



China News Summary

May 2009

Compiled by The United Methodist China Program
General Board of Global Ministries
The United Methodist Church
475 Riverside Drive, Room 1335
New York, NY 10115
www.qbgm-umc.org

To receive online notification of the China News Summary, contact DAllen@qbgm-umc.org with <CNS, subscribe> in the subject line.

China's first two-year action plan on human rights. China published its first working action plan on human rights and pledged to improve and safe-guard civil, economic and social liberties of all its citizens. The *National Human Rights Action Plan of China 2009-2010* calls for enhancing transparency and supervision within the detention system and enhancing the right to a fair trail including the video recording of all open trials. It also prohibits corporal punishment, abuse, insulting detainees and the extraction of confessions by torture, said Xinhua, China's state news agency. The *Action Plan* also said the government needs to be

more widely representative to include more women, ethnic minorities, and 'farmers'. According to the *New York Times*, the document does not suggest changing China's one-party system or separating the judiciary from party influence. Some human rights groups felt that the document was a cautious step forward and signaled that China was ready to discuss human rights on the world stage. Amnesty International felt it focused too much on economic and social rights and not civil and political rights, said the BBC. Amnesty felt the document should be tackling issues like the broad powers given to local law enforcement that can send people to 're-education through labor' camps without a trial. The 54-page document calls for 18 million new jobs to be created for urban workers by 2010 and to cover 223 million people with an urban basic pension, 400 million people with basic medical insurance, 120 million with unemployment insurance and 140 with workers compensation, to name a few specific 'rights to development'. The document can be downloaded in its entirety from

http://www.china.org.cn/archive/2009-04/13/content_17595407.htm ("China releases human rights plan," *New York Times*, April 14, 2009; "China debuts 2-year human rights action plan", *USA Today*, April 2009; "China publishes national human rights action plan," *Xinhua*, April 13, 2009; "China plans 'human rights action'," *BBC News*, April 14, 2009)

Visual comparison of China-US statistics. The relationship between the United States and China has become economically interwoven over the past decade with facts and figures sewn into the fabric of almost every general news report. The US Central Intelligence Agency puts out an online *World Factbook* for every country/territory on the globe which it updates annually. For a visual comparison of what the China figures may mean relationship to the United States, WallStats.com have created some graphs that compare the economies, people, geography and military of both China and the United States:

<http://www.mint.com/blog/finance-core/china-vs-united-states-a-visual-comparison/> For the exact numbers in any category see the Central Intelligence Agency online *World Factbook*:
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html> .

Graying China. China's baby boom of the 1950s and 1960 coupled with the last 30 years of a one-child per family policy, has created a society where in 2050 there will be two working-aged people for every senior citizen, estimates the *New York Times*. To illustrate this graying population, today's statics are one senior citizen for every 13 working-aged person, said the *NYT*. That statistic will narrow rapidly in the next forty years. The children born under government policies that encouraged larger families in the 1950s and 1960s face being cared for in their older years from the child born under policies enacted to reign in over-population (1980s, 1990s and beyond). Evidence that the Chinese government is concerned about this issue is seen in its move to provide a basic health care and pension safety net for most all of its citizens, said the *NYT*. Government statistics estimate that over 30 percent of China's population will be over the age of 65 in 2050. China's tradition of families caring for aging relatives is also being challenged as it is becoming increasingly difficult for children to take on the care of their aging parents. Many are hundreds of miles away having taken construction or factory jobs as migrant workers and are physically unable to take on parental care. The one-child per family policy means that it is impossible to share the care of aging parents with siblings. China's Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, has pledged to expand urban

and rural pension coverage and develop a system that would allow migrant workers who changed jobs frequently to shift retirement benefits. With the onset of an aging society, people of prime working years will also decline, and this is expected to impact China's economic development as well, especially in building trades and factory work. (*"China begins to address a coming wave of elderly," New York Times, April 21, 2009; "Chinese 'living longer than ever'," BBC News*)

Search engine for China's 'silver-surfers'. One of the best known Chinese Internet search engines, Baidu.com, has launched a search engine especially aim at China's elderly population, reported *The Wall Street Journal*. Called Baidu Elderly Search, it is uncluttered with graphics and moving images and has larger fonts that make for easier reading and identification of necessary information. Baidu Elderly Search also offers a menu of search selections that are tailored to an older population, like Liberation and revolutionary songs for downloads, and has online forums for activities such as bird keeping and *taijiquan* (Tai Chi), favorites of the over 60s. The search engine also features more opportunities to 'click' rather than type as many elderly persons are not as familiar with Romanized Chinese (*pinyin*). This was Baidu's first new product for 2009 and came out of research from the China Internet Network Information Center which said that only 5 million people over the age of 50 used the Internet, said the *WSJ*. China has 300 million Internet users, the largest in the world. (*"China's search engine for the elderly," The Wall Street Journal, April 10, 2009*)

Mandatory pay cap for top state finance executives. China's Ministry of Finance imposed a pay cap for top executives of state-owned financial institutions in a move to stem increasing public criticism of the large salaries being given to executives in the banking sector in light of the nation's economic downturn, said Xinhua. The new rule said that an executive's pay must be no more than 90 percent of the 2007 pre-tax level. The official China Securities Journal reported that top executives of listed financial institutions were making an average of 604,600 *yuan* (\$89,000) during 2008, the highest salary of all industries. In comparison the per capita income of the average Chinese citizen is \$1,740, cited the Chinese embassy in the United States. The high salaries of state financial executives have angered many people in China where nearly 40 percent of all factories that produced goods for export have closed. (*"China's national per capita income reaches \$1,740," <http://big5.fmprc.gov.cn/gate/big5/us.china-embassy.org/enq/qvzq/t268200.htm> : "In China, pay cuts are ordered for bankers," The New York Times, April 11, 2009; "Executive pay ignites public grumble, regulations urged," Xinhua, February 9, 2009*)

China to revise writing, add more strokes to characters. Later this year Beijing is set to announce plans to create a new list of Chinese characters whose simplified version (*jianti zi*) will have some additional strokes added to the character to correct what Beijing calls 'oversimplification', said the *Economist*. In the 1950s the government of Mao Zedong had simplified many of China's 50,000 characters in order to assist literacy efforts as well as to disassociate itself with traditional values, which included classical writing, which it thought held the country back from modernization. Taiwan, the Hongkong and Macau Special Administrative Regions, and overseas Chinese diasporas continue to use traditional characters (*fanti zi*). The move to add more strokes to some of the most reduced characters is highly emotive as some feel traditional characters add a greater expressiveness and cultural identity than simplified ones. Others are worried how hard it will be for those brought up on simplified characters during the last 51 years to learn anew, as well as the cost of converting hundreds of millions of primary and secondary school text books. (*"Not as easy as it looks," The Economist, April 23, 2009*)

Key anniversary passes without notice. The year 2009 is one of several key anniversaries in China including the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the 20th anniversary of the June 4th Tiananmen Square incident. The latest milestone to pass without public notice was the 20th anniversary of the passing of Chinese leader Hu Yaobang. Hu was considered a reformist whose handling of student demonstrations in 1986 was perceived conciliatory and lenient by conservative members of the government, reflected the BBC. It led to his being dismissed as the chair of the Chinese Communist Party shortly after in 1987. When he died in April 1989, his death was the catalyst that triggered student and worker demonstrations which led to the government's crackdown on June 4, 1989. Hundreds of citizens and soldiers died in the event. The anniversary of Hu's death, unlike other former leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, passed without acknowledgement. (*"China muted on key anniversary," BBC News, April 15, 2009*)

What's in a name? Approximately 900 million people in China, about 85 percent of the population, share only 100 surnames. One of the colloquialisms for 'the masses' or 'ordinary people' in Chinese is *laobaixing* which literally means 'old hundred names'. There are 92 million Wangs, 91 Lis, and 86 million Zhangs, estimates the *New York Times*. Yet there has been a recent trend in the last few decades to find unique first names for children to help a them 'stand out'. These characters are often found in obscure classical literature but no longer in use. This trend is causing difficulty with the computer systems of the Public Security. As China modernizes its citizens' database, the Public Security Bureau has been replacing handwritten identity cards with computer issued ones. It is able to recognize approximately 33,000 of the current 50,000 Chinese character lexicon, but it is unable to recognize some of the unique classical characters that may not have been in use for centuries, even a millennium. Some people are being asked to change their names to accommodate the system, reports the *New York Times*. It is not uncommon for Chinese to share the same name. There are nearly enough Chinese named Zhang Wei to populate the city of Pittsburgh, said the *NYT*. In contrast, in the United States there are about 70,000 last names which cover 90 percent of the population. (*"Name not on our list? Change it, China says," New York Times, April 21, 2009*)

Glimmers of hope for China's economy. China's first quarter statistics for 2009 showed the economy grew by 6.1 percent, which may have been the worst in 17 years but was better than expected, reported the BBC. Premier Wen Jiabao said China's economy was "showing positive changes" in part because of the \$580 billion stimulus package that Beijing introduced last year. Upon government instructions Chinese banks are lending freely and the government has provided incentives to entice Chinese people to spend more in order to cushion the fall of exports which plunged 26 percent in February. Sales tax on automobiles with less than 1.6 liter engines was halved, for instance. The Canton Fair, called the 'showcase of the 'factory of the world"' welcomed Chinese purchasers as well as foreign ones for the first time, said the *Christian Science Monitor*. Chinese manufacturers are hoping that as clients empty stocks, the only chance of surviving means customers will have to buy again, the *CSM* put forth. Forty percent of China's economy depends upon manufacturing, said the BBC. The Chinese government has been concerned the unemployed, 23 million of them in the last year alone, could agitate for change. Keeping unemployment down has been a major focus. (*"Optimistic signs for Chinese economy," BBC News, April 16, 2009; China 'a bright spot,' in 2009 world economy, Xinhua, April 20, 2009; "Amid dire economic news, China sees a glimmer of hope," Christian Science Monitor, April 16, 2009; "Chinese see positive changes in economy," Associated Press, April 13, 2009*)

Links and frequent sources

Agence France-Presse	www.afp.com
Amnesty International	www.amnesty.org
Amity Foundation	www.amityfoundation.org
Associated Press	www.ap.org
British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)	www.bbc.co.uk
Beijing Review	www.bjreview.com.cn
China Christian Council	www.ccctspm.org
China Daily	www.chinadaily.com.cn
China Development Brief	www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com
China Dialogue	http://www.chinadialogue.net/
China Institute	www.chinainstitute.org
China.org.cn	www.china.org.cn
Christian Science Monitor	www.csmonitor.com
CNN	www.cnn.com
Committee of 100	www.committee100.org
Deutsche Presse-Agentur	http://www.dpa.de/en/unternehmenswelt/index.html
Economist	www.economist.com
Ecumenical News Service	www.eni.ch/
Embassy of the PRC in the USA	www.china-embassy.org
General Board of Global Ministries, UMC	www.gb-gm-umc.org
Guardian	www.guardian.co.uk
International Herald Tribune	www.iht.com
Jinde Charities	www.jinde.org
Los Angeles Times	www.latimes.com

[National Public Radio](http://www.npr.org)

[New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com)

[People's Daily Online](http://english.people.com.cn/)

[Reuters](http://www.reuters.com)

[South China Morning Post](http://www.scmp.com)

[Times](http://www.timesonline.co.uk)

[UCAN News](http://www.ucanews.com)

[United Methodist China Program](http://new.gbgm-umc.org/connections/partnerships/chinaprogram/)

[United States Catholic China Bureau](http://www.usccb.net)

[United States China People's Friendship Association](http://www.uscpfa.org)

[Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

[Xinhua News Agency](http://www.xinhuanet.com)

www.npr.org

www.nytimes.com

<http://english.people.com.cn/>

www.reuters.com

www.scmp.com

www.timesonline.co.uk

www.ucanews.com

<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/connections/partnerships/chinaprogram/>

www.usccb.net

<http://www.uscpfa.org>

www.washingtonpost.com

www.xinhuanet.com

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.