

Monthly News Summary: People's Republic of China

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China to Send Additional Peacekeepers to Lebanon. China announced it will increase its peacekeeping force in Lebanon to 1,000 troops, following a request by the United Nations for its member nations to provide an additional 15,000 troops, according to the BBC News. China's additional 820 troops will join 120 already in Lebanon carrying out mine clearing operations. China first joined United Nation's peacekeepers in 1989, taking part in a mission to Namibia. Prior to that, it shunned international missions as interfering in other country's affairs. In the late 1980s, when the Chinese Communist Party Congress gave a clear signal it would continue and expand its Open Door Policy, China has since gradually taken part in several UN missions in East Timor, Democratic Republic Congo, Afghanistan and Liberia. Analysts agree that by working with the United Nations, China is becoming a more responsible international player, a role that the United States and the European Union has urged it to take. It is also no secret that as the world's fourth largest economy continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, it is paying great attention to developing closer relations with oil-rich countries in the Middle East and Africa. Says the BBC, while Lebanon does not fall into that category, China's peacekeeping commitment sends a positive signal to other Middle Eastern countries. *"China signals peaceful ambitions," "China ups Lebanon force to 1,000," BBC News, Sept. 18, 2006.*

Social Security to Expand to Migrant Workers. The *China Daily* has reported that China will enlarge its social security coverage to include migrant workers and private business employees. Social security benefits for migrant workers would include injury insurance and a pension program. It is estimated that in the next 20 years, there will be 300 million migrant workers in Chinese cities, fueling China's continued economic growth. The *China Daily* also reported that Khalid Malik, a United Nation's representative in China, has said China's proposals—while 'a good beginning'—fall short of genuine needs. He urges China to provide social services to the families that migrant workers leave behind, disproportionately women, children and the elderly. For those that qualify, China's social security benefits currently cover basic pension, unemployment, employment injury, maternity and basic medical insurance. *China Daily, September 25, 2006.*

China's Loans to Africa on the Increase. The World Bank may be a bit worried about China's increased loans and grants to African nations, but for the countries desperate for international aid, these loans are life-savers. Andrew Walker, BBC News, quoted World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, "The challenge is how to make sure these countries that were heavily indebted and suddenly get large debt relief, don't turn around and borrow so imprudently that we have a heavily indebted country all over again." But the debt relief promised by the G8 leaders, including the United States, is slow in coming and often riddled with 'conditionalities' which are specific requirements attached to loans and grants which can be highly controversial themselves. These can paralyze a nation even further. For example, in return for getting aid, a country may have restrictions on what it can export. The international aid organization Oxfam recommends that just "a one percent increase in world exports for Africa is worth a staggering five times the amount it receives in aid and debt relief." The Jubilee Debt Campaign, begun by Christian activists to encourage rich nations to drop debts owed by very poor nations, has said that African nations needing to borrow have grown up in countries that have suffered from 'conditionalities' and are very savvy about any 'small print' to new loans. China's lack of conditionalities and low, subsidized interest rates make these loans very appealing to many African countries. The bottom line for many African nations, according to Jubilee Debt Campaign, is what makes a 'good' loan is its ability to generate income to help the country's poorest people. *"China loans raises African debt fears," BBC News, September 19, 2006; "The Great Trade Robbery," Oxfam; Jubilee Debt Campaign.*

Asia-Africa 'Silk Road' Open and Thriving. A new study by the World Trade Organization has found that trade with China and India could be a key to unlocking African economic growth. Titled *Africa's Silk Road: China and India's New Economic Frontier*, the study reported that since the year 2000, exports from Africa to Asia have increased dramatically. Asia is now the third largest trading partner with Africa receiving 27 percent of Africa's exports, surpassed by only the United States (29 percent) and the European Union (32 percent). From China's perspective, its aspiring consumer-oriented middle class and need for natural resources to fuel its spectacular economic growth, make trade with Africa vital if China is to continue on the road to what the Chinese Communist Party calls 'moderate prosperity' for all. The author of the study, Harry G. Broadman, a World Bank Economics Advisor, says that skyrocketing Asian trade and investment in Africa hails a new global trend towards rapidly growing South-South commerce. The Silk Road was a 4,000 year old network of trading routes from the Mediterranean to present day Xi'an, known for facilitating trade in spices, precious metals, fabrics and food. The medieval trader Marco Polo is said to have taken the noodles from China back to Italy where it was re-invented into spaghetti. Christianity first arrived in China along the Silk Road brought by Nestorian missionaries in the year 635. The World Bank's report can be downloaded free of charge. *"New Trade Directions for Africa on Asia's Silk Road,"* www.worldbank.org; *"Africa cashes in on new 'silk' routes with Asia,"* *The Observer*, September 17, 2006; *"China's loans raises African debt fears,"* September 19, 2006, *BBC News*.

Too Much Homework. Pressure from parents for children to succeed is impeding childhood development, according to Sun Xiaoyun of the China Youth and Children Research Association. In a 2006 study of elementary school students conducted by the China Development Forum on Juveniles, when asked 'how do you arrange your weekends?', 57 percent of elementary school students said they go to training class or take after-school lessons, 32 percent said they do homework, and only 11 percent admitted to having free time. Additional statistics reveal that a 'great proportion' of Chinese students watch the national news in addition to any children's programming. Professor Zhou Xiaohong, Nanjing University, warned that a surfeit of after-school lessons and excessive homework does not allow children to become well-rounded, and stuns children's development. "Inculcating too many things to children which don't conform to their age is sure to put too much pressure on them," he said. Sun Xiaoyun also affirms that the heart of education is to help children develop healthy personalities not just to disperse academic knowledge. *"Experts: More Respect for Children's Rights and Positions,"* *China Internet Information Center*, www.china.org.cn/english/2006/Sep/182150.htm

Shanghai's Communist Party Head Fired. The Chair of Shanghai's Communist Party was fired on the grounds of corruption and graft and has been removed from the Politburo, the Party's highest leadership council, according to Xinhua (New China News Agency). More than 100 persons were involved investigating Mr. Chen Liangyu's alleged misuse of Shanghai's social security funds. According to the BBC, Chen, 60, was accused of using nearly a third of Shanghai 10 billion *yuan* (US\$1.25billion) pension fund to make illegal loans and investments in real estate and other infrastructure deals. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sees this as proof that, "Whoever it is, no matter how high their positions are, anyone who violates Party rules or national law will be investigated and punished" if guilty, as put forward in its press release. Chen was the highest senior political official to be charged with corruption since 1998, when Beijing's vice-mayor Chen Xitong was jailed for 16 years for corruption. According to the BBC, there is speculation that the sacking Shanghai's Chen Liangyu is also an attempt by Chinese President Hu Jintao to consolidate power. President Hu succeeded Mr. Jiang Zemin, once the mayor of Shanghai and who still commands a loyal political base there. *"China's top leader fired for graft,"* *BBC News*, September 25, 2006; *"Shanghai Party Chief Sacked,"* *Xinhua*, September 25, 2006.

The Amity Foundation up for National Award. The Amity Foundation is one of 20 nominations for China's second national China Poverty Eradication Award, according to Xinhua. This award highlights and rewards individuals and organizations who make a significant contribution to poverty alleviation. The Amity Foundation is a social service organization that was begun in 1985 by Christians in China looking for a way to live Christ's gospel in society. Amity works with local communities in projects designed to empower and lift people out of poverty. It facilitates work in health care, education, rural development, blindness prevention, relief and rehabilitation. Through the General Board of Global Ministries, Amity is one of the United Methodist Church's major partners in China. Many United Methodists are familiar with Amity through its printing press which, since 1987, has printed more than 42 million Bibles in China, distributed throughout the nation by the China Christian Council. *"Poverty Alleviation Awards Highlight Nation's Efforts," Xinhua, September 2006.*

Renewable Energy Is the Way Forward. The North China Electric Power University, a state-owned university, has announced the beginning of a four-year degree in Wind Power Engineering, Xinhua announced. It is the only university to offer such a degree. China, in need of all the energy it can get, announced plans to boost the national wind power capacity to 30,000 megawatts by 2020. NCEPU's graduates will work on design, manufacture and operation of wind turbine plants and organize experimental research. *"China Tacking Into Wind," Xinhua, September 25, 2006.*

For Further Information

Amity Foundation	www.amityfoundation.org
BBC News	www.bbc.co.uk
China Daily	www.chinadaily.com.cn
China.org.cn	www.china.org.cn
Jubilee USA Network Drop the Debt	www.jubilleeusa.org
Oxfam	www.OxfamAmerica.org
World Bank	www.worldbank.org

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, including the China Christian Council, to help it define new relationships within China's post-denominational context. 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.

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