

News Update on Religion and Church in China December 1, 2013 – March 19, 2014

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2014, No. 1, pp. 3-15) covered the period September 1 – November 24, 2013.

December 1, 2013 and February 4, 2014:

Media report on construction boom of giant outdoor Buddhas as tourist attractions



The Buddha statue of Lushan is placed on top of a Buddhist monastery and including the pedestals it has a total height of 208 meters.
Foto: Zgpdsz 2011, Wikimedia Commons.

According to a story in the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), tourism bureaus and real estate developers have been engaged in a race to build ever-higher Buddha statues following the success of the Lingshan Grand Buddha, completed in 1996. The colossal Buddha (88 meter high) attracted 3.8 million visitors in 2013 and brought in more than 1.2 billion yuan in revenue from tourists. Competition in the Buddha construction business is tough. According to the *Guangzhou Xin Zhoukan* (*New Weekly*), the Nanjing firm Aerosun (Hangtian chenguang 航天晨光) is the leader in the field. The firm plans 10 such projects throughout all of China for 2014, and it has already built giant Buddhas in many Asian countries and in the U.S.A. The firm’s largest Buddha to date is the 108 meter high Guanyin Buddha of Sanya (Hainan). A representative of the firm said that while in countries such as Japan, Thailand or Bhutan the faithful contribute to the building of Buddha statues out of a genuine sense of religious piety, in China the building of such statues is motivated much more by touristic aspects and competition for the tourist dollar. According to the SCMP, there are often tensions between the Bud-

dha attraction developers and monks or residents who differ over ownership of a site. In one such incident, the paper says, Buddhist monks attempted to take charge of the Great Buddha of Lushan (Henan Province) in order to admit people free of charge. The statue, which measures 208 meter high (including its pedestals) was completed by a developer in 2008 at a cost of 1.2 billion yuan. The newspaper also reported on local complaints that the 71-meter-high Giant Buddha of Leshan, built in the 8th century, suffered greatly from competition from a theme park with 3,000 replicas of famous Buddha statues from around the world (*SCMP* Feb. 4, 2014; *Xin zhoukan* 新周刊 Dec. 1, 2013, No. 408).

December 4, 2013 – March 16, 2014:

Six Tibetans immolate themselves in acts of protest

Tibet.net – the website of the Tibetan government in exile, has reported that all six men died from their burns. Three were monks, one a former monk and two others were fathers of families. The self-immolations took place in the Tibetan districts of Sichuan (3), Qinghai (2) and Gansu (1). With these deaths, the total number of Tibetans who have burned themselves to death within the People's Republic of China since 2011 has now risen to 127 or 128 (the variation is due to conflicting reports by www.tibet.net and www.savetibet.org).

December 4, 2013:

Center for Religion and Chinese Society (CRCS) announces “Spatial Study of Chinese Religions and Society (2014–2016)”

The project is an extension of the spatial study of Chinese Christianity to the study of Buddhism, Islam and Daoism in mainland China. Among other things, the project will complete, validate and enter spatial data on the sites of these religions into a public online system, it said in a notice. In general, the project aims to promote empirical research on Chinese religions and to develop global cooperation in this area. The study is being carried on jointly by the CRCS at Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana) and the China Data Center at the University of Michigan. Accurate knowledge of the religious landscape in China is very limited since in the past it has been entirely dependent on the data made available by the government, said Yang Fenggang from CRCS in an interview granted to the *Imperial Valley News* (Jan. 14, 2014; www.chinadatacenter.org/Announcement/AnnouncementContent.aspx?id=475).

December 11, 2013:

Death of Bishop Paul Liu Jinghe of Tangshan – Dispute with the government over his place of burial

Bishop Paul Liu Jinghe, retired Bishop of Tangshan, Hebei Province, died on December 11 at the age of nearly 93. He was one of only three priests who had survived the devastating Tangshan earthquake of July 1976, in which 240,000 people lost their lives.

Bishop Liu was born on December 26, 1920. He completed his theological studies in Beijing. In 1945 he was ordained a priest, taking up pastoral service in his home diocese. Between 1940 and 1960 he was imprisoned three times, and was later detained in a re-education camp from 1970–1979. On December 21, 1981, he was ordained a bishop without a Papal mandate, although he was later recognized by Pope

Benedict XVI on May 8, 2008. In 2010 he retired for reasons of health, and that same year he refused to take part in an illicit episcopal ordination.

Following his death, a bitter dispute broke out between the government authorities and the local Church concerning his place of burial. Bishop Liu had stipulated that he wished to be buried at the Lulong Cemetery – in which the first Bishop of the diocese, the Dutch Lazarist missionary Msgr. Ernst Geurts, had been buried in 1940. However, the Lulong Cemetery had been destroyed in the 1950s and has since been used as farmland. In 1993, with the permission of the government, Bishop Liu reburied the bones of Bishop Geurts and the other clergy in one corner of the field. Several times he demanded that the government return the site.

On December 17, the Diocese of Tangshan announced that Bishop Liu would only be buried once the government had finally returned the old cemetery property to the Church. A day later, the priests of the diocese were forced to attend a session in the offices of the local Religious Affairs Bureau. The website of the diocese was temporarily blocked and the mobile phones of all the priests and sisters were placed under close surveillance. After days of struggle, the government finally bought a piece of land in the village of Beigang in Qianxi County as a replacement for the former Lulong Cemetery. The clergy expressed their willingness to accept that solution, and Bishop Liu was buried in the new cemetery on Christmas Eve. – The Diocese of Tangshan is currently led by Bishop Fang Jianping (*AsiaNews* Dec. 19, 2013; *Fides* Dec. 19, 2013; *UCAN* Dec. 18, 26, 2013; www.chinacath.org/news/china/2013-12-19/25202.html).

December 15, 2013 to February 14, 2014:

According to official Chinese figures, 47 people have died in four clashes in Xinjiang

The violent clashes occurred in the counties Shufu (December 15: 16 deaths) and Shache / Yarkant (December 30: 8 dead), both in the administrative district of Kashgar, and in the counties Xinhe / Toksu (January 24: 12 dead) and Wushi / Uqturpan (February 14: 11 dead), both in the government district of Aksu. According to the reports, of the 47 dead, 45 were identified as attackers and two were from among the police. The existing reports of the official government news agency *Xinhua* for the latter three incidents, spoke of “religious extremism” and “terrorism” (*Los Angeles Times* Dec. 16, 2013; *South China Morning Post* Dec. 30, 2013; *Xinhua* Dec. 30, 2013; Jan. 26, Feb. 16, 2014).

December 15, 2013:

Pope Francis among the ten “Key Figures of the year 2013”

During the 15th China International Press Forum in Hainan, an anonymous poll of 50 media representatives from all over China placed Pope Francis number three in a list of the “Top Ten” most important people of 2013. The list also included President Rohani of Iran, President Putin, the former Egyptian President Mursi and Nelson Mandela. This marks the first time that a religious personality was included in the list (*Fides* Jan. 7, 2014; www.news.gmw.cn/2013-12/26/content_9928264.htm – Website of the official daily newspaper *Guangming ribao*, one of the co-organizers).

December 17, 2013; February 13, 2014:

Reports on new forms of extra-judicial detention

According to reports by Amnesty International, authorities in China are making increasing use of unofficial so-called “black jails,” i.e., enforced drug rehabilitation centers and “brainwashing centers,” to replace the system of “Re-education Through Labor” camps. Since these detention centers have no legal basis whatsoever and the authorities deny their existence, the risk of human rights violations is even greater than in the labor camps, thus Amnesty International.

On February 13, the *Xin jing bao* (*Beijing News*) revealed the existence of so-called “reprimand centers for abnormal petitioners” (fei zhengchang shangfang xunjie zhongxin 非正常上访训诫中心) in Henan Province, in which the methods of “24 hour non-stop reprimand, warning and education” are used. The paper indicated that, among other sources, it was relying on reports gleaned from the online social networks. The following day, the official news agency *Xinhua* reported that the province government of Henan had sent teams to examine the allegations. Should such centers be discovered, they will be closed and any illegal acts will be punished according to the law, it said (Amnesty International Dec. 17, 2013; *South China Morning Post* Feb. 13, 2014; *Xinhua* Feb. 14, 2014; www.bjnews.com.cn Feb. 13, 2014).

December 25, 2013:

Packed Christmas services throughout China

Once again, this year’s Christmas services have drawn thousands of people into Christian churches throughout the country. In Beijing’s Cathedral, the “South Church,” the Christmas Masses were also projected on large screens outside the church. Christmas also provided the opportunity to help those in need. Thus, many parishes organized visits to poor families, to the elderly and to the sick, in nursing homes and orphanages. At their 9th annual Christmas Party for Charity in Shijiazhuang on December 14, Jinde Charities raised 500,000 yuan (about 59,000 euros). The money goes to children of poor families, children with disabilities and children with AIDS, in order to help integrate them back into the classroom.

According to a report by the *Global Times*, in the midst of the Christmas commercialization, which is ubiquitous in all major Chinese cities, there are more and more Christian house churches whose members are out on the streets inviting passers-by to come in and join them for worship. Thus, in the major cities many church services, to which non-Christians are invited, are being held in houses and office buildings as well as commercial spaces. However, once again such open proselytizing on the streets is inevitably drawing the attention of the police, as the report indicates (*Fides* Dec. 20, 2013; *Global Times* Dec. 19, 2013; *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Jan. 4, 2014; English.news.cn Dec. 26, 2013).

December 28, 2013:

Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) decides to abolish labor camps

The Committee voted to repeal the 1957 legal document and its amendments of 1979, on which the whole system of labor camps was based. Their decision took effect the same day on which the measure was passed. According to the decision, all sentences handed down before the abolition of “re-education through labor” remain valid, although those currently serving “re-education through labor”

sentences will be released and will not need to make up the rest of their sentences (www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/2013-12/30/content_1821974.htm).

The actual political decision to abolish the system of “re-education through labor” camps (*laodong jiao-yang* 劳动教养) had already been taken by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China at its last Party Congress in November 2013. The system allowed sentences of up to four years to be imposed at police discretion – without trial. Among those especially affected by such sentences were those persecuted on religious grounds (see: *RCTC* 2013, No. 2, p. 11; 2014, No. 1, p. 14).

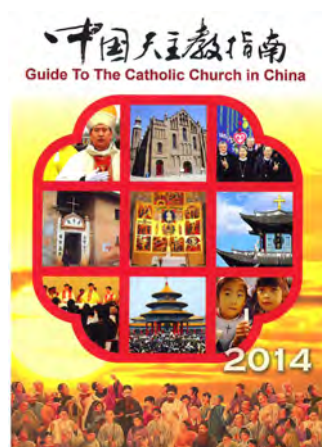
December 28, 2013:

Standing Committee of the NPC passes resolution to amend Family Policy

According to this decision, a couple in the future may have two children if one of the parents is an only child. According to the family planning policy introduced in 1979, couples in the cities were allowed only one child, and those in rural areas a further child if their firstborn had been a girl. Exceptions were also allowed, among others, if both husband and wife were themselves only children. According to government controlled media, the one child policy has prevented some 400 million births since the law was adopted in 1979. The *South China Morning Post* reported that despite the welcome relaxation, which is expected to affect around ten million couples, there is also criticism of the fact that the state continues to hold on to the principle of deciding itself how many children families may have. The Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) has asked provincial governments to bring their regulations on family planning into line with this newest decision, while continuing to pay attention to local demographics. As of February 25, 2014, the governments of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Anhui had already implemented this change in directives. The change in the family planning policy was adopted by the CPC Central Committee at its most recent party congress on November 12, 2013. On December 30, the Central Committee and the State Council jointly published a political guideline under the title: “Opinions on the re-adjustment and improvement of the family planning policy” 关于调整完善生育政策的意见 (*South China Morning Post* Dec. 28, 2013; *Xinhua* Dec. 28,30, 2013; Jan. 17; Feb. 21, 25, 2014). See also: *RCTC* 2014, No. 1, p. 14.

December 28, 2013:

New “Guide to the Catholic Church in China”



The 8th edition of the *Guide to the Catholic Church in China* has been published in Singapore. The 642-page bilingual Guide (English-Chinese) is a useful reference work for people who travel or visit the Catholic Church in Mainland China.

The China Catholic Communication Centre in Singapore is publishing the *Guide to the Catholic Church in China 2014*, which was written by Fr. Jean Charbonnier. This is the first new update of the Guide since the last edition came out in 2008. The book contains a lot of new information and maps as well as photos of new churches and links to Church related websites (www.zhonglian.org).

January 2, 2014:

State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) publishes its work report for 2013 and the key activities planned for 2014

One of the Bureau's major focuses for 2014 is the continued legalization process of religious activities. After ten years, the "Regulations on Religious Affairs" – the basic state legal document for this sector, which was issued by the Council of State in 2004, are to be evaluated and recommendations are to be prepared for the future. Among new documents planned for the future, one will affect, for example, the relations of the religions with individuals and groups outside of China: all national bodies of the various religions, with the support of the SARA, are required to draw up suitable guidelines for their members traveling abroad. In the 2014 list of the SARA's key activities, the focuses for the various religions remain essentially the same (www.sara.gov.cn Jan. 2, 2014).

January 4, 2014:

14 dead during a stampede at a mosque in Ningxia

According to reports by *Xinhua*, the stampede at the Beida Mosque in Xiji County occurred during the distribution of traditional religious food at a memorial service for a deceased Muslim leader. According to the regional party committee, the accident was the result of poor organization and management. The director of the mosque's administration committee was arrested, the head of the county government was suspended from office, and the director of the county Bureau of Religious Affairs as well as a deputy director of the county's public security bureau were removed from their posts (*Xinhua* Jan. 5, 9, 2014).

January 8, 2014:

House church members from Eastern China involved in a crash while visiting Gansu – Reports in Catholic media

Three people died in the accident and three were injured, as a vehicle with members of two house churches plunged into a chasm. The victims were from two house churches which were involved in an exchange program. They came from Sushan in Hangzhou in the Eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang and from the Tibetan village of Tielou, County Wen, City of Nanlong in the Northwestern province of Gansu. The report was carried by *UCAN* on its Chinese language website. The group was on its way to Tielou when the accident occurred. The website of the newspaper *Xinde (Faith)*, which belongs to the official Catholic Church in mainland China, picked up the report and published a call to its readers to pray for the dead and injured (www.chinacatholic.org Jan. 12, 2014; www.china.ucanews.com Jan. 10, 2014).

January 9, 2014:

Discovery of "Nestorian" grave niche in Longmen Grottoes confirmed by experts – Thought to be earliest Christian graves ever found in China

Already back in 2009, the archeologist Jiao Jianhui discovered a group of 16 small burial niches carved into the rock wall and clustered together off to one side of the Buddhist Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang,

Henan Province. One of the niches was decorated with a Cross. Many similar niches in the Longmen Grottoes have been identified as graves from the Tang Dynasty (618–907) used for the remains or ashes of deceased Buddhists. They are decorated with comparable Buddhist symbols. Since the cross found in 2009 is similar to other known “Nestorians” crosses, which have been dated to the Tang Dynasty, Jiao Jianhui has concluded that he had discovered a new group of Tang Dynasty Nestorian burials. Jiao Jianhui’s conclusions have now been confirmed and they have also been announced in the government media. The East Syrian Church, also known as the Assyrian Church of the East (“Nestorians,” Chinese *jingjiao* 景教 or “Doctrine of the Light”) was the first Christian Church to arrive in China as early as the 7th century (UCAN Jan. 17, 2014; www.china.ucanews.com Jan. 22, 23, 2014; www.news.xinhuanet.com Jan. 12, 2014).

January 9 and February 4, 2014:

Dalai Lama: Continuance of Tibet as part of the People’s Republic of China is of “mutual benefit” – provided that real autonomy is granted

In a January 9th address to Indian Buddhists in Nagpur, the Dalai Lama said that since Tibet is a backward (state), it is in its own economic interest to remain part of China, provided that China grants Tibet “meaningful autonomy” in areas such as culture, religion and environment. He repeated that statement in a February 4th address at the Martin Luther Christian University in the northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya (ANI Jan. 9, 2014; *India Today Online* Feb. 4, 2014).

January 9, 2014:

Chinese Catholic newspaper reports on protests by Japanese religious communities against Prime Minister’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine

In a controversial December 26, 2013 visit, Japan’s Prime Minister Abe Shinzō went to the Yasukuni Shrine, in which the fallen from several wars as well as a number of convicted war criminals from the time of World War II are remembered. Especially China and Korea both protested against his visit. *Xinde (Faith)* reported that Japanese religious communities also protested against the visit. According to *Xinde*, between December 26 and 28 the following religious groups representatives released statements condemning the visit: Auxiliary Bishop Michael Matsuura Goro, Chairman of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Japanese Bishops’ Conference and representing Japanese Catholics; the Japanese Baptist Federation; the Japanese Christian Council and the umbrella organization representing the coalition of the Shinshu (that is Amida)-Buddhists, also joined by the Nishi Honganji and Higashi Honganji temples in Kyoto. The Catholic statement said that by his visit Abe was whitewashing Japan’s war against China, in Asia and the Pacific, and was trampling underfoot the 20 million victims of that war as well as those who to this day still suffer from the bitter memories of those days. The Baptists expressed concern that repeated visits to the shrine by Japanese Prime Ministers were actually contributing to Japan’s sense of denial of responsibility for the war – something which could lead to new wars. According to *Xinde*, all of the statements spoke of the visits to the shrine by the Prime Minister as a violation of the clear-cut separation of church and state laid out in the Japanese Constitution. *Xinde* also pointed out that in 2006 the Commission for Social Affairs of the Japanese Bishops’ Conference had called upon all Japanese Catholics not to visit the shrine (*Xinde* Jan. 9, 2014; see also UCAN Nov. 22, 2006).

January 9, 2014:

Film director Zhang Yimou hit with record fine for violation of the 'one child' policy

According to *Xinhua*, the local Family Planning Bureau of Binhu, Wuxi City, ordered the internationally renowned film director and his wife to pay a “social maintenance fee” of 7.48 million yuan (about 875,000 euros), after they had admitted last December to having two sons and a daughter. A second article later reported that the couple had paid the fine. The *South China Morning Post* noted that this was the largest fine ever imposed on a Chinese couple for having violated the one-child policy (*South China Morning Post* Jan. 9, 2014; *Xinhua* Jan. 9; Feb. 7, 2014).

January 12–17, 2014:

Diocese of Fenyang (Shanxi) organizes first formation course for divorced and older unmarried Catholics

According to the article in the Catholic newspaper *Xinde*, the aim of the course is to help people discover the reasons why they have failed in their past emotional relationships in order to help them avoid failure in the future. Course participants are helped towards personal growth through self-reflection, prayer, sharing and group therapy. In addition, course leaders provided information about the canonical situation of the divorced. They hope to prevent divorced Catholics from leaving the Church due to disappointment at not being able to fully participate in the sacraments. They stressed that God's love is always with us. The leadership team included Fr. Liu Huwei, who had studied ethics of family and marriage in Rome, and Sister Yu Jie, who is a psychological consultant (*Xinde* Feb. 13, 2014).

In China, the number of divorces has increased significantly, even among Catholics. In August of 2013, the Diocese of Fenyang opened its first family outreach clinic to help people deal with family related problems (see *RCTC* 2013, No. 4, p. 10).

January 22, 2014:

Dedication of the Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore

According to Archbishop William Goh of Singapore, the goal of the Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore (CTIS) is the theological formation of the laity in a “systematic” manner. The reasons for the Church's doctrine need to be explained in ways that will help the laity understand the Catholic faith as “credible and reasonable.” The Institute was inaugurated on January 22 in the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, among others, and courses began on January 27 with a total of more than 100 students. According to *AsiaNews*, the Institute constitutes an important contribution to the development of the Church in Singapore, which with its 200,000 Catholics accounts for about 5% of the population (Buddhists represent about 43%, Christians 18%, Muslims 15%, Hindus and Daoists 11.5%). Archbishop Goh said that it is a strange “anomaly” that, despite the generally high level of education among the population, including Catholics, in matters of theology and Church doctrine a widespread attitude of “distrust” prevails. For this reason – thus the Archbishop – it is important that those who occupy public offices and positions of responsibility or are involved in education, “are directed by the Church teaching” and will be formed to hand on the Catholic faith and Christian doctrine in an “orthodox” manner. The Institute's Rector, Fr. James Yeo, stressed that the theological course is intended primarily for Catholics in Singapore, but that it is hoped that it will later be able to welcome students from “surrounding nations” as well (*AsiaNews* Feb. 8, 2014).

January 26, 2014:

Pope Francis sends Lunar New Year greetings to people throughout the Far East

After the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said: "In the coming days, millions of people who live in the Far East or who are scattered in various parts of the world, among them Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese, celebrate the Lunar New Year. I wish all of them a life full of joy and hope. May the irrepressible yearning for fraternity, which dwells in their hearts, find in the intimacy of the family a privileged place to be discovered, educated and realized. This will be a valuable contribution to the building of a more humane world, where peace reigns" (*Fides* Jan. 27, 2014)

January 28, 2014:

Lunar New Year greetings from Hong Kong's religious leaders

In their traditional Lunar New Year message, the Colloquium of Leaders of Six Religions in Hong Kong conveyed their best wishes for the new year. The topics of their message were many and varied, ranging from efforts to improve the global climate to the importance of purity of the heart and the soul, the dangers of the Internet and the importance of family and education. Their message also included a call for peace and stability in Hong Kong (*Hong Kong Sunday Examiner* Feb. 1, 2014).

January 28, 2014:

First "baby hatch" installed in Guangzhou – Closed after only six weeks due to overwhelming numbers

In the brief span of only six weeks, 262 children were placed anonymously in the first "baby hatch" in Guangzhou, which had been opened to receive babies on January 28. There were 148 boys and 114 girls. More than 90% of them survived. Two thirds of the babies were younger than one year, but there were also a number of five and six year old children – all of them with serious illnesses or handicaps. Due to the unexpected overload, the device has been closed for the time being.

The first baby drop – called in Chinese "baby safety island" – was set up as a pilot project in July 2011 in Shijiazhuang (where so far 181 children have been deposited). Shortly thereafter, the Ministry of Civil Affairs authorized the establishment of such facilities in all of China's major cities and 25 cities have thus far made use of that authorization. The Chinese version of the baby hatches are miniature cottages into which a person can walk. They are equipped with a baby cot, an incubator and an oxygen supply. Parents can simply place their child on the cot or incubator in the little room, trigger an alarm to alert the staff and then leave. Within minutes, the child will be collected and taken care of by professional personnel. There are no cameras in the room and the police will not conduct any investigation. A striking number of the anonymously deposited babies suffer from disabilities or illnesses. One reason prompting parents to give up their babies is the current expense of medical care which many cannot afford. Abandoning children continues to be illegal in China. The strikingly high number of 100,000 babies given up annually – mostly newborns – is, among other things a direct result of the government's one-child policy, since parents prioritize healthy boys. Also, according to a report from Shenzhen in the *South China Morning Post*, it is young, unmarried female migrant workers who are most likely to have unplanned pregnancies and be tempted to give up or expose their babies. Baby hatches are a subject of lively discussion on the social networks all over China. Some see them as life savers. Others

argue that their very existence contributes significantly to the number of parents who are led to give up their children more quickly than they would otherwise. At the same time there is an increasing number of people voicing demands for a really good social security system, which would be capable of ensuring better care for children with disabilities and special needs (*Shanghaiist* Feb. 12, 2014; *South China Morning Post* Dec. 10, 20, 2013; *Spiegel online* March 17, 2014; *The Guardian* March 17, 2014; UCAN Feb. 10, 2014; www.stimmen-aus-china.de Aug. 17, 2013).

January 31, 2014:

Chinese New Year: Campaign in the temples to battle against air pollution

According to the lunar calendar, following the Year of the Snake, January 31 ushered in the Year of the Horse. For this year's Lunar New Year celebration, due to ever growing, and ever more threatening air pollution, the number of businesses that were allowed to sell fireworks in Beijing was once again reduced by 12 percent. An initial reduction in the number of shops had already been put into effect last year. At the same time, the fireworks that were advertised were more environmentally friendly and were also more expensive. Representatives of the Chinese Buddhist Association and of the Chinese Daoist Association have also added their voices to the campaign. At a press conference on January 22 they called for the use of environmentally friendly incense sticks. Thus, for example, since the beginning of last December, the Lama Temple in Beijing has been distributing to temple visitors incense sticks made from pinewood and cedar wood flours, as well as of other natural materials – all free of charge. “The air quality in the temple has improved significantly, and so has visitors' environmental awareness,” declared the Abbot, Hu Xuefeng (*Xinhua* Jan. 22, 24, 2014).

February 13, 2014:

China Aid Association releases its “2013 Persecution Report” and sees once again an increase in the religious persecution of Christians in China

The US-based organization China Aid, which campaigns for the rights of the Chinese house churches, mentioned in its annual report 143 cases of persecution of Christians by government agencies in 2013, with a total of 1,470 people (54 of whom were clergy) detained and twelve sentenced. There were 16 cases of mental or verbal abuse, 50 people were abused. China Aid notes that there has been a continuous deterioration of the situation and an increase in the number of cases for the last eight years. According to China Aid, in 2013 house churches as well as Three-Self-churches were objects of persecution, both in the cities and in the countryside. Those affected have been individual Christians, including clergy, lay people, students, dissidents, Christian booksellers and Christian members of ethnic minorities. The organization reported that in 2013 the Catholic Church had enjoyed “relative peace,” but that it was too early to draw the conclusion that the Xi administration made intentional efforts to avoid conflicts with the Vatican. China Aid characterized the strategy of the authorities in 2013 as the destruction of “Christianity's Accumulated Social-cultural Assets in China.” China Aid has pointed the spotlight at various types of cases on which they report: the expropriation of church property; actions taken against large house churches in cities with a view to limiting their development; “Warfare on the cultural battlefield,” as in a campaign against Christian publications or college campus ministry. There has, however, been a reduction in the number of moves by the government against Christian lawyers and civil rights activists (www.chinaaid.org/2014/02/china-aid-association-2013-persecution.html).

February 28, 2014:

China Daily reports on academics in the Buddhist Longquan Monastery



Young people praying in Longquan monastery.
Foto: M. Welling.

The state run newspaper *China Daily* reports that the Longquan Monastery, located in Beijing's university district of Haidian, has among its monks or aspiring monks a number of academics, professors and IT specialists. According to the abbot, the average level of education of the monks in the monastery is probably higher than that in the general population. According to a popular "urban myth," *China Daily* says, the developer of the mobile phone software "WeChat" is supposed to have found crucial inspiration in Longquan Monastery. The monastery, which attracts many volunteers, has, among other things, a group of 30 volunteers from IT companies who take care of the monastery's network and software services. The paper mentioned in its article that mainly via the volunteer service individuals come to enter the monastery as a novice and later as a monk. The

monastery also attracts some 200 lay Buddhists who are studying Dharma (*China Daily* Feb. 28, 2014). – The Abbot of the monastery, Master Xuecheng, is Vice Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA).

March 1, 2014:

Assault in Kunming – reactions from religious organizations

On March 1, six men and two women attacked passengers at the train station of the city of Kunming (Yunnan Province) with long knives, killing 29 people and injuring more than 140. The government identified the attackers as Uyghur separatists. The attack sent waves of shock throughout China and many believers prayed for the victims, expressing their dismay also via the online social network platforms. On March 5, the representatives of the official province-level organizations of Buddhists, Daoists, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants held a special assembly, in which they sharply condemned the terrorist attack. Their actions deviate totally from the teachings of any genuine religion and trample human rights underfoot they said. The religious leaders called on the religious communities in Yunnan to recognize the cruelty of the terrorists and, under the leadership of the party and the government, to promote unity, economic development and social harmony. The *South China Morning Post*, among others, spoke about the impact of the attack on the Uyghur population in China, for example in Beijing, where Uyghurs spoke of stricter identity checks and a fear of growing resentment against the Uyghur population (*South China Morning Post* March 11, 2014; *Xinhua* March 3, 5, 2014; www.sara.gov.cn March 6, 2014).

March 5, 2014:

Pope Francis reports on his exchange of letters with Chinese President Xi Jinping

In an interview with the *Corriere della Sera* published on March 5, Pope Francis said on the question of relationships between the Vatican and China: “We are close to China. I sent a letter to President Xi Jinping when he was elected, three days after me. And he answered me. There are relations. It’s a great people which I love” (*Radio Vatican* March 5, 2014).

March 16, 2014:

Pope Francis calls for prayers for passengers of missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370

Following the Angelus prayers in St. Peter’s Square, the Pope asked the faithful gathered in the square to pray for the passengers and crew and their families of flight MH370, which disappeared on March 8 on its way to Beijing. There were 239 people on board, including 154 Chinese nationals (*Vatican Insider* March 16, 2014).

March 16, 2014:

Shanghai’s Bishop Fan Zhongliang, SJ, dies “underground” at age 96



Bishop Fan 2010 in the apartment where he was under house arrest. Foto: UCAN.

Bishop Fan was recognized by the Pope but not by the government and was therefore the “underground” Ordinary of the Diocese of Shanghai. He was born in 1918. In 1938 he entered the Jesuit novitiate in Shanghai – together with Jin Luxian, who later became the official Bishop of Shanghai – and was ordained a priest in 1951. In 1955, he was arrested together with Shanghai Bishop (later Cardinal) Ignatius Gong Pinmei and other priests, including Jin Luxian. He was only released from prison in 1979. On February 27, 1985, he was secretly ordained as Coadjutor Bishop of Shanghai. This occurred shortly after Jin Luxian was ordained Auxiliary Bishop on January 27 – with-

out a Papal mandate. Following the death of Cardinal Gong in 2000, Bishop Fan succeeded him as the Ordinary of the diocese. According to UCAN, Bishop Fan was also the President of the underground Chinese Bishops’ Conference. Until the day of his death, Bishop Fan lived under strict surveillance imposed by the government. Anthony Lam of the Holy Spirit Study Centre reports that, nonetheless, almost all of the young priests belonging to the official church went to Bishop Fan before their ordinations to ask for his blessing, a sign of the respect the bishop was enjoying. According to *AsiaNews*, Bishop Fan and Bishop Jin were reconciled several years ago.

March 18, 2014:

Obituary of Bishop Fan by the Secretary of the Pontifical Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples indicates Bishop Ma as his successor

For many Catholics Bishop Fan was a symbol of fidelity to his vocation and of allegiance to the Pope, wrote Archbishop Savio Hon in his obituary of Bishop Fan. “In his clarity and truth he also knew how to be gentle and merciful,” which is the reason why he was later able to reconcile with Bishop Jin Luxian, the Archbishop said. Now that both of them have died, the Church in Shanghai does not remain “without a guide.” “The presence of Msgr. Thaddeus Ma Daqin ensures continuity.” The majority of Shanghai’s Catholics follow him and love him as the pastor of Shanghai, the Archbishop continued. “And it is a wonderful thing that he is the successor to both Msgr. Jin and Msgr. Fan. Through him the Church of Shanghai can really live a new era of reconciliation.” The obituary was published by *AsiaNews* on March 18, 2014.

March 19, 2014:

State-run *Global Times* publishes article entitled “Catholic Patriotic Association warns Vatican not to interfere”

The Vatican should respect China’s sovereignty and not interfere with China’s bishop appointments, said Liu Yuanlong, vice-president of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, according to an article in the *Global Times*, “in response to Pope Francis disclosing that he exchanged letters with Chinese President Xi Jinping.” Pope Francis is the first Pope to disclose that he received a reply from a Chinese leader, wrote the *Global Times* (citing *Phoenix TV*) and reproduced a few sentences from the text of the Pope’s interview. The article also quoted Catholicism researcher Wang Meixiu’s statement that the Chinese Church has always had contact with the Vatican, but not in the name of its Church groups. “The Pope is willing to consolidate relations with China,” Wang continued. Hong Kong Cardinal John Tong is quoted as having referred to a lack of communication and understanding between the two sides. According to the article, Pope Francis, who used to be provincial superior of the Society of Jesus, could possibly be favorable to normalizing bilateral relations, “as Matteo Ricci, a missionary to China whose friendship was widely acknowledged by Chinese people, was also from this organization” (*Global Times* March 1, 2014).

March 22, 2014:

Requiem in Shanghai for Bishop Fan Zhongliang – with both underground and official Church participation

Shortly after Bishop Fan’s death, the officials removed his biretta, a sign that they did not recognize him as a bishop, *UCAN* reported, citing Church sources. They did, however, allow a Requiem Mass to be celebrated for him – not in a church, but in a funeral home – and without any use of the title “Bishop.” According to reports from *AsiaNews* and *UCAN*, about 5,000 Catholics attended the funeral Mass on March 22. The police re-routed traffic in front of the funeral home, and the funeral liturgy was projected on a giant screen in the outer courtyard. Even foreigners were present, including the Canadian Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Chris Alexander (the Canadian Ambassador for Religious Freedom, Andrew Bennett, had released a condolence statement on March 20). Sixty-one or seventy priests (de-

pending on the source) from both the underground and the official parts of the diocese as well as from other dioceses concelebrated at the Requiem Mass, which was presided over by Fr. Zhu Yude, head of the underground community of Shanghai. According to *UCAN*, a number of priests from Shanghai's open community were banned from attending the funeral. Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who is under house arrest since he announced his resignation from the Patriotic Association following his episcopal ordination on July 7, 2012, did not make an appearance at the funeral. *UCAN* reports that since March 16, surveillance on Bishop Ma had stepped up. A Mass of suffrage was also celebrated for Bishop Fan in the Cathedral of St. Ignatius. The body of the Bishop was cremated, and his ashes are to be interred in a cemetery in an area of Sheshan, where Catholics had bought a burial plot for him (*AsiaNews* March 17, 18, 22, 2014; *UCAN* March 17, 24, 2014; www.cic.gc.ca March 24, 2014; www.international.gc.ca/media/orf-blr/news-communiques/2014/03/20.aspx).