this was possible.

One of the earliest and somewhat unusual proposals to “regularize” the religious life of virgins was put forward by the Italian Jesuit Luigi Maria Sica 薛孔昭 (1814–1895) in 1855. Since so many young girls had been abandoned or saved from female infanticide and raised in orphanages by dedicated virgins, he wanted to turn them into instruments of conversion. Initially, a dozen or so girls, aged around twelve years, were assembled at the former Jesuit residence of Hengtang 橫塘 in the Kunshan 昆山 area, where they received a basic education, were required – without taking vows – to live a *vita communis* in what became known as the Shengmuyuan 聖母院 and observe a rule of discipline that had been drawn up by Sica with the approbation of Bishop Francesco Maresca 趙方濟 (1806–1855) who was a member of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Jesus Christ in Naples, and the Jesuit Visitor Pierre Fournier 伏伯祿 (1802–1855).⁴⁵ Four virgins were to live with them under the same rule and discipline.⁴⁶ In other words, the institution became the precursor of an indigenous religious congregation, which later became known as the Association of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin or Présentandines 聖母獻堂會 under the supervision of French sisters from the Helpers of the Holy Souls (Auxiliatrices des Ames du Purgatoire) 拯望會 who had arrived in Shanghai in 1867.⁴⁷

Whereas the Jesuits were able to organize indigenous religious institutions in the relative safety of the foreign concessions of Shanghai or in its vicinity, similar efforts in the interior of China carried a greater degree of risk. The work of Paul-Hubert Perny MEP 童文獻 (1818–1907) in Guizhou is, therefore, noteworthy. In the 1850s he was much involved in producing rules and regulations for Chinese priests and catechists (*ministres*). At the same time, he realized that in China only women were in a position to bring the teachings of Christ to other women. Thus, the virgins – of whom there were twelve in Guizhou in 1856 – were an obvious choice for the task of “teaching them the prayers, to mould their Christian life by extended instruction, by a kind of re-education of their thinking, their habits, their customs.”⁴⁸ Yet because the virgins, with a few exceptions, were living in isolation with their families and hence rather ignorant and essentially incapable of teaching in schools for girls, Perny decided in 1857 to assemble them in one single convent at Guiyang for dedicated training. This model community was intended to be a kind of nursery that

45 La Servièrre, Vol. 1, p. 334. The Shengmuyuan was later moved to Xujiahui 徐家匯. Fournier resided in Shanghai from 18 August 1854 to 21 November 1855. Note also that Maresca's Chinese name is given as 馬自修 in: *Elenchus Alumnorum. Decreta et documenta quæ spectant ad Collegium Sacræ Familiæ Napolis*, Shanghai: Typographia Missionis Catholicæ 1917, p. 25.

46 Sica, Jiangnan, 8 April 1855, *Annales de l'Œuvre de la Sainte-Enfance* 10 (1858), p. 218.

47 Joseph de la Servièrre SJ, “Les Vierges Présentandines du Kiang-Nan,” in: *Relations de Chine* VI (1918–1921), pp. 158–164.

48 Adrien Launay, *Histoire des missions de Chine. Mission du Kouy-Tcheou*, Vannes: Lafolye frères 1907–1908, Vol. 1, p. 428.

would in time nourish the entire province.⁴⁹ He prepared a rough outline of the rules he wanted the virgins to follow. They trained and worshipped together similar to the practices in the European religious establishments. No Christian of the one or other sex was allowed to enter the interior of the community without permission of the superiors. He expected that the expenses would be covered by the income from their work and dowries and that any surplus could be used to expand the work.⁵⁰

This was, however, no easy task because anti-Christian persecutions were particularly severe in a province that was experiencing prolonged turmoil during the so-called “Miao” Rebellion (1854–1873). Matters were complicated because the virgins were expected to work among the Miao 苗 and Zhongjia 钟家 (now called Bouyei 布依) ethnic minorities. Indeed, one MEP priest, several seminarists and catechists, including virgins lost their life during these turbulent times. Among the martyrs canonized in 2000 were two virgins who were killed in Guizhou: Agatha Lin Zhao 林昭 (1817–1858) was executed on 28 January 1858; Lucia Yi Zhenmei 易貞美 (1815–1862), a virgin from Sichuan, was beheaded in Guiyang on 19 February 1862 at the behest of the local anti-Christian military commander Tian Xingshu 田興恕. Under these conditions the elevation of the “institute of virgins” was much retarded. Louis-Simon Faurie MEP (1824–1871), the vicar apostolic of Guizhou, reported to Propaganda Fide in 1865 that attempts had been made on several occasions to encourage the virgins to lead communal lives and assemble them in a convent. Although this project could not be realized for a variety of reasons, in time the young women were required to spend two or three years in a novitiate before they were given the title of virgin.⁵¹ Given the insecurity in Guizhou as well as its remoteness, the MEP mission failed to attract any European women religious to the province in the nineteenth century. Thus, the virgins did not receive the necessary guidance and supervision. It was not until 1922 that the first group of foreign sisters arrived in the province, namely the Canadian Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Angels (天神之后傳教女修會). They assumed the direction and formation of the teaching virgins of the Society of the Sacred Heart (聖心院) which had been founded by Émile Cousin MEP (1877–1936) at Guiyang 貴陽 in 1915. Later the Canadian sisters also supervised the Sisters of the Blessed Agatha Lin which had been established in 1937.

The experience in Guizhou is indicative of the slow transition from the “institute of virgins” to the creation of female institutes of diocesan right in the hinterland of the Qing Empire. Since the development of conventual life relied on the supervision of European religious institutes, the creation of female Chinese congregations was more advanced in eastern China and in the treaty ports along the Yangzi River. Thus, in the Lazarist missions of Zhili (now Hebei), with the presence of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (仁愛修女會), the creation by Bishop Louis-Gabriel Delaplace CM 田嘉璧 (1820–1884) of the Chinese Religious of Saint Joseph (若瑟會; Josephines) in Beijing in 1872 is an example of dynamic development. The primary apostolate was religious instruction of

49 Adrien Launay, *Histoire des missions de Chine*, Vol. 1, p. 428.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 428–429. The text of the French version of the “Rule,” based on Martiliat’s *Rules* of 1744, is on pp. 429–433.

51 Adrien Launay, *Histoire des missions de Chine*, Vol. 2, pp. 529–530.

women and subsequently the running of dispensaries. This institute of diocesan right for indigenous sisters became a model that subsequently spread to other vicariates in northern China.

The arrival of new missionaries, including from the newly-established missionary congregations (Milan Foreign Missions – now PIME 米蘭外方傳教會; Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary 聖母聖心會; Society of the Divine Word 聖言會) resulted in the division and subdivision of existing vicariates apostolic. With greater accessibility of China's interior, European and North American women religious established themselves at major mission stations throughout the country during the early decades of the twentieth century. The increase of ecclesiastical circumscriptions and the presence of more female missionaries produced a proliferation of Chinese sisterhoods dedicated to conventual life. Among these, the Little Sisters of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus (德來小妹妹會) are surely particularly interesting. Inspired by the Belgian priest Vincent Lebbe 雷鳴遠 (1877–1940), fifteen Chinese Sisters of St. Joseph adopted the name Little Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus in 1928. A year later, with the authorization of Bishop Melchior Sun Dezhen CM 孫德楨 (1869–1951), they erected their mother house at Anguo 安國, Hebei. The institute combined pastoral ministry with contemplative spirituality, emphasizing Marian devotion. Subsequently a small group of Theresian Sisters established themselves at Shuiqu 水渠 near Sangzhen 桑鎮 (Xingping 興平 county) in the Prefecture Apostolic of Chowchih (Shaanxi), in charge of a dispensary and a girls' school. The prefecture had been entrusted to Chinese secular clergy in 1932. Another group came to Luoyang (Henan). Note that the Luoyang sisters were called Soeurs de Ste Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus, or Yingdehui 嬰德會. The Theresian Sisters were also involved in the formation of Sisters of Our Lady of China (中華聖母會) that had been founded in Yanggu 陽穀, Shandong, by Bishop (later Cardinal) Thomas Tian SVD 田耕莘 (1890–1967) in 1940. Since Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS; 聖神婢女傳教會) were not available to provide spiritual guidance, the bishop turned to the indigenous Little Sisters of Saint Therese. They sent a “moderator” and a novitiate mistress. But it seems that they did not perform satisfactorily. On 6 January 1941 Bishop Tian opened the novitiate at Zhaocheng 朝城. This date is now regarded as the official founding date of the congregation. The work was, however, severely disrupted during the Anti-Japanese War. In 1945 all sisters were driven out by the Communists. Bishop Thomas Niu Huiqing 牛會卿 (1895–1973) gathered them and started to continue to work with them in South China. Eventually he fled with them to Macao in 1948. From there they went to Taiwan in the early 1950s and established their motherhouse in Chiayi 嘉義. The congregation is now an international diocesan religious institute of consecrated life, dedicated to apostolic mission work.

When the Chinese “institute of virgins” had grown to a reasonable size by the middle of the nineteenth century, pressure was exerted on the virgins to form indigenous religious congregations. Certainly, in the late nineteenth century, in the course of their work with foreign sisters in dispensaries, hospitals, schools or orphanages, some Catholic virgins expressed the desire to live in a communal environment. However, by no means all celibate women were willing to accept the discipline of institutionalized religious life. During her research in the MEP archives, Dr Li Ji discovered letters from three sisters of the

Du 杜 family in southern Manchuria, written to their former local priest Dominique-Maurice Pourquié MEP 林貌理 (1812–1871) who had returned to France in 1870. They were complaining about the future bishop Joseph-André Boyer 包若瑟 (1824–1887) who had established a convent of the Sacred Heart of Mary (聖母聖心會) for Chinese women religious and insisted that the Du sisters join it. However, the three virgins did not want to enter the convent because they were not willing to observe the rules. Moreover, an active religious life did not suit them. They preferred a contemplative role, something that virgins had traditionally been expected to adopt within the confines of family households. Consequently, they were prepared to join the Discalced Carmelite Nuns (加爾默羅跣足女修會) who had come from France to establish a convent in Shanghai in 1869 and were willing to accept Chinese women.⁵²

The reluctance to join a convent that was intended to become involved in apostolic works was no doubt based on personal preferences. We should, however, not underestimate the cultural differences between Chinese believers and foreign missionaries that persisted and were even aggravated by the changing political situation and the growth of national consciousness in China after 1900. Especially after the 1911 Revolution, tensions between Chinese and foreign priests became more pronounced, often focusing on disputes over missionary power.⁵³ But as the examples from Shanxi indicate, Catholic virgins, too, became involved in such struggles. In early 1913 the Italian Franciscan Ugolino Arcari 雷驚 (警) 世 (1885–1963) spoke of a “revolution” in the orphanage at the important rural station of Dong’ergou 洞兒溝 over control by the newly arrived foreign sisters and the pressure on the local virgins to work as evangelists. As Henrietta Harrison points out,

*The new emphasis on evangelism brought huge changes in the lives of these women. Evangelism required a drastic reordering of their understanding of Christian life, from an emphasis on prayer and personal salvation to a more outward-looking focus; many found the transition very hard.*⁵⁴

Yet there was more to the discontent in the orphanage. The unhappiness among the virgins stemmed also from the attempts by the newly arrived European sisters, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (瑪利亞方濟各傳教女修會), “to position themselves as the religious superiors of the Chinese virgins.” The Chinese women objected to the French mother superior’s insistence on obedience and humility and consequently provoked a great deal of conflict.

Ultimately, the virgins succeeded where the Chinese priests had always failed, presumably because as women they were not a threat to the male church hierarchy:

52 For a detailed analysis of the letters and background discussion, see Li Ji, “Becoming Faithful: Christianity, Literacy, and Female Consciousness in Northeast China, 1830–1930,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan 2009, chapter 8.

53 In this connection, the activities of the Belgian Lazarist priest Vincent Lebbe 雷鳴遠 (1877–1940) in support of the Chinese clergy in the face of French missionary opposition come to mind.

54 Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2013, p. 133.

*over the next few years the foreign mother superior left Shanxi altogether and a new Chinese religious order was set up for the sworn virgins.*⁵⁵

Presumably, this is a reference to the Chinese Sisters of Christian Doctrine (貞女傳信教授會) who were founded by Bishop Agapito Fiorentini OFM 鳳朝瑞 (1866–1941) in 1922. They directed schools, dispensaries, homes for the aged, and orphanages.

While increasing numbers of celibate Chinese Catholic women were brought together in indigenous religious communities, some of the active foreign missionary institutes considered accepting Chinese women into their congregations. However, certain Western priests objected to the creation of hybrid communities because it would impede the development of a genuine indigenous church. Because Chinese sisters joining Western religious institutes were expected to wear European habits, one Capuchin friar referred to them as religious “with crippled feet and European bonnets.”⁵⁶ The Steyl missionary Georg Maria Stenz 薛田資 (1869–1928) felt that Chinese sisters in foreign religious garb would be out of place in Chinese society. They should wear a distinct form of Chinese dress.⁵⁷ Actually, he was strongly opposed to the presence of ill-prepared foreign women religious in China.

*What are the house Sisters to do out here who can only cook and wash and sweep well? What are the Sisters to do who come out in older years and have never in their life learned another language? Why [do we need] these half-trained Sisters who know a little about teaching, about medical care, about this and that?*⁵⁸

Stenz is no doubt exaggerating somewhat, but further research is required to determine whether the Western sisters in general at that time had the expertise, temperament and preparation for work in a markedly different cultural environment.

As the decision of the American Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods (主顧修女會) indicates, some foreign women’s institutes felt that the cultural differences between Western women religious and Chinese virgins were too great to accept the latter into their congregation at Kaifeng. One Providence Sister of the Kaifeng mission in the mid-1920s insisted on piety as a decisive and sufficient condition. This was, however, rejected by the influential Sister Marie Gratia 蓋夏 (secular name: Josephine Luking; 1885–1964) because the virgins (colloquially called *shouzhen guniang* 守貞姑娘)

55 Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse and Other Tales*, p. 134.

56 Lorenz Bollig OFM Cap, “Eine Lebens- und Gewissensfrage der Chinamission,” in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 16 (1926), p. 65.

57 Georg Maria Stenz SVD, “Zur Missionsmethode und –lage in China,” in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 15 (1925), p. 201.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 205 note 17. The debate whether Chinese women should join European congregations or form their own indigenous religious communities arose in connection with the foundation of the Oblates of the Holy Family (聖家修女會) by Bishop Augustin Henninghaus SVD 韓甯鎬 (1862–1939) at Yanzhou 兗州, South Shandong, in 1910. For other aspects of the debate and a brief history of the Oblates, see R. G. Tiedemann, “The Formation of Chinese Diocesan Religious Congregations and Sisterhoods in the Late Qing: Some Preliminary Observations on an Elusive Phenomenon,” in: Rachel Lu Yan – Philip Vanhaelemeersch (eds.), *Silent Force: Native Converts in the Catholic China Mission*, Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, K.U. Leuven 2009, pp. 49–56.

*were too poorly educated and too physically handicapped by their bound feet to be able to perform the task each member of the Providence Sisters, as a teaching order, was expected to contribute to the Society.*⁵⁹

According to Maria Jaschok, this was an issue common in many missions, namely whether the foreign Sisters should adapt to the local culture or continue to live in China according to the customs of the motherhouse in the West (in this case the United States).⁶⁰ The Providence Sisters decided, therefore, to establish a Chinese society, distinct from the foreign religious community. As one American Sister later explained:

*There seems to be an ingrained hatred of foreigners and their ways in the Chinese. In their own Communities they would be happy with their own customs of housing, clothes, food, etc. The foreigners would be healthier and happier not to have to go "native."*⁶¹

It was, therefore, decided to establish the indigenous Providence Sister-Catechists in 1929, under the protection of the Italian vicar apostolic Noè Giuseppe Tacconi PIME 譚維新 (1873–1942). Still, where the foreign and Chinese had to share the same premises, the American Providence Sisters found it difficult to adapt to local customs and especially to the more primitive Chinese living conditions.

*Cleanliness of the kitchen and cooking utensils, observation of hygiene as well as the tradition of eating together and paying attention to table etiquette all became matters for reflection and, to a certain extent, accounted for the practice of segregated food preparation and eating.*⁶²

While cultural differences were difficult to overcome and relations between Chinese and foreign sisters were sometimes less than harmonious, many foreign women's congregations nevertheless admitted Chinese vocations into their ranks. It would obviously be tedious to list all the Western congregations that accepted Chinese women.⁶³ Two somewhat unusual examples may suffice. The Discalced Carmelites from France had accepted Chinese women following their arrival in Shanghai in February 1869. It is to be noted that the Carmelite Nuns were the first of the few contemplative orders to establish monasteries in China. Local vocations came mainly from fervent Shanghai families who had been Christian for several generations. The rather more rigorous religious observance as well as the penitential, solitary and contemplative life of Carmel is particularly noteworthy. Perhaps it is not surprising that for several of the first Chinese postulants the life of Carmel was too hard. They had to give it up and return to their families or accept a less arduous religious

59 Maria Jaschok – Shui Jingjun, *Women, Religion, and Space in China: Islamic Mosques & Daoist Temples, Catholic Convents & Chinese Virgins*, New York: Routledge 2011, p. 113. The first American sisters arrived in Kaifeng in 1920.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Quoted in Jaschok – Shui, *Women, Religion, and Space in China*, p. 115.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 118. In 1948, some of the Catechist Sisters went with the American Sisters of Providence from Kaifeng to Taiwan where they became an independent religious congregation in 1962. They are now known as Missionary Sisters of Providence 主顧傳教修女會 (MSP), with convents in Taipei, Taichung, Shalu, and Chiayi.

63 The number of professed Chinese sisters and postulants in each foreign congregation of women religious can be gleaned from *Les Missions de Chine*, Seizième Année (1940–1941), Shanghai 1942.

observance. Only those who had shown that they could follow all the customary exercises of French monasteries were admitted to the novitiate.⁶⁴

The other unusual example concerns American Franciscan Sisters entering a Chinese sisterhood. The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family (Dubuque), who had arrived in the Vicariate Apostolic of Chowtsun 周村監牧區 (Shandong) in 1931, were prepared to accept Chinese vocations from the start. When the American and Chinese Franciscan Sisters were forced to leave for the United States because of the Communist advance in Shandong, Sister M. Leola 李芝芳 (Theresa Catherine Pottebaum; 1893–1979) and Sister M. Hubertine (Cecilia Sadie Rempe; 1899–1994) decided to stay in China and with their Shandong postulants. They were accepted by the Franciscan Sisters of Our Sorrowful Mother (聖母痛苦方濟女修會), a Chinese religious congregation of diocesan right that the Italian vicar apostolic Raffaele Angelo Palazzi 柏長青 OFM (1886–1961) had founded at Hengyang (Hunan) in 1939. Having escaped from mainland China and spent some time in Hong Kong and Macao, the congregation left for the United States in 1952. This American-Chinese congregation is now known as the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows (聖母痛苦方濟傳教女修會), with administrative headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon and missions in Hong Kong, Taiwan, British Columbia, and the United States. Apostolic works include catechetics, retreat ministry, education, pastoral ministry, and care of the sick and underprivileged.⁶⁵

The creation of Chinese religious congregations was at least in part an attempt to regularize the lives of Catholic virgins. Yet at the end of the missionary era, the so-called “institute of virgins” still played an important part, especially in rural China. The Catholic virgins continued to undertake many essential tasks of the rural apostolate: providing basic medical care, educating the poor, teaching about Christ, and assisting the clergy. Several missionary accounts are full of praise of these zealous unwed Christian women, yet the foreign priests also tried to provide guidance, supervision and control. In certain vicariates strict apostolic “Rules for Virgins” were produced and annual retreats organized for them.⁶⁶ Still, because these unwed women did not live in convents but were scattered across particular jurisdictions, they had achieved a fair degree of autonomy. As Maria Jaschok has found in Kaifeng, the virgins interacted with the Sisters on occasion, but very few entered the Kaifeng-based convent of the Chinese Sister Catechists. Most chose to do their religious work away from the Providence Sisters, continuing their lives as celibate women in the local tradition of *shouzhen guniang*.⁶⁷ Indeed, as was the case in the Jiangnan region in the early 1840s, the intrusion of foreigners into the established patterns of religious life in Catholic villages could provoke tensions in later decades as well. Writing from the large rural mission station of Poli 坡里, South Shandong, one European sister hinted that there had been friction between the established virgins and the newly arrived Missionary Sisters

64 Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *Christian Monks on Chinese Soil: A History of Monastic Missions to China*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press 2016, “A Garden of Tiny Flowers in Chinese Soil” in Chapter 2.

65 For historical details, see Donalda Kehoe OSF, *The China Story: Franciscan Ministry, 1931–1949*, Dubuque, Iowa: Sisters of St. Francis 2010, pp. 175–207.

66 For positive reports in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Tiedemann, “A Necessary Evil,” pp. 96–98.

67 Jaschok *et al.*, p. 106.

Servants of the Holy Spirit from Europe shortly after 1900: “Relations with the Chinese virgins are now also much better than in the beginning.”⁶⁸ At least initially, certain cultural differences were apparent between the European sisters and the Chinese virgins. For instance, the foreign sisters complained that virgins disturbed their observance of *clausura* (i.e., the privacy of cloistered life).⁶⁹ The practice of foot binding represents another aspect of cultural incongruence: at the beginning of the twentieth century the virgins in charge of the Poli orphanage for girls continued to insist on binding the girls’ feet, something the German sisters had to reluctantly accept.⁷⁰ In the words of Louis-Marie Kervyn CICM, the consecrated unwed women continued to be a “necessary evil.”⁷¹

Conclusion

It was not my intention to present a comprehensive history of Chinese women religious. Much more space and detailed archival research would be required to produce a full and definitive account. The records show, however, that the long and sometimes tortuous road toward the creation of indigenous institutes of women religious did not produce any fully recognized indigenous female congregations before 1949.⁷² Instead, a great variety of Chinese Catholic religious communities of women had come into being, ranging from rather loose pious unions of virgins to a few properly constituted institutes of diocesan right, on the verge of full papal approbation. The transitional process from the one to the other awaits further investigation. Thus, in each particular case of the seventy or so Chinese Catholic sisterhoods⁷³ there is a need to establish whether the specific association in question had a common uniform habit, a name or title in Chinese, and fulfilled other requirements demanded by the Sacred Congregation of the Affairs of Religious (now known as the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, in some cases nothing much is known about certain associations.⁷⁴ It is clear, though, that Chinese Catholic women who wanted to lead celibate lives had several options: they could join pious unions of virgins, many of which

68 Sister Blandina (Anna Mairon) SSsP to Mother Superior Theresia, Poli, 20 October 1905, quoted in Richard Hartwich SVD, *Steyle Missionare in China*. Vol. II: *Bischof A. Henninghaus ruft Steyle Schwestern 1904–1910*, Nettetal: Steyle Verlag, p. 197.

69 Sister Dolorosa (Luise Schotenröhr) SSsP to Mother Theresia, Yanzhou, 24 October 1905, in: Hartwich, *Steyle Missionare in China*, Vol. II, p. 132.

70 Sister Blandina to Mother Theresia, Poli, 12 November 1906, in Hartwich, *Steyle Missionare in China*, Vol. II, p. 199.

71 Louis-Marie Kervyn, *Méthode de l’apostolat de Chine*, Hongkong: Imprimerie de la Société des Missions-Etrangères 1911, p. 559.

72 In other words, during the missionary era in China none had received a completely positive approbation (starting with the decree of commendation or *decretum laudis*, followed by the decree of pontifical approbation of the congregation as well as approbation of its constitution) to make them institutes of pontifical right.

73 For a rather basic description of the female Chinese religious unions that could be identified, see R.G. Tiedemann, *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China: From the 16th to the 20th Century*, Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe 2009, Part III: “Roman Catholic: Chinese Religious Communities of Women (Associations of Diocesan Right).”

74 R.G. Tiedemann, “Catholic Religious Communities of Chinese Women,” in: idem (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. Two: 1800–Present*, Leiden: Brill 2010, pp. 587–599.

progressed into congregations of diocesan right; they could join foreign religious communities of women or they could remain unaffiliated and celibate in their family household. Indeed, the traditional “institute of virgins” continued to be an important feature of the Catholic Church in China right up to the end of the missionary era.

After 1949, some of the mainland Chinese sisterhoods found new homes in Hong Kong and Taiwan and subsequently joined the international community of Catholic women religious as societies of apostolic life, such as, for example, the Missionary Sisters Oblates of the Holy Family (聖家獻女傳教修會),⁷⁵ founded in 1910 in southern Shandong, or the Sisters Announcers of the Lord (顯主女修會), established in the Salesian mission in Guangdong in 1936. Perhaps more intriguing is the reappearance of female religious associations on the mainland, many of them operating under names that are familiar from the pre-1949 period.⁷⁶ Thus, the Oblates of the Holy Family are present again in Yanggu county, Shandong. However, as we know from other aspects of Chinese history, identical names do not necessarily imply continuity of organization. Perhaps even more interesting is the adoption of institutional names by mainland religious associations that suggest a link with European or North American female religious institutes. Of course, in China today, there are officially only diocesan communities of women religious, because no national or international congregations have been officially registered. Here, too, much more research is required. In conclusion, I must admit that the above rather brief outline obviously reflects my rather inadequate understanding of an important religious phenomenon.

75 Wu Ziqing 吳子清 (ed.), *Tianzhujiao Shengjia xian nü chuanjiao xiuhui chuanghui 96 zhounian qian Tai 50 zhounian jinian tekan* 天主教聖家獻女傳教修會創會 96 周年遷台 50 周年紀念特刊 [Special issue on the 96th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation of Missionary Sisters Oblates of the Holy Family and the 50th anniversary of the move to Taiwan], Taipei: Tianzhujiao shengjia xian nü chuanjiao xiuhui 2006.

76 On the reappearance of religious congregations, see Jerrold Heyndrickx CICM, “Le rétablissement de congrégations religieuses dans la République populaire de Chine,” in: *Courrier Verbiest* 13 (December 2001), pp. 18-21; Beatrice Leung – Patricia Wittberg, “Catholic Religious Orders in China: Adaptation and Power,” in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (March 2004) 1, pp. 67-82.

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Katharina Feith, Katharina Wenzel-Teuber

Assistant editor and layout:

Eveline Warode

Web editor:

Jan Kwee

Collaborators of this issue:

Sr. Jacqueline Mulberge SSPS
Fr. David Streit SVD

Calligraphy:

Yang Xusheng

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Contact:

China-Zentrum e.V.
Arnold-Janssen-Str. 22
53757 Sankt Augustin
Germany
Phone: +49 (0) 2241 237 432
Fax: +49 (0) 2241 205 841
www.china-zentrum.de

Bank account:

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