

Monthly News Summary: People's Republic of China March 2007

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Chinese New Year of the Pig. With fireworks, special foods and massive celebrations, Chinese communities all over the world ushered in the New Year of the Golden Pig on February 18, a particularly auspicious year according to Chinese geomancers who follow the 60 year cyclical Chinese calendar. To nearly 25 percent of the world's population, Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival (*chun jie*) as its called in Chinese, is the most important festival of the year. Red couplets (*chunlian*) adorn walls to herald good wishes of health and blessings, firecrackers scare off malevolent spirits, and meat dumplings (*jiaozi*) are a requisite midnight fare to ensure good fortune throughout the year throughout the year as their shape resembles ancient gold ingots. In Hongkong, flower markets remain open all night, where people rush to buy plum blossoms, a sign winter has ended, and tangerine trees whose small fruits represent gold coins and therefore good fortune. Spring Festival celebrations last for several days, each specific day replete with traditional foods and customs that ranges from visiting temples to calling in on distant relatives. A time for reunion, hundreds of millions were on the move in China, returning home to be with parents and grandparents. A special Chengdu-Shanghai railway line was put on by the government especially for migrant workers, many who work thousands of miles from their hometowns. The government lifted its 12 year old ban on fireworks with Beijing city limits and the *People's Daily* estimated that sanitation workers spent nearly seven days and nights collecting spent firework casings. Spring Festival is calculated as the second new moon after the winter solstice and assigns years according to 12 animals. The year of the pig is the last in the 12 animal pattern which will repeat itself beginning next year. (Source: "Beijing collects 2,600 tons...", *People's Daily Online*, Feb 27, 2007; *United Methodist China Program*)

35th anniversary of the Shanghai Communiqué. February 28, 2007 marked the 35th anniversary of the Shanghai Communiqué, signed at the end of U.S. President Richard M. Nixon's historic visit to the People's Republic of China from February 21 – 28, 1972. Nixon's visit to remains a watershed event for both nations. The 1972 visit culminated with both sides signing a joint communiqué, the principles which remain a touchstone of Sino-US relations, said David M. Lampton, director of China Studies at Johns Hopkins University, and former president of the United States China People's Friendship Association. The communiqué acknowledged areas of commonality, difference, an understanding of the One China principle, and an agreement of the need to handle issues surrounding Taiwan with sensitivity. Lampton feels that a focus by Nixon and the then-Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, on long-term common interests was key to a relationship that he feels has been essentially peaceful, although not without contentions, for past 35 years. (Source: "Principles of Shanghai Communiqué still apply...", *People's Daily Online*, February 27, 2007)

Two-thirds of Chinese students remain overseas. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) estimates that two-thirds of Chinese students who have studied abroad since the 1980s have not returned to China, said the *China Daily*. The CASS report said these 'brain drain' figures are the highest in the world. In 2002 more than 100,000 students had gone abroad to study with approximately 25,000 returning to China when their studies were completed, said the BBC News. Ms. Li Xiaoli, co-author of the comprehensive report, said the report reflects that China is now in a "dire need of people with expertise." Chinese state media has called on the government to provide incentives for returnees. The *China Daily* said, "Before, many talented Chinese emigrated overseas as they could not find opportunity at home. It is time to nurture that reverse migration." (Source: "China suffers severe brain drain," *BBC News*, February 13, 2007; "China's lost talent overseas," *BBC News*, February 21, 2007; *Agency France-Presse*, February 14, 2007)

Third African visit for Hu Jintao. Chinese President Hu Jintao recently completed his third visit to Africa further signifying China's continuing desire for closer relationships with African countries. In recent years China has been offering both significant debt cancellation packages and grants for improvement in education, agriculture, and infrastructure. In return China has been given wide access to raw materials to supply its growing economy. In Liberia, in exchange for iron ore, Hu cancelled a \$10 million debt and promised \$25 million within the next two years towards Liberia's reconstruction efforts following Liberia's devastating 1989 – 2003 civil war, the BBC reported. In Zambia, where Chinese investments have topped \$800 million, a 'special economic zone' will be created in the copper mining region of Chambishe, where Chinese companies can operate without having to pay import or value-added taxes. In the Sudan, China imports nearly 80

percent of Sudanese oil and has financed its pipeline structure. Beijing has been heavily criticized by western nations for its relationship with the Sudan, where it has continually advocated quiet diplomacy and peaceful negotiations, as opposed to rigorous United Nations sanctions, in regard to the Sudanese government's alleged complacency in human rights violations in the Dafur region. According to Hongkong's *Da Kung Bao* newspaper, it was Hu that recently convinced Sudanese President Bashir to allow joint United Nations and Africa Union forces into the Dafur region. Western companies and countries, long accused of depleting Africa's riches and resources for corporate gain, are now leveling the same criticism at China. Analysts say that what makes China's negotiations so appealing to African countries is that it is able to negotiate significant unilateral aid packages which are relatively devoid of unfair and crippling caveats so characteristic of loans and grants given by others like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. South African President Thabo Mbeki has also spoken out strongly against the risk of Africa becoming an economic colony of China. (Sources: "Chinese leader boosts Sudan ties," *BBC News*, February 2, 2007; "Press divided over Hu's African tour," *BBC News*, February 10, 2007; "China's 'peaceful rise' running into criticism," *BBC News*, February 1, 2007; *Christian Aid*; "China's influence in Africa arouses some resistance," *New York Times*, February 10, 2007)

China brokers North Korea nuclear crisis deal. North Korea has agreed to shut down its main nuclear facilities, a direct result of the most recent six-nation talks in Beijing. China authored the agreement which subsequently led to North Korea abandoning its nuclear program in which it was alleged that its Yongbyon plant was used for uranium enrichment. As part of the Beijing-based agreement, the United States has agreed to hold further talks on opening formal ties with North Korea and replacing the awkward 1953 truce that ended the Korea War with a permanent peace treaty, said the *Christian Science Monitor*. This would eventually require the United States to take North Korea off a list of nations that support terrorism. It is widely thought that after North Korea tested a nuclear device in October 2006, China's 'economic squeeze' on North Korea, coupled with those of the United States, strangled the North Korean economy. (Source: "North Korea comes in from the cold," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 14, 2007; "China retakes center stage in North Korea crisis," *Reuters*, February 7, 2007.)

Film on China's AIDS victims wins Oscar. The 39-minute documentary film, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, about AIDS orphans in Yingzhou district, Fuyang, Anhui province, won an Oscar for the best short documentary at the 79th Academy Awards in Los Angeles. Zhang Ying, head of the Fuyang AIDS Orphan Salvation Associate, a local non-government organization, praised the film for depicting accurately the plight of Fuyang's AIDS orphans. Zhang's organization, founded in 2003, has helped more than 400 children whose parents have died of AIDS-related illness. The film also chronicles AIDS prevention campaigns in the district. According to international statistics there are about 650,000 persons living with HIV and AIDS in China and around 76,000 children who have been orphaned, their parents having died of AIDS-related illness. GBGM partner, the Amity Foundation, a non-governmental social service organization in China initiated by Christians, also has been working with HIV-AIDS issues since 1996. (Source: "Documentary depicting care for AIDS orphans in Chinese city wins Oscar," *People's Daily Online*, February 27, 2007)

80-year old AIDS activist from China to receive award in U.S. The Chinese authorities will allow Dr. Gao Yaojie, 80, to visit the United States to pick up the Global Women's Leadership Award, given by the organization Vital Voice, reported the *New York Times*. Dr. Gao, initially denied permission to travel, was the leading force behind exposing the 1990s plasma-selling operations in Henan province, in which thousands of poor farmers unknowingly contracted the HIV virus. In many of these commercial operations, some encouraged by local government, quality control and sterilization procedures were ignored which led to the contamination of blood products that has affected the lives of millions in Henan alone, China's most populous province. Dr. Gao had traveled abroad to receive other awards, but was stopped in 2001, as Beijing grew uncomfortable with her criticism of the actions of some Communist Party provincial leaders. She recently began an online blog where she posts information about AIDS cases and said it has been subjected to online insults. (Source: "China covers up detention of AIDS doctor," *New York Times*, February 16, 2007; *Vital Voice*)

China readies for important national meetings. Several important political meetings are on the Chinese agenda in March. On March 3 the national Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress, the top political advisory body, will open session, with the National People's Congress, China's top legislative body, following suit on March 5. Later in the year the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which meets every five years, will elect top leadership. According to Chinese media, corruption is high on the agenda in each of the meetings. Last year Mr. Chen Liangyu, the top Chinese Communist Party leader in Shanghai,

was convicted of corruption and the BBC reports that in 2006 nearly 97,000 Party members were found guilty of bribe-taking or breaching financial rules. A new state corruption prevention bureau will soon be established which the BBC News said is expected to have offices in the nation's far-flung regions. Also on the agenda of these national meetings will be the rising costs of medical care and education, soaring housing fees, the lack of adequate social service coverage, and the growing gap between the urban rich and rural poor. Nearly 2,000 journalists from within China and overseas have applied to cover the two March sessions. (Source: "China steps up corruption fight," *BBC News*, February 14, 2007; "Thousands of correspondents to cover China's two sessions," *People's Daily Online*, February 27, 2007; "Corruption to be hot topic," *People's Daily Online*, February 23, 2007)

Global warming impacts China. Beijing experienced the warmest winter in 30 years, said the *China Daily*, and quoted top meteorologist, Dr. Qin Dahe, as saying that the unseasonable temperatures were due to the impact of global warming. Global warming is also blamed for the severe drought in southwest China last summer and the lack of rainfall in China's northwest where hundreds of thousands are short of drinking water. Dr. Qin Dahe was part of an inter-governmental panel on climate change which released a report saying humankind was the very likely cause of the intensification of greenhouse gases over the past five decades. China is the world's largest consumer of coal and is set to overtake the United States as the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the next decade, said the BBC News. China's foreign ministry spokesperson, Ms. Jiang Yu, has indicated China's willingness to curb greenhouse gases and also said, "Developed countries bear an unshirkable responsibility" for climate change, and that they should "lead the way in assuming responsibility...." China has committed to reducing carbon dioxide and other emissions by 20 percent over the next five year. (Source: "Water woes plague China's economy," *BBC News*, February 7, 2007; "Climate change 'affecting' China," *BBC News*, February 6, 2007)

Links and sources

[Amity Foundation](http://www.amityfoundation.org)

[BBC News](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

[Beijing Review](http://www.bjreview.com.cn)

[China Christian Council](http://www.chinesechristiancouncil.org)

[China Daily](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn)

[China Development Brief](http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com)

[Christian Aid](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)

[General Board of Global Ministries, UMC](http://www.gb-gm-umc.org)

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

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

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

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

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www.amityfoundation.org

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