

CHINA TODAY UPDATES

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1.

China Voice: Peace, opportunities: global implication of “Chinese dream”

25th March 2013

Xinhua News - In-depth
Xinhua Writer Gui Tao

BEIJING, March 25 (Xinhua) -- Neither a crystal ball nor a pair of colored spectacles will help interpret the "Chinese dream." To better understand the phrase that is being widely discussed, it takes vision and impartiality.

China's pursuit of its dream of national rejuvenation brings peace and opportunities to the world. That is deeply rooted in the country's constant commitment to peaceful development and its own path ahead.

A major player in maintaining both regional and global security and stability, China has been pursuing peaceful growth.

The latest reaffirmation came on March 23, when President Xi Jinping told his audience in a Moscow institute that Chinese people deeply appreciate the value of peace and also need a peaceful environment to build their nation.

It was in the same speech that Xi said the Chinese dream, which he put forth when he became the country's new helmsman last year, will benefit not only the Chinese people, but also people of all countries.

The Chinese dream is not a call for revanchism and Chinese nationalism at the expense of its neighbors. It is the dream of China, which once suffered invasions and turmoil, to maintain lasting peace.

A peaceful and stable China is a blessing to the Asia-Pacific region and the whole world. The world's second-largest economy and the most populous country is too important to fail.

Among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China is now the largest contributor of personnel to UN peace-keeping missions. It has also sent naval task forces to conduct escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. The realization of the Chinese dream will see the country play a bigger role in maintaining world peace.

To realize its rejuvenation, China will have to sustain its growth through deepening reforms and transforming from an investment-driven growth mode to a consumption-driven one.

Consumption-led growth will not only bring opportunities for investors throughout the world and expand the market for overseas goods and service providers, but also ease China's trade imbalance with the United States and Europe.

The realization of the Chinese dream won't entail the shattered dreams of other countries. On the contrary, it helps them to realize their own dreams, be they American, Russian or African aspirations.

The methodology used by the largest developing country in the world to achieve its dream also provides inspiration to other developing nations that are fumbling their way out of the dark.

During his visit in Russia, Xi called for building a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation at the core. China's rise does not have to come at the cost or the fall of any other nations. The development and growth of other countries could be regarded as an opportunity rather than a threat for one's own country.

2.

Africa's trade ties with China in spotlight as President Xi visits

24th March 2013

By George Obulutsa and Fumbuka Ng'wanakilala

DAR ES SALAAM (Reuters) - Chinese President Xi Jinping faces growing calls from policymakers and economists in Africa for a more balanced trade relationship between the continent and China as he arrives in Tanzania at the beginning of an African tour on Sunday.

China's ties with the continent dates back to the 1950s, when Beijing backed African liberation movements fighting to throw off Western colonial rule. It has built roads, railways, stadiums and pipelines to win access to Africa's oil and minerals like copper and uranium to feed its booming economy.

Many across Africa see China as a valuable counterbalance to the West's influence. But as the relationship matures there is mounting discomfort in Africa that the continent is exporting

raw materials while spending heavily to import finished consumer goods from the Asian economic powerhouse.

"He will be looking to tone down the feeling that China is just here to exploit resources. I think that is going to be his main job," James Shikwati, director of the Nairobi-based Inter Regional Economic Network think tank, told Reuters.

China's new leader is due to land in Tanzania's commercial capital, Dar es Salaam, on Sunday for a state banquet before delivering his first policy speech on Africa in a Chinese-funded conference hall on Monday.

Xi will go on from Tanzania to South Africa where leaders of the world's major emerging economies, known as the BRICS, will meet on Tuesday and Wednesday and could endorse plans to create a joint foreign exchange reserves pool and an infrastructure bank at a summit.

The proposal underscores frustrations among emerging markets at having to rely on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which are seen as reflecting the interests of the United States and other industrialised nations.

Xi's visit to Africa - which ends in the Republic of Congo - on his first trip abroad is seen as a demonstration of Africa's strategic importance to China, driven by Beijing's hunger for resources and African demand for cheap Chinese imports.

ENERGY

The east African seaboard is hot property after huge gas discoveries boosted Tanzania and Mozambique's combined gas reserves to more than 180 trillion cubic feet.

Mozambique accounts for the bulk of this, with enough to supply world number one importer Japan for 35 years. There have also been oil strikes in neighbouring Kenya and Uganda.

Xi will criss-cross a region where China's economic growth and injections of aid offer both hope and cause for anxiety.

Nigeria's central bank chief, Lamido Sanusi, said Africans should wake up to the realities of their "romance with China."

"So China takes our primary goods and sells us manufactured ones. This was also the essence of colonialism," Sanusi wrote in the Financial Times this month. "Africa is now willingly opening itself up to a new form of imperialism."

"We must see China for what it is: a competitor."

In Dar es Salaam, where Tanzanian and Chinese flags fluttered in the coastal breeze, businessman Hamisi Mwalimu said China was flooding local markets with counterfeit goods while stripping the continent of its natural resources.

"We need a smart partnership where both Tanzania and China benefit. Right now, they're getting a much better deal than us," Mwalimu said.

EQUAL PARTNERS?

Beijing has kept under wraps details of new investments or aid Xi will announce, a typical feature of overseas trips by Chinese leaders. Last year, Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao offered \$20 billion in loans to African countries over the coming three years.

At that summit, China pledged to help Africa export manufactured products, not just raw materials, and to import from the continent.

But rights groups and some Western governments say China supports African governments with dubious human rights records to get access to resources. Often cited is Beijing's relationship with Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir who faces international war crimes charges.

The European Union rejects what it labels China's "cheque book" approach to doing business with Africa and demands reforms and the transparent use of aid.

Such criticism draws rebukes from China that the West treats Africa as though it were a colony.

"Africa wants to be treated as an equal, and this is what many Western countries do not understand, or are at least are not willing to do," Zhong Jianhua, China's special envoy to Africa, told Reuters in an interview this month.

"China at least knows that we have to treat people in Africa as equals."

China is criticised for using Chinese workers on infrastructure and mining projects in Africa. Beijing estimates almost 1 million Chinese are working in Africa.

Zhong acknowledged Chinese companies faced criticism for flooding Africa with Chinese workers.

"We have told Chinese companies that they cannot just use Chinese workers," Zhong said. "I think most Chinese firms now realise this."

Yet not all African governments appear that worried with the use of Chinese workers, especially for infrastructure projects.

"China isn't coming to Congo to create jobs," Republic of Congo Ambassador to China, Daniel Owassa, told Reuters.

(Additional reporting by Ben Blanchard in Beijing; Writing by Richard Lough; Editing by Pravin Char)

3.

What Does the Chinese Constitution Say About Religion?

20th March 2013

Joann Pittman

Misconceptions abound regarding what the Constitution of the People's Republic of China has to say about religion. The government trumpets the fact that the freedom of religious belief is enshrined in the Constitution. And we often hear about the constitution forbidding the teaching of religion to those under 18.

I thought it would be interesting to take a look at what the constitution has to say about religion and religious freedom.

Since its founding in 1949, the People's Republic of China has had four different constitutions. The first one was ratified in 1954, and laid out the guiding principles, as well as establishing state structures and citizen rights and obligations. The second constitution was ratified in 1975, with a third, amended version being ratified in 1978. The current Constitution of the People's Republic of China was ratified in 1985. Each reflects the unique political and social conditions in China at the time of ratification.

Each constitution has an article that references religious belief.

* Article 88 of the 1954 constitution states:

"Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief."

During the Cultural Revolution, the constitution was cast aside and Mao ruled by decree. Towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Constitution was revived and revised.

* Article 28 of the 1975 constitution states:

"Citizens enjoy freedom of speech, correspondence, the press, assembly, association, procession, demonstration and the freedom to strike, and enjoy freedom to believe in religion and freedom not to believe in religion and to propagate atheism."

* Article 46 of the 1978 constitution states:

"Citizens enjoy freedom to believe in religion and freedom not to believe in religion and to propagate atheism."

* Article 36 of the 1982 (current) constitution states:

"Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any

foreign domination."

What all of these articles has in common is the notion of having a right to believe (or not) in religion.

Article 36 is actually the most comprehensive of all the articles in the protections that it seems to offer citizens. They can't be forced to believe in religion. They can't be forced not to believe in religion. Those who believe in religion cannot be discriminated against.

However, the provisions in the second half of the article seem to nullify, or at least place limits on, the freedom promised in the first half. After stating what freedoms citizens have, it basically says "but the state can set the boundaries around religion" (regulate). The state gets to define what religious activities are considered to be "normal." The state gets to decide what activities are considered "disruptive" to social order, impair the health of society, and interfere with the educational system. According to some Mainland legal scholars, then, the first half of the article protects religious freedom, while the second half restricts it. (Am I allowed to say, "nothing is as it seems" at this point?)

At the end of the day, however, it doesn't really matter all that much what the constitution says or doesn't say because in the Chinese legal system courts do not have the power of judicial review. In other words, they cannot consider the constitution when deciding cases. It's just not relevant.

As I mentioned earlier, for years we have often heard that the Chinese Constitution forbids the teaching of religion to children under the age of 18. The good news, as we can see, is that it isn't true. The Chinese Constitution does no such thing.

The bad news, however, is that such a stipulation does exist in "Document No. 19 The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period," which was promulgated by the State Council (cabinet) in 1982. This was a detailed document put out detailing how religion could/could not function in Chinese society. It states:

"The political power in a socialist state can in no way be used to promote any one religion, nor can it be used to forbid any one religion, as long as it is only a question of normal religious beliefs and practices. At the same time, religion will not be permitted to meddle in the administrative or juridical affairs of state, nor to intervene in the schools or public education. It will be absolutely forbidden to force anyone, particularly people under eighteen years of age, to become a member of a church, to become a Buddhist monk or nun, or to go to temples or monasteries to study Buddhist scripture."

In 2005, the State Council promulgated the "Regulation on Religions Affairs," in which it further clarified how religious affairs are to be managed in China. Interestingly, this time there is no mention of prohibitions for those under the age of 18.

Article 2 states:

"Citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief. No organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in any religion (hereinafter referred to as religious citizens) or citizens who do not believe in any religion (hereinafter referred to as non-religious citizens). Religious citizens and non-religious citizens shall respect each other and co-exist in harmony, and so shall citizens who believe in different religions."

Article 3 states:

"The State, in accordance with the law, protects normal religious activities, and safeguards the lawful rights and interests of religious bodies, sites for religious activities and religious citizens. Religious bodies, sites for religious activities and religious citizens shall abide by the Constitution, laws, regulations and rules, and safeguard unification of the country, unity of all nationalities and stability of society. No organization or individual may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State, or in other activities that harm State or public interests, or citizens' lawful rights and interests."

In other words, people can believe what they want, but the state reserves the right to set the boundaries within which their beliefs can be practiced.

For a detailed analysis of these regulations, I recommend an article titled "Semantic Analysis of Keywords in the Regulation of the Religious Affairs," by Zhang Shoudong, a Mainland scholar. <http://www.pacilution.com/english/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=3101>

The Centre on Religion and Chinese Society at Perdue University has a collection of English translations of government documents on religion in China. <http://www.purdue.edu/crcs/itemResources/chinaDocs.html>

4.

For Many in China, the One Child Policy is Already Irrelevant

19th March 2013

LESLIE T. CHANG

Before getting pregnant with her second child, Lu Qingmin went to the family-planning office to apply for a birth permit. Officials in her husband's Hunan village where she was living turned her down, but she had the baby anyway. She may eventually be fined \$1,600—about what she makes in two months in her purchasing job at a Guangdong paint factory. "Everyone told me to hide so the family-planning people wouldn't find me, but I went around everywhere," she told me. "In the past, that place had very strict family planning, but now the policy has loosened. The cadres worry that there are too many only children here." I asked her if government policy had factored into her decision to have a second child. "It was never a consideration," she said.

Lu Qingmin, or Min, is typical of the migrant workers I met while researching a book in the factory city of Dongguan. Born in one place, working in another, and married into a third, they are as adept at moving between worlds as the frequent-flying global élite, with the difference that they have never left their home country. The Chinese government, which is good at transmitting edicts from Beijing down through the provinces to counties and villages, isn't set up for people who don't respect borders. Married migrant women are required to send home a certificate every year confirming that they are not pregnant; Min has never done this. Her older sister, who works in nearby Shenzhen, also has two children. The owner of an

apartment that I rented in Dongguan from 2005 to 2006 had two children; so did a businessman who gave me a tour of the city's karaoke bars. "Most of my friends have two children, except the ones who have three children," Wu Chunming, a migrant who has lived in the city for nineteen years, told me. "In the villages now, having two children is standard."

For so long a symbol of the authoritarian state at its most coercive, China's policy limiting most families to one child is slipping into irrelevance. Last week, the government announced it would merge the National Population and Family Planning Commission, which has overseen the policy for three decades, into the Ministry of Health—a tacit admission that limiting births no longer requires the scrutiny and enforcement it once did. Most observers see this as a first step toward dismantling a policy that has already been rendered inconsequential by increased mobility, rising wealth, and the sense that stringent controls are no longer necessary. Wealthy Chinese can travel to the United States to give birth, which also confers the bonus of American citizenship on the child. Couples one step down the economic ladder may have a second child in Hong Kong, Macau, or Singapore. Families with two offspring are commonplace among the country's millions of mobile entrepreneurs; an estimated 150 million rural migrants enjoy similar freedoms. Even in the countryside, where heavy penalties and forced abortions were more prevalent in the past, officials are loosening their grip. In my conversations with rural Chinese people over the past several years, it has become clear that fines that were once prohibitive are now just a nuisance—a couple of months' wages, rather than a lifetime of savings.

The one group that still sticks to the letter of the law are the country's traditional élite: urban residents with proper household registration, or hukou, often in government jobs, who risk punitive fines and dismissal from their jobs for violating the law. In Dongguan, the penalty for a second child in a hukou-holding family can be as high as 200,000 yuan, or \$31,000; any woman with a child must have an ultrasound every three months to ensure she is not pregnant. A friend of mine in Shanghai had two abortions in the years following the birth of her daughter. "A lot of entrepreneurs, including some of my friends, have two children," she told me. "But we both work for government units, so we can't."

Officially, the policy remains the same. In 2004, a group of social scientists petitioned Beijing to relax the one-child rule, eventually allowing all families to have two children. After thirty years, they argued, the policy had lowered fertility and raised living standards; now China faced the opposite problem of an aging population with too few young people to support them. The government turned down the proposal, fearful of igniting a population explosion. In 2009, these experts tried again, this time presenting evidence that any loosening would not cause a sudden spike in births; they petitioned the government again last year. Beijing has still not approved any changes.

Yet this long-running and inconclusive debate is having unexpected results. When I visited the city of Chongqing over a year ago, a local official told me out of the blue that Beijing might soon announce a national two-child policy. "We are eagerly awaiting that," he said. In Dongguan, one person told me that anyone could have two children five years apart; another said that any resident of a major city who had a daughter could now have a second child four years later. None of these things is true. But they reflect a widespread feeling among officials and average people that draconian controls are no longer needed. "China's population is aging very fast, so there will be too many only children in the future. So the policy does not have to be as strict as before," I was informed by my migrant friend Chunming, a saleswoman for a chain of traditional-style teahouses. She is unmarried and has no need to

know about family-planning policies, but she sounded as authoritative as a government spokesman.

“But they haven’t formally changed the policy?” I asked her.

“No. The policy has not been formally changed,” she said. Then she added, “China’s laws toward births have never been that strict, that’s my feeling. Different places have different policies.” That was true, too. The one-child policy was born of a 1980 Communist Party directive urging Party members to “encourage” families to have one child; it was strictly enforced in large cities, where the single-child family soon became standard. But because of stiff resistance from farmers, who wanted sons to work the land and carry on the family name, provinces were granted latitude to adapt the rules as they saw fit. Some rural areas permitted couples to have a second child if the first was a girl; others allowed two children across the board. Of all the rural migrants I knew in Dongguan—all born after the policy went into effect—not one was an only child.

Chunming introduced me to Xu Xiang, a sales agent for latex manufacturers who has two daughters, aged eleven and seven. “About the only people who have one child are government officials,” he told me. “For them to break this law is like for an American to violate the constitution.” Yet no one he knows wants more than two children, and over two days of failed effort to meet his daughters, I began to see why. They were too busy—with math tutoring, drawing class, piano lessons, and taekwando. They attend a private school where every subject except Chinese is taught in English from the first grade. The older girl is on track to get into the best middle school in the province. She wants to go to Harvard or Oxford.

After two decades in Dongguan, Xu Xiang’s hukou is still in his native Guangxi, which means that no one is monitoring the size of his family. “But what’s the point of having seven fairy maidens if you can’t educate them properly?” he asked me. Such sentiments explain why variable enforcement of the policy has not led to a boom in childbearing. The ideal family, of two parents feverishly pushing one or possibly two offspring to excel, has already been internalized as the norm.

Demographers estimate that a Chinese woman today will have 1.5 children on average over her lifetime, one of the lowest fertility rates in the world. In Dongguan, I met couples who skirted the law to have two children. The opposite trend is taking place elsewhere. Even couples permitted to have two children—for example, when a husband and wife are both only children—are choosing to have just one, or they are remaining childless. A study in Jiangsu province found that only ten percent of couples eligible to have a second child have had one; the rest said it would be too expensive. “People’s behavior in childbearing has become diversified, along with everything else in a market economy,” said Gu Baochang, a professor of demography at the Center for Population and Development Studies at the People’s University in Beijing. “Some people don’t want children at all. Others just strongly want to have two children. Some want more than two.”

I lived in China from 1998 to 2007, and the longer I stayed, the more I felt that governance was a frantic effort to keep up with what was happening on the ground. The economic opening championed by Deng Xiaoping was actually set in motion in 1978 by a group of Anhui farmers who illegally split up their communal farmland into individual plots, which led to increased efficiency and the dismantling of the communes. In an age of reform, the

government's role is often to pass laws to "legalize" entities (such as foreign Internet investors or private book publishers) that already exist. So when Beijing finally gets around to abolishing its one-child policy, as its latest actions suggest will happen, it will likely find that the ruling has almost no impact.

Min was born in 1986, six years after the one-child policy came into effect. She is the second of five children, a reflection of lax enforcement of family planning in the Hebei farming village where she grew up. (Min's father told me that one family in the village had six children; another man, who had fathered seven children, had been the village chief.) Min herself, along with everyone she knows, has two children. When history's largest social experiment in state-regulated childbearing comes to an end, it will have been borne disproportionately by the Chinese urban middle-class. The elaborate machinery built to enforce these policies barely touched Min at all. She was ignored by the government, living at the margins—in China, that's often the best place to be.

5.

China's new president promises 'great renaissance'

17th March 2013

The Washington Post

William Wan

Zhang Jie contributed to this report.

BEIJING — In his first speech as China's new president, Xi Jinping promised Sunday to pursue a "great renaissance of the Chinese nation" and to deliver a more equitable society and a more effective, less corrupt government.

But at a rare news conference afterward, China's new premier, Li Keqiang, parried reporters' efforts to get specifics on how the new administration would accomplish those goals, sticking largely to vows to reform.

The news conference — held annually at the close of the National People's Congress — drew widespread attention because it is one of the only times each year when China's top leaders open themselves to public questioning.

Even as Xi and Li are trying to project an image of new transparency, there are clear limits to that effort, as Sunday's news conference showed. All questions at the news conference were carefully pre-screened, and answers were apparently prepared well in advance.

The premier was asked about China's increasing problems with pollution, its widely despised labour camps, its economic slowdown and rampant problems with corruption. The corruption question yielded one of the few detailed responses at the event, with Li saying the new administration planned to further curb signs of ostentation by building no new ornate government buildings and decreasing official receptions and visits abroad.

“Reform is about curbing government power. It is a self-imposed revolution,” Li said. “It will require real sacrifice, and it will be painful, like cutting the wrist. But this is necessary for development and demanded by people.”

He also invoked repeatedly the importance of the rule of law, acknowledging a common complaint among citizens about a judicial system that critics say is often decided by personal contacts rather than what is right.

On a question about pollution and environmental safety — on a particularly hazy day and after more than 12,000 pigs were mysteriously found dead in rivers that provide drinking water to Shanghai — Li said the pollution “depressed” him and that economic growth should not be pursued at the expense of the environment.

Li dismissed one reporter’s question about U.S. charges of official Chinese involvement in hacking American companies and government agencies to carry out cyber-espionage. He called the charges “groundless accusations,” and he repeated long-standing bromides about the U.S.-China relationship, saying it should stress mutual interests rather than differences.

Those differences are likely to come up later this week when U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew visits China, with the topic of recent cyberattacks on U.S. companies likely unavoidable.

At the conclusion of the two-hour news conference, Li acknowledged general alarm from other countries at China’s rise. They are worried about the sustainability of China’s growth and its possible use of force and hegemony, he said, referring indirectly to China’s pollution and its increasingly aggressive posture in the region.

He tried to allay those fears, saying China would not “force on others what we don’t want ourselves.”

But for the most part, the comments by the premier and president seemed geared to domestic concerns.

Xi has talked repeatedly in recent months of pursuing a new “Chinese dream,” which he has often characterized in terms of the nation as a whole — a common theme for a Communist government that emphasizes the collective. But in Sunday’s speech, Xi linked that dream more closely to improving the lives of individuals.

“Chinese people living in our great motherland and this great era shall share the chance of living a splendid life, share the chance of realizing the dream, share the chance of growing and improving along with the motherland,” he said.

Public reaction to both leaders included praise for how they handled themselves, mixed with healthy doses of skepticism about their sincerity.

“Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang look smart and pragmatic, more and more like Western politicians,” noted one microblogger under the handle Bright New Moon. “Right now, we listen more to what they say than we observe what they do.... It has thundered loudly, but now we are waiting to see if it will rain or not.”

End