



# China News Summary

## January 2009

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**Carter tells Obama: openness key to relations with China.** Former US president, Jimmy Carter, has urged U.S. President Barack Obama to ensure 'openness in discussion' with China so that disagreements can be heard and discussed in mutually beneficial ways, reported the *China Daily*. Carter urged shared responsibilities in international crisis, particularly naming Zimbabwe and the Sudan. He recognized this would require a shift in China's policy of noninterference in other countries' sovereign affairs. Carter also acknowledged China's progress on human rights, citing China's policy on freedom of religion as one indicator of change. A study conducted by East China Normal University in 2008 indicated that China may have as many as 300 million religious believers of which 30-40 million are Christian (Catholic and Protestants combined.) For more than a decade the Carter Center has worked with the Chinese government in standardizing village elections procedures and also supports several websites for Chinese people aimed at increasing political transparency and debate. (*"Openness key, Carter tells Obama," China Daily, December 1, 2008*)

**Charter '08 challenges one-party rule.** Charter '08, a Chinese-authored Internet manifesto containing 18 political, legal and economic demands, has been signed by thousands of Chinese causing concern within the Chinese Communist Party, reports the *Christian Science Monitor*. Most notably, Charter '08, posted on the Internet December 9, calls for an end to one-party rule and lays out an auxiliary vision for a society based on rights under the rule of law. According to Reuters, the document's strength is, in part, due to breadth of the signatories, lawyers, intellectuals, migrant workers, and even high-school students. The document contains sections on a new constitution, separation of powers, rural-urban equality, freedom to form assemblies, protection of the environment, and right to private property, to name some areas. Said China-scholar Perry Link, University of California, Riverside, "it is the first time in PRC history that a group has taken a public stand against one-Party rule." Because it has been signed by a cross-section of Chinese society, and not just outspoken human rights activists, Charter '08 has gained the attention of police authorities who have detained its co-author, Liu Xiaobo, and have questioned dozens of other signatories, said the BBC. Charter '08 was modeled on Czech activists' call for freedom in 1977. An English translation of Charter '08 can be found at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/22210> (*"Charter '08 worries China," Christian Science Monitor, January 7, 2009; "Battle opens over China's future," Reuters, December 18, 2008; "Chinese police hut authors of democracy charter," BBC News, January 6, 2009*)

**Social unrest will grow, say Chinese officials.** Several prominent Chinese officials have warned that rising unemployment and economic slowdown could cause massive social turmoil in China. Zhang Ping, head of the National Development and Reform Commission cites bankruptcies and production cuts as leading to massive unemployment, said the BBC. Zhou Tianyong, a researcher at the Central Party School in Beijing, warns that the urban joblessness rate of 12 percent rate will rise to 14 percent. Huang Huo, head of Xinhua's Chongqing bureau, cites a two-fold threat to China's social fabric: graduating university students facing a shrinking job market and diminishing incomes, and a "tide of migrant workers who have lost their jobs as export-driven factories have shut" reports Reuters. Fifty percent of China's toy factories in Guangdong have already closed (see *China News Summary*, November 2008) while in Beijing there has been a doubling of the number of migrant workers in pay disputes said the Associated Press. There has also been a rise in organized crime which officials have directly linked to a slowing economy. China's economy is used to double digit growth and will most likely shrink to 7.5 to 8 percent, reported Reuters. Ironically it is the capitalist boom that has reestablished the Communist Party's legitimacy, reflected the *Guardian*. Its economic miracle has detracted calls for political reform. While other nations have been through boom and bust before, China's newly affluent have only been through boom. Without the promise of wealth, said the *Guardian*, the Party's claim to legitimacy may crumble as well. (*"Charter '08: a bold call for change," Guardian, December 12, 2008; "China seen facing wave of unrest in 2009," Reuters, January 6, 2009; "China*

'faces mass social unrest', BBC News, December 5, 2008; "China faces economic pain, sensitive anniversaries," Associated Press, January 7, 2009)

**Connie Wieck, United Methodist missionary, receives Sichuan province award for teaching excellence.**

Cornelia (Connie) Wieck, a Global Ministries' missionary, was a recipient of the Jinding Award, the highest award offered to foreign experts in Sichuan province. Connie teaches English at Luzhou Vocational and Technical College in southern Sichuan through her placement with the Amity Foundation, one of Global Ministries' main partner organizations in China. Connie received the Jinding Award in recognition for her contribution and dedication to the training of Chinese personnel. There are currently 33 teachers of English language with Amity from mainline denominations worldwide, who share new teaching methodology, cooperate with colleagues in educational projects, participate in setting English language curriculum for students, and provide an English language support system for Chinese departmental staff. Connie has been with Amity for over ten years, and prior to that taught at Wesley Girls School in Taiwan. In Luzhou, the majority of her 350 English major students are from the countryside where their parents remain poor farmers. In many cases, her students are the first in their families to graduate from high school and attend an institute of higher learning. During her years at Luzhou, Connie established an English language choir, led cultural activities such as Christmas caroling and Halloween traditions, created a US-China pen-pal exchange program, founded an ongoing small English language library with donated materials, judged English speech and skit contests, and visited area schools to promote English language learning among young people. For more information on teaching English through the Amity Foundation, contact the Global Ministries Mission Personnel, the Rev. Jungrea Chung ([JChung@gbmg-umc.org](mailto:JChung@gbmg-umc.org)). Connie also has a personal blog about her experiences in Sichuan: <http://chinawieck.spaces.live.com/> (Source: Amity Foundation; the United Methodist China Program)

**China uses paid Internet commentators.** The Chinese government is using an increasing number of paid Internet commentators to post positive comments on websites worldwide about Chinese government directives and Party ideology, writes the BBC. The move is seen as a proactive way to engage in 'public guidance', a term used by the former Chinese Communist Party chair, Jiang Zemin. *The Economist* estimates that there are now more than 280,000 netizens, dubbed the 50 Cent Party (*wumao dang*), who are trained and certified in Party ideology and government policy. Their job it is to surf the Internet and chat rooms on a regular basis who post comments to neutralize undesirable public opinion. The practice began in 2005 and the name 50 Cent Party was derived from the payment method: each received 50 *jiao* (the equivalent to cents) (\$.07) per positive post. The move reflects the government's acknowledgement of the Internet as a powerful interactive tool through which Chinese can share viewpoints and information, and even to organize, said the *Economist*. Some analysts say that the very need to expand the Party's influence within common opinion is not a means of increased control, but illustrates the weakening of it, said Li Yonggang of the Universities Service Centre for China Studies, Chinese University, Hongkong. ("China's internet 'spin doctors'," BBC News, December 16, 2008; "China's guerrilla war for the web," *The Economist*, July 2008)

**Shanghai Catholic diocese celebrates 400 years.** Since March 2008, Shanghai Catholics have been celebrating 400 years of Catholicism in the Shanghai municipality. The celebrations ended in December with the ordination of two priests at St. Ignatius Cathedral, downtown Shanghai, amidst a congregation of nearly 2,000, reported UCAN. Celebrations included pilgrimages to the Sheshan Marian shrine, a seminar on evangelism, concerts, tours, and a 100-photo exhibition which linked communities to local church history. Tours to 30 parishes with historical links to Chinese Catholicism will continue well into 2009. During the celebrations, the first-ever diocesan choral concert was held at St. Ignatius where 1,000 attended. The concert remembered the past through songs like the Latin *sicut cervus* (as the deer) sung by a youth choir, expressed thanks for the present through contemporary Chinese hymns, and looked forward to the future, reported UCAN. Shanghai Bishop Xing Wenzhi ordained Fathers Li Gangyao and Xu Ruhao. ("China ordinations ends Shanghai diocese's celebration of 400 years of evangelization," UCAN, December 10, 2008)

**Taiwan will lift ban on mainland university student enrolment.** When running for Taiwan's presidency Ma Ying-jeou advocated that Taiwan should repeal its law that bans mainland students from attending university in Taiwan. Now that he is president, the ban has been repealed and the *China Daily* reported that up to 1,000 students from China's mainland will now enroll in universities and colleges on the Taiwan island in 2009. Taiwan's former ruling party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), strongly opposed mainland enrollment citing that fewer local students could gain the opportunity to study in the island's institutes of higher learning. This policy was in conflict with nearly 90 percent of Taiwan's universities who

welcome mainland enrollment, said the *China Post*. Part of the reason for allowing mainland students to enroll is financial. Over the past 10 years Taiwan's educational policies have liberalized registration laws and there is now a surfeit of tertiary institutions with not enough students to fill them. President Ma also hopes that the increased integration will lead mutual understanding. The *China Post* reported Ma Jingyeou as saying that if one day some of the mainland's high-ranking officials were graduates of Taiwan's institutions and some of their Taiwanese counterparts were graduates of mainland institutions, there will be more chance of peace in the Taiwan Strait. Since 1985, Beijing has allowed students from Taiwan to study on the mainland. There are now approximately 7,200 students from Taiwan enrolled in the mainland's institutions. ("*Taiwan set to lift university ban*," *China Daily*, November 12, 2008; "*More than 7,200 Taiwan students enrolled in mainland colleges*," "*Mainland students can enliven local education*," *China Post*, July 25, 2008)

**Using religion to inspire hope.** Hongkong's religious leaders say that those looking to faith traditions amidst difficult economic times will find the hope needed to overcome adversity. The Hongkong Christian Council, an umbrella organization of Protestant denominations, said that people suffering during this 'financial tsunami' should use this time to "review their basic values and priorities" and that the Church should both lend a helping hand to those who have financial difficulties and keep speaking out against unjust society systems that reward greed. A Confucian leader noted that Western cultures encourage competition while eastern philosophies and religions emphasize common good and mutuality, said ENI. Could this be of help to a searching soul, he offered. (*Hongkong religious leaders say they should inspire hope during crisis*," *Ecumenical News Service*, December 19, 2008)

**China sends warships to protect merchant vessels off the coast of Somalia.** China has joined the international community in sending its navy to protect Chinese commercial vessels from Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden, reported the BBC. China promotes and follows a doctrine of non-interference in the affairs of other countries and it is the first time Chinese war ships have ventured out of the Pacific. The Chinese ships will join an international 'taskforce' in that region of warships from the European Union, the United States, India, Russia, Malaysia, Iran and others that are already patrolling the area said the BBC. The Chinese department of defense said China's ships would strictly abide to relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and international law and will offer cooperation with other convoy protection ships. China's decision to send ships is an economic one as 60 percent of its oil comes from the Middle East and must travel through the Gulf of Aden to reach Chinese shores. China's move also sends a signal that it may be willing to consider a more expansive role in international affairs, a move welcomed by the United States, said the BBC. There have been 100 pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden in 2008, reported the BBC. ("*China begins anti-piracy mission*," *BBC News*, December 26, 2008; "*China to deploy ships off Somalia*," *BBC News*, December 20, 2008; "*China dips its toe in Gulf of Aden*," *BBC News*, December 18, 2008)

**University graduates have increased by 500 percent.** More than six million Chinese have graduated from universities in 2008 and over a quarter are finding it difficult to obtain employment, the *Guardian* reported. The rise in the number of people with university degrees has risen by 500 percent since 1999, a figure imbued with the 'sweet and sour' of Chinese reality. While the expansion of higher education reflects China's aspiration of moving a generation away from factory and farms into more skilled work, society has yet to create those jobs. In December, a record 775,000 applicants sat civil service exams for only 13,500 posts. The government estimates that in recent years four million university graduates have yet to find their first job. ("*Millions of Chinese graduates out of work after fivefold rise in university places*," *Guardian*, December 4, 2008)

**Myanmar-China natural gas deal.** China has signed a 30 year agreement with the government of Myanmar along with four international firms, for natural gas to be piped to China from Myanmar's Shwe region gas reserves, said the BBC. Corporate stakeholders Daewoo International (South Korea) and India's Videsh Oil and National Gas Corporation have a 51 percent and 17.5 percent interest in the gas field, respectively, said the Shwe Gas Movement (SGM). SGM is a non-profit movement which objects to what it sees as people's exploitation and environmental degradation caused by the gas mining. SGM questions the export of Myanmar's natural gas resource considering that 80 percent of Myanmar's households use wood for cooking, said its website. All four companies that comprise this consortium are not bound by the US and European Union sanctions against Myanmar which is rooted in opposition to Myanmar's military rule. ("*Firms to pipe Burma gas to China*," *BBC News*, December 29, 2008; see also [www.shwe.org](http://www.shwe.org))

**More incentives to spend country out of economic downturn.** China has introduced another economic stimulus package targeting domestic consumption, said Xinhua. The package will offer subsidies to rural households for the purchase of appliances, provide incentives for small struggling business, and will encourage distribution centers to merge to conserve energy and improve output. The package also calls for the renovation of urban food markets and the creation of second-hand markets to encourage recycling and small income generation. The government is expected to raise export tax rebates on high technology products and lower inspection fees. In addition China will allow some debts with Asian nations to be settled with its own currency, the *yuan*, if the two parties have readily available *yuan*. Most all of China's foreign trade is settled in US dollars or euros, leaving exporters vulnerable to exchange rate fluctuations. The US dollar in particular is unlikely to stabilize in 2009, said Zhou Xiaochuan, Central bank governor, reported the BBC. The offer to trade in *yuan* is extended to Asean nations: Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia. Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. (*"China to allow freer yuan trades," BBC News, December 25, 2008; "China to take measure to spur consumption," Xinhua, December 24, 2008*)

**China produces its own commercial airliner.** The first flight of China's first domestically manufactured commercial plane was successful and the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (CACC) has already secured 200 orders for the small 90-seat ARJ-21 jet, said the BBC. Manufactured in Shanghai the design of the plane will reduce fuel consumption by ten percent, thereby lowering the cost of short-term domestic flights in China, CACC said. The craft can fly a maximum of 2000 nautical miles and is expected to take 60 percent of the short-haul airline market in China. Until now, China has depended upon foreign air craft from Boeing, Airbus, and Bombardier. (*"China's first home-made jet flies," BBC News, November 28, 2008; "China's first home-grown regional jet," China Daily, December 12, 2007*)

**2009: The year of anniversaries.** 2009 seems to be *the* year of anniversaries for China. Some will be celebrated in China with great fanfare and jubilation while others will be consciously ignored. December 2008 may have ushered in the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform, but the following belong to 2009:

\*January 2009: the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

\*March 2009: the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fleeing of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa to Dharamsala, India.

\*May 2009: China celebrates the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, demonstrations against the Treaty of Versailles which gave Shandong territory formally controlled by Germany, to Japan, and a movement that heralded a period of modernization, liberal thought, and patriotism.

May 2009: For June 2009: the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square which ended in military suppression.

October 2009: The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

For Christian in China and worldwide, April 2009 is also 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the re-opening of the first Protestant church in China, Bainian Church in Ningbo, after the end of the Cultural Revolution era when the Chinese government restored its policy of religious freedom.

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*The United Methodist China Program seeks to facilitate deeper understandings between China, the United States and other nations throughout God's world. It respects the autonomy of Protestant churches in China and recognizes that, with God's guidance, Christians in China are shaping a bold new witness. The United Methodist China Program relies on partner organizations like the China Christian Council to help it define new relationships within China's post-denominational context. Another partner organization is the Amity Foundation, a Chinese social service organization initiated by Christians in China to make Christian participation in meeting the needs of society more widely known to the Chinese people. Through education, communication, and exchange, China Program is a sensitive lens through which we and people within China can see and understand each other more accurately. The China News Summary is prepared by Diane Allen, a GBGM missionary serving as China Program Associate.*