

CHINA TODAY UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2014

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1.

The New Contexts and Challenges in China Today

31st January 2014

China Source

New Post: ZGBriefs - Top Picks from January 30 Issue
By Joann Pittman, ZGBriefs Editor

Our top picks this week are all over the map, so to speak, covering religion, politics, and the perils of language learning!

The New Contexts and Challenges in China Today (Global China Center)

In this article, Kevin Yao does an excellent job of summarizing the current socio-political context of China:

Needless to say, the context in which the Chinese Church lives is a fast-changing one. As China undergoes drastic social and cultural changes, the Church there is facing new realities and challenges. If the overseas churches continue to walk along with the Chinese Christians in a constructive way, it is absolutely necessary to understand the Chinese Church's current dynamics in Chinese society and culture, and to adjust their approaches and strategies accordingly.

In my view, there are three monumental shiftings or mega trends in the Chinese context, which have huge implications for the Christian ministry there.

The three shifts he identifies are: from social consensus to social division; from Marxist

dominance to religious tolerance; and from open-mindedness to nationalism.

His conclusion about the main challenge facing the church in China is interesting, and probably somewhat surprising to most people outside of China:

Furthermore, the competitor of Christianity in China of the 1980s was relatively easy to be identified: primarily Marxism. But today there are multiple competitors ranging from Marxism to traditional religions, and from consumerism to new religious cults. In the face of nationalist pressure, to make the Church genuinely Chinese is becoming an even more urgent task. Taking all factors into account, I believe the challenges the Chinese Church faces in the 21st century are mounting, not waning. And the paramount external challenge may no longer be governmental persecution, but religious pluralism.

Full text of article:

<http://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/christianity-in-china/the-new-contexts-and-challenges-in-china-today.php>

2.

Jailing of Xu Zhiyong raises questions about Xi Jinping's war on graft

27th January 2014

South China Morning Post
COMMENT › INSIGHT & OPINION
LEADER

Jailing of Xu Zhiyong raises questions about Xi Jinping's war on graft

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SCMP Editorial

If there is one thing that defines President Xi Jinping's rule it is his stand against official corruption. The authorities have detained a number of senior officials on suspicion of graft and appear to be far from done with high-profile cases. Many more people have been disciplined. Through it all Xi has emphasised the importance of the rule of law in rooting out what is seen as a threat to the party's future. It might be expected, therefore, that there would be more tolerance of public advocacy of basic principles of clean government, such as transparency and accountability, rather than treating it as dissent that undermines the state.

The trial and jailing of human-rights lawyer Xu Zhiyong for four years has confounded that idea. He and seven others from his New Citizen movement were charged with assembling a crowd to disrupt public order. His real "crime" was to organise a campaign for rules to

compel officials to disclose their assets which is, after all, consistent with the letter and spirit of the leadership's drive against corruption. Far from challenging the government or inciting the overthrow of the Communist Party, Xu was advocating steps the government could be expected to take in pursuit of its goal of making China a more equitable society. His jailing is regrettable.

His prosecution is a reminder of the continuing intolerance of criticism and social activism. It sends a message that when it comes to dealing with officials who abuse their power, the party will go it alone and that there is no role for civil society in keeping government open and honest.

These trials are among recent events that raise questions about how far Xi will take his anti-corruption campaign. The other is Beijing's silence on and suppression of a report by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists that several family members of China's political and military leaders are among mainland and Hong Kong residents who store wealth in offshore companies based in the tax haven of the British Virgin Islands. That is not necessarily illegal, but it highlights a lack of transparency that prompts public suspicion about the wealth of the families of the elite and fuels disrespect for authority.

That said, Xi has to try to root out corruption without risking the unity and legitimacy of the party. Perhaps activist pressure is seen as an undue risk to both. However, if Xi really wants his anti-corruption stand to define his rule he must back up words with actions that enshrine accountability and transparency.

* This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as Questions raised in anti-graft war

3.

"Left-behind" children pains China

26th January 2014

"Left-behind" children pains China

English.news.cn

HEFEI, Jan. 26 (Xinhua) -- Xiao Lin went to school to pick up his academic report alone, while most of his schoolmates were accompanied by their parents.

Nine-year-old Lin (pseudonym), whose divorced parents had been working outside his hometown for years, looked a bit down with his disappointing scores on Monday, according to a village cadre in Sige Village in Wangjiang County of east China's Anhui Province.

Lin's mum made a phone call to the family during supper that night, saying that she would not be home for the Lunar New Year, the second year that Lin was not going to see her. Lin was silent during supper. He ate by the doorway staring into the distance.

No one thought that Lin was planning to end his life. He strangled himself in the toilet that night, days away from Spring Festival. He left no note.

Lin was one of China's vast number of "left-behind" migrant children. His father went to work outside the village, less than 30 days after Lin was born.

"Left-behind" children are those who remain in rural homes while their parents go to work in cities to earn a living. The children are usually taken care of by their grandparents or other relatives. China's "left-behind" population is nearing 100 million.

Lin's mum became a migrant worker when she and her husband divorced two years ago. The boy was transferred to an elementary school near his step-father's home village, also in Anhui Province. He was then transferred back half a year later to the school he had originally attended.

Lin's parents never went to school to pick up his academic reports with him, nor had they ever attended parents' meetings, enhancing his insecurities, according to Yang Qinglin, the school's headmaster.

"He was more well-behaved than his schoolmates, because he knew no one was going to defend him if he caused trouble at school," Yang said.

Lin rarely received a phone call from his parents.

4.

Corruption in China: money of political and business leaders in tax havens

22nd January 2014

AsiaNews - www.asianews.it
CHINA

Corruption in China: money of political and business leaders in tax havens

Revealed in an investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists , already dubbed "Chinaleaks". Family members of national leaders from days of Deng Xiaoping also blacklisted. Analysts: "The offshore accounts increase inequality between rich and poor and feed corruption. Beijing can stop them, if it wants to". The turnover is estimated at one trillion dollars.

Beijing (AsiaNews) - Political leaders, industrialists and their families, and even anti - corruption officials commissioned by Xi Jinping have funds stashed away in tax havens around the world. This was revealed by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists in a report on data obtained by a massive leak. The scandal, which covers more than 2.5 million files, has been renamed "Chinaleaks" and could lead to a new wave of censorship in the country.

According to the text, the holders of foreign accounts include 22 thousand customers with address in mainland China and another 16 thousand that can be traced back to Hong Kong and Taiwan. Having an offshore account is not in itself a crime, the secrecy surrounding these data banks and international privacy laws of tax havens make them highly suspect. In the best case scenario, experts point out, they are used to evade taxes, in the worst to harbour capital abroad.

The names of account holders include Deng Jiagui , brother of the President Xi Jinping, and two sons of former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao (Wen Yunsong and Wen Ruchun , both involved in a scandal related to the family that emerged last year). There are also relatives of former President Hu Jintao, the reformer Deng Xiaoping and the "butcher of Tiananmen ," the former premier Li Peng . There are even some of the biggest business people in the country: Yang Huiyan , the " richest woman in China" at the head of Country Garden Holdings , and her male counterpart , Pony Ma Huateng , founder of internet giant Tencent, the construction billionaire Zhang Xin.

Finally, there are also the names of officials involved in the investigation against the former head of internal security, Zhou Yongkang. The proceedings against Zhou - former ally of Bo Xilai - is the most important internal trial in China in recent times , and many believe the real "test" to see if Xi Jinping is serious in his battle against corruption within the Party and state industries .

The scandal of the foreign accounts also reveals the "dark side " of Chinese growth . Many analysts point out that it is "common practice" for Chinese companies to open offshore accounts in order to sell their products abroad without paying taxes . In this way they accumulate capital which then re-enter the country in the form of investments (that are subject to much lower taxation than that for exports) or they keep the money outside of China.

Clark Gascoigne , spokesperson for the Global Financial Integrity (an American foundation that oversees ethics in finance), told the South China Morning Post that the data in the report "is not a surprise, given that China is believed to be the largest exporter of illicit capital to world. We are speaking about a turnover of approximately one trillion dollars, compared with 880 billion from Russia and 461 billion from Mexico".

The risk , said Gascoigne , "is that this practice could exacerbate the social and economic inequality in the country even further, already a factor in the high instability. Moreover, the foreign accounts gives more space to corruption." China , the expert concludes , "has the ability to tackle this issue effectively, and there's no reason why they can't take the lead. After all, it's developing and emerging economies like China that suffer the most from illicit financial flows".

5.

China to boost education for disabled children

20th January 2014

China to boost education for disabled children

By Zhu Ningzhu

English.news.cn

BEIJING, Jan. 20 (Xinhua) -- The Chinese government has vowed to ensure that at least 90 percent of children with visual, hearing and intellectual disabilities receive primary and middle school education by the end of 2016, according to a plan publicized Monday.

According to a 2014-2016 plan on improving education for learners with special needs, the country will increase investment, build more infrastructure, foster more quality teachers and reform special education curricula.

The plan was jointly mapped out by seven departments, including the ministries of education, civil affairs and finance, based on inspections and surveys across the country.

"Despite obvious development in recent years, our country's special education work in general is still at a low level and suffers from regional imbalance," the Ministry of Education (MOE) said in a statement accompanying the plan.

Official figures show that compulsory education, which includes primary and middle school, only covered 71.9 percent of disabled children as of the end of 2012, compared with 99.5 percent of standard primary schools and 98 percent of middle schools.

The three-year plan stipulates that disabled children should attend the nearest possible standard schools, special education knowledge should be incorporated into exams for teachers' certificates, and that higher education institutes should not refuse admission for learners because of their disabilities.

According to the MOE, government departments will review the progress of local authorities in improving special education as well as the implementation of related policies.

6.

Beijing vows respect for farmers' rights as it pushes rural land reforms

19th January 2014

South China Morning Post

Beijing vows respect for farmers' rights as it pushes rural land reforms

Teddy Ng in Beijing teddy.ng@scmp.com

Annual policy statement recommitts country to meeting own grain needs while pushing ahead with Communist Party's goal of rural land reforms

The central government pledged in a key policy document yesterday to respect farmers' rights while reaffirming its commitment to grain self-sufficiency and rural land reforms.

The broad policy statement was released as part of the so-called No 1 Central Document, which is issued jointly every January by the Communist Party's Central Committee and the State Council. The document sets priorities for the 12 months ahead and has focused on rural matters for 11 straight years.

This document mapped out "three rural issues" - agriculture, rural areas and farmers - and eight focus areas, including improving food security, modernising agriculture, deepening land reforms, ensuring sustainable rural development and encouraging innovation in rural finance.

The document stressed that Beijing would continue to pursue "basic grain self-sufficiency" while allowing an "appropriate" amount of food imports from overseas. It also said the central government would respect farmers' creativity and support local experimentation with reforms. Uniformity would not be imposed and interim policies might be allowed.

Li Guoxiang, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Rural Development Institute, said that respecting farmers' rights and taking the differences between villages in to account was conducive to healthy rural development.

Some local authorities had disregarded the needs of farmers in implementing reforms, especially after the Central Committee vowed to expand rural property rights and form a unified market for rural and urban construction after its plenum in November.

"The conditions among different villages are very varied, but some local authorities take implementing the central government directives as potential political achievements," Li said. "Some authorities took the land from the farmers and focused on attracting investment."

Ma Wenfeng, an analyst at Beijing Orient Agribusiness Consultants, said that the mainland's villages were in various states of development, and it was appropriate for local authorities to be given some autonomy.

Li said the country was facing growing risks as development consumed arable land and a richer populace consumed more food. "The nation will inevitably need to import some food, such as soya beans, from other nations," he said.

Ma said the country had a sufficient food supply, but added that the price differences between imported and domestically produced food should be reduced.

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