

# Social Issues

## Chinese Higher Education Faces Complex Challenges

Opinion polls in China indicate a growing public discontent with higher education. Because of China's Confucian tradition, learning was always highly esteemed, and university graduates never had to worry about employment. But in recent years, **it has become increasingly difficult for university graduates to find work.** Critics maintain that the whole of China's higher education system is problematic; and that problems stem from an internal contradiction within the system itself: part of its operation still strictly follows centralized government planning, while another part is free market-oriented. Government education plans do not always meet the demands of the job market in which graduates today must compete for jobs. As a result, China's higher education system faces several serious challenges:

- **Entrance Examination:** China has a policy of admitting to university only those who obtain the best scores on entrance examinations. This policy tends to favor those students more likely to give the standard answers rather than those who are more creative.
- **Employment Qualities:** Enrollment geared to the planned economy, and employment geared to the free market economy - are mutually incompatible. Hence, the "products" of the universities frequently possess neither the knowledge nor the skills to meet the demands of the fast developing industries.
- **Financial problem:** Tuition fees have skyrocketed to about 20 times what they were 10 years ago, making it very difficult for families to meet expenses.



Since *President Hu Jintao's* blueprint for building a "harmonious society," is slated to be endorsed at the *Chinese Communist Party's 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress* next year, the government must resolve the higher education crisis by launching a thorough restructuring of the entire system, remove the threat to social harmony; and seriously addressing the challenges facing China's university graduates

[Asia Times 12/06]

## Rural School Fees Waived

To narrow the gap between wealthy coastal provinces and poorer regions China **plans to abolish tuition and other school fees for 150 million rural students.** Children from rural families who have migrated to China's booming cities, however, will not be included in the tuition break. The new policy, according to a state-owned newspaper is "*part of a major move to relieve the financial burden of farmers and to develop a new countryside,*" It is also part of the drive to build a "*harmonious society.*" The first phase of the program took place in the Spring of 2006 when more than 50 million students living in some of the poorest western provinces were exempted. In theory, education is free, or almost free, for all children in China from ages six to 15. In practice however, cash strapped local authorities and schools often charge tuition and other fees, placing an undue burden on poor rural families, many of whom survive on less than one US dollar a day. [BBC News 12/06]



## Welfare for Elderly a National Priority

The number of **elderly** in China is **expected to top 200 million by 2015** and 280 million by 2025. A recent government report on aging stated that creating welfare programs for soaring numbers of elderly is one of China's national priorities. **The elderly population rising at 3 percent a year, the absence of adequate social security, and economic and social consequences of aging present a daunting challenge to government finances.** Rapid economic development has eroded Confucian culture that requires sons to support parents in their old age, while daughters are expected to care for their in-laws. With 60 percent of China's elderly living in the countryside, the report said that the government "*has begun to study the establishment of an old-age social security system in rural areas in order to guarantee the basic livelihood of the elderly there.*"

[Xinhua News Agency 12/06]



## China's Revised Adoption Rules



China's new adoption regulations, which take effect on May 1, 2007, favor stable, affluent, physically healthy foreign couples between the ages of 30 and 50. Beijing says the revised criteria are meant to guarantee "optimal family conditions" for adopted children; "not to show prejudice against less qualified applicants." [AP 01/07]

## Christians discuss HIV/AIDS

China Church workers serving people with HIV/AIDS agreed at a recent **Ecumenical Consultation in Shenyang** that they need to work with one another and the local government to be more effective in their ministry. According to *Rev. Joseph Zhang Kexiang*, Vicar General of Liaoning diocese and director of *Catholic Social Services*, this was the first such ecumenical exchange in China on HIV/AIDS ministry. The meeting, aimed at gathering frontline Church workers to share their experiences, stressed the importance of *gaining support from and cooperating with local health and religious-affairs bureaus*. Since 1985 more than 180,000 HIV/AIDS cases have been reported but the number of people living with the condition is likely three to four times this number. The report from this meeting says discrimination is the biggest challenge faced by church workers, especially from the medical sector.

Asia Focus 01/07

## China Leprosy Service

Inspired by *Blessed Father Damien de Veuster*, the Catholic priest - hero of the Island of Molokai, Hawaii, - **China Leprosy Service** was founded in Taipei, Taiwan in 2000 and opened a branch in Sichuan, China in 2003.

The **goal of CLS** is the promotion of a higher quality of life for those with leprosy with the aim of empowering them to actively shape their own future. CLS provides medical care, economic support, education for the children of leprosy patients, and the basic and advanced training for Sisters and social workers in leprosy service.

### For additional information contact:

Luis Guntheinz, SJ  
Fu Jen Catholic University  
Taipei, Taiwan 24255  
E-mail: [fj00046@mail.fju.edu.tw](mailto:fj00046@mail.fju.edu.tw)

## Hebei Press Anniversary



Last October more than 100 people, including bishops, priests, correspondents, writers, scholars and local and overseas Church media workers gathered in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, to attend a seminar titled "*Christian Faith and Modern Media*". The event marked the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Hebei Faith Press.

**Faith Press**, established in April 1991 as a Catholic publishing house, aims at enriching the faith life of its readers and giving them "*a window*" on the Church in China. Today with a circulation of more than 50,000, Faith Press—renamed this year as Faith-10-day, to indicate it is published every 10 days—is the highest circulating Church newspaper in China. [UCAN 11/06]

## Ethically Inspiring TV

*President Hu Jintao's* government has repeatedly tightened controls on television in what it says is an effort to improve public morality. The latest move came ahead of a major Party Congress convened in March. Rules requiring broadcasters to "**reflect the reality of China in a positive way**" took effect in February. The government also announced a crackdown last month on "*vulgar reality shows*." According to an official of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, the restrictions will ensure a better TV environment. AP 01/07

## Beijing Church Fosters Research

A Church-run Institute of Beijing diocese has set up a special scholarship to foster academic research on Catholicism in China. The **Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture** launched its *Sapientia Scholarship* to encourage such research on the undergraduate through doctoral levels. The Institute's director, *Rev. Peter ZHAO Jianmin*, said that studies on Catholicism currently lag behind similar research on Protestant Christianity. He listed inculturation, along with theological, historical and ethical studies, as possible areas for research. Asia Focus 02/07

## Papal Message of Peace at the Lunar New Year

*In his greeting to the faithful for the Lunar New Year, Pope Benedict XVI particularly addressed the Chinese peoples, confirming that China is one of the matters occupying his mind. After reciting the Marian prayer, and recalling that "in various countries of the East the Lunar New Year is being celebrated with joy and in the intimacy of the family", the Holy Father sent "to all those great peoples" best wishes of "serenity and prosperity".*

Asia News 02/07

## Happy New Year of the Golden Pig!

**Lunar New Year, or Spring Festival** as it is now called in China began unusually late this year on February 18. This is just not any **Year of the Pig**, but a fire or golden pig, **the luckiest possible year to be born**. As there are 10 celestial stems, linked to the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water, and 12 terrestrial branches matched to the animals, after 60 years, 10 and 12 overlap, so the fire or golden pig comes only once every six decades.

According to lore, thousands of years ago a story came from India about 12 animals which raced to visit the Buddha. The lazy pig came in last, but was too contented to lose any sleep over ranking as the last year in the 12 year cycle. Pigs are happy animals. They eat, they sleep and they eat some more, without a care in the world. Because pigs have large litters, they also symbolize fertility. The *Year of the Dog*, which ended on February 17<sup>th</sup>, was considered an auspicious year for marriage and China recorded a surge in the number of newly-weds. Whereas, twenty years ago Chinese couples had to get permission to have a baby, now the procedure has been simplified. Married couples may have their first child without filing any official papers, so **a baby boom in China may be on the horizon during this year!**



***USCCB wishes all our readers a safe, peaceful, and above all fruitful Lunar New Year of the Golden Pig.***

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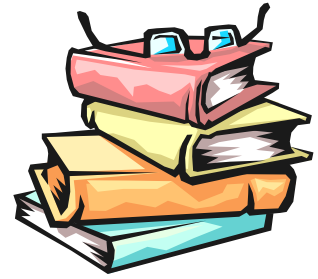
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U.S. Catholic China Bureau  
Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079  
Tel: 973-763-1131 - E-mail: chinabur@shu.edu  
Web: www.usccb.net

USCCB's 11<sup>th</sup> Religious Study Tour was in China 1-19 March 2007 - a marvelous opportunity to witness firsthand all the exciting development in the religious and socio-cultural arenas. For a fuller report and some photos visit our website at [www.usccb.net](http://www.usccb.net) and watch for an account in CCQ #70.

# Reading Notes



- ***The Writing on the Wall: Why we Must Embrace China as a Partner or Face as an Enemy.* Will Hutton. Simon & Schuster 2006.** The author looks at the uneasy relationship between China and the West in light of China's phenomenal economic growth - seen by many, especially the United States, as a threat. However, in today's globalized economy, much of the USA economic health depends on China's economic growth and its considerable investment in the United States. The United States would be wise to encourage China to develop into a fully modern and open democratic society - embracing the rule of law, a fair and independent judiciary, freedom of the press, and an accountable representative government. **Sustaining its economic growth will depend on how the Chinese are persuaded of the economic advantages of a more open, democratic society.**
- ***One Billion Customers: Lessons from the Front Lines of Doing Business in China.* James McGregor.** This extremely witty book presents case studies on doing business in China. Each chapter concludes with a practical section entitled "What This Means for You," and the "Little Red Book of Business" which consists of short pithy sayings that reveal the insights gained in each case study. McGregor ends his book by examining the cooperative Jesuit venture between BeiTa, China's premier university and a consortium of Catholic business schools in the USA. **This book has applications not only to those doing business in China, as well as those working in different sectors of Chinese society, including faith-based organizations.**
- ***Rising China and Asian Democratization: Socialization to "Global Culture" in the Political Transformation.* Daniel C. Lynch.** The author discovered that both Taiwan and Thailand adopted democracy as the elites in their societies accepted the concept of "global culture," which was adopted in the West some two centuries ago. These elites viewed a global culture as universally valid; and democracy as an appropriate political system for all societies. On the contrary, **China maintains that since cultures are at the service of the State, a global culture is impossible.** To accept socialization to global culture would be equivalent to accepting subjugation to Western dominance. Hence, **PRC elites, wary of democracy, are intent on building a new superior, political civilization, incorporating some elements of Western democracy, but authentically Chinese.**

23<sup>RD</sup> NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHINA CONFERENCE

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**Plan Ahead!**

**CONTINUING CROSS CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS**

*Following on the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing,  
the proposed theme will focus on youth: Christian and other religious believers, students,  
business people and so forth*