

INSIGHT

Starting point

Andrew Leung examines blueprints for how China, under Xi Jinping, could begin a political transformation to create a model of development that would be admired around the world

The Communist Party says China will chart its own path of development and will not copy the Western model of multi-party politics. The need for political reform is becoming more urgent as social discontent mounts. But, given China's entrenched vested interests, most pundits have grave doubts about whether Xi Jinping (习近平) will be able to deliver.

There are some who harbour patriotic hopes of grandeur. For example, Yau Loppoon, chief editor of *Yazhou Zhoukan*, an Asian weekly, says China should draw from the reform experiences of Myanmar, Singapore and South Africa to embark on a "creative transformation". Through a peaceful and systematic process, China should be able to build its own system of checks and balances that can resist the temptations of elite capitalism. The vision is to develop a model that achieves administrative efficiency, clean government, social justice and sustained, high economic growth. Such a model, if realised, would be the pride of the Chinese people and a marvel to the rest of the world.

High hopes, however, often fail to accord with reality. At any rate, a tall tower needs to be built from the ground, as the Chinese saying goes.

So it is refreshing, and extremely timely, that Professor Yu Jianrong (于建嵘) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences circulated a succinct, down-to-earth, 10-year outline for China's social and political development. Published online earlier this year, it went viral on Sina Weibo among his 1.5 million followers on the popular micro-blogging site.

Yu's road map is divided into two phases. Phase one, from October this year to the end of 2015, advocates change in four areas.

First, people's livelihood. Rural land rights should be legally recognised; welfare provisions for lower-income groups expanded; and the *hukou* (household registration) system, that discriminates against migrant workers, reformed.

Second, judicial checks and balances. The staff, finances and property of primary and intermediate courts should be managed by provincial authorities, not county or municipal governments. Lifetime tenures and high salaries for judges should be introduced, subject to restrictions on mobility and strict accountability.

In addition, a few retrograde state organs should be abolished – the political-legal committees below the provincial level (as they often take the law into their own hands), the petitioning system (outstanding grievance cases should be

resolved through judicial processes), and the labour re-education system.

Third, press freedom and freedom of expression. This extends to transparency of administrative information, declaration by officials of their private assets, and prohibition of punishment for expression.

Fourth, social development and civil society, including the improvement of neighbourhood management, promotion

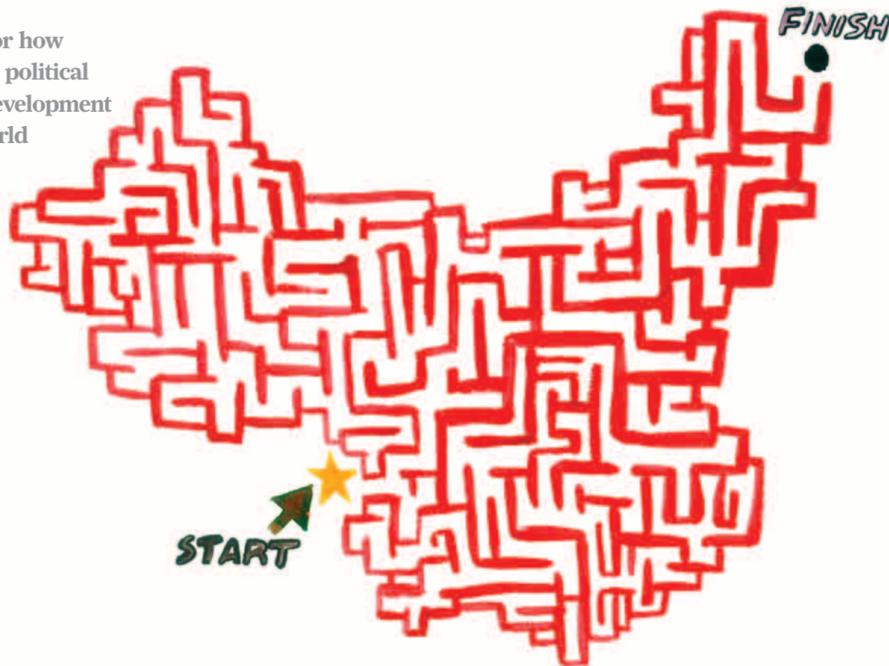


The blueprints are likely to enhance accountability, transparency and the rule of law

of charitable bodies, and protection of religious organisations.

Phase Two, from 2016 to September 2022, proposes reform in two areas.

First, reform of county-level government. Yu proposes opening up elections for county-level congresses, so they become less administrative and professionalised; scrapping the system of appointing county officials from the outside; introducing competitive elections for the top county leader; and turning township governments into subordinate outposts of higher authorities.



Second, open society. This requires setting laws for press freedom and for political parties. The management of media and political organisations should be liberalised.

Yu's reform agenda tallies with a World Bank report, co-authored with the Development Research Centre of the State Council, titled *China 2030: Building a Modern, Harmonious, and Creative High-Income Society*.

In line with China's latest five-year plan, the World Bank report focuses on efficiency, equity and sustainability. Its prescriptions include policy measures to remove critical bottlenecks for China's development, such as by tackling unauthorised land grabs by local authorities, releasing private sector productivity, achieving fairer social provisions, enhancing greater social mobility, delivering greater financial liberalisation, including full currency convertibility, and achieving a greener economy.

At the 18th party congress, the two primary targets for the next decade were identified as fighting corruption and achieving a middle-class society by doubling income per capita by 2020.

Provided China continues to grow at an average annual rate of 7 per cent, that objective is by no means unrealistic. The above reform blueprints are likely to enhance accountability, transparency and the rule of law. This should help the new Politburo Standing Committee graft-buster Wang Qishan (王岐山), known for his toughness, turn the tables on corruption.

Indeed, Xi's team of six in a more compact Politburo Standing Committee could well be "China's dream team", according to Stephen Roach, former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia and now senior fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute of Global Affairs. Xi is by no means a conservative and the new premier, Li Ke-qiang (李克强), is an avid reformer. Both hold doctorates, in law and economics respectively. Virtually all the others hold degrees in the humanities rather than engineering. Yu Zhengsheng (俞正声), Zhang Dejiang (张德江) and Zhang Gaoli (张高丽) come from senior roles in Shanghai, Chongqing and Tianjin. Together, they bring a vast pool of political and administrative leadership overseeing dynamic consumption-oriented cities. This is extremely relevant. According to the Brookings Institution, the consuming middle-class will grow from 12 per cent to 70 per cent of China's population by 2030.

Xi's presidency is expected to cover two terms, totalling 10 years. During his second term, a crop of reformers is likely to ascend to the top leadership. If under a one-party system, Xi manages to achieve all of the above reforms and development targets, he would have kick-started a political transformation that may well marvel the world. If so, perhaps the chief editor of *Yazhou Zhoukan* is prescient with his vision of grandeur.

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Clear warning

Greg Torode says there's no doubting China's newfound assertiveness in pressing its South China Sea claims – and it is alarming others



In the evolving story of the South China Sea – now an issue with broadening international dimensions – the events of the past few days are potentially highly significant.

The importance of reports from Hainan (海南) that provincial officials have passed new regulations to govern the halting and boarding of foreign ships in disputed waters should not be underestimated. While the details have still to be fleshed out, they play on the worst fears of rival claimants in the South China Sea, as well as the US and its allies Japan and South Korea, both of whom rely on the sea's strategic shipping lanes. Not surprisingly, the reports have set off alarms in the wider region and Washington itself.

Beijing's assertiveness in buttressing its controversial nine-dash claim to the South China Sea is already challenging regional strategic assumptions. If that is followed by a sweeping new enforcement regime at sea, then tensions can only escalate. "Make no mistake ... this is potentially a huge move if it is really what Beijing intends to do," one Pentagon official said privately. "We are urgently trying to get some answers."

Freedom of navigation lies at the heart of the dispute. Beijing officials repeatedly insist China would never threaten such freedoms and yet Washington says the need to protect those freedoms underpins its interest in finding a peaceful and legally sound solution to the territorial disputes. The ongoing rhetoric is a jarring reminder that the two giants have divergent opinions on the rights and responsibilities of nations in international waters.

Not surprisingly then, the moves by Hainan – which administers the new Sansha (三沙) prefecture through which Beijing is manning its claims in the area – are raising more questions than answers. What activities are they likely to object to and take action against? Will they seek to stop ships heading to islands and shoals claimed by China but occupied by other states?

Then came the statements from the Philippines' Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario that provide a rare window on Beijing's strategic intentions – and its regional manoeuvring.

He warned that Beijing had recently made clear to Manila that it would make its maritime presence at the disputed Scarborough Shoal – currently three coastguard-type ships – permanent. That would mark a significant challenge to not just Manila, but also its US treaty ally as well.

"They have told us what their intention is, we don't have to guess," he told the *South China Morning Post*.

He also detailed explicit warnings about what China means when it tells countries like the Philippines not to "internationalise" the South China Sea dispute – not only no involvement of outside powers, even allies and partners (particularly the US, of course), but also no action via the United Nations or even high-profile media interviews.

Beijing, it seems, is starting to turn the screw – whatever the short-term costs to relations with its smaller neighbours and its longer-term desire of seeing the US retreat from the neighbourhood.

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One way to scale the barrier of intolerance

C.P. Ho says the humbling experience of climbing mountains opens our eyes – and hearts

Mountains are great levellers. I don't know why so many of us feel the urge to climb them. It's hard work, and dangerous at times. But it seems to turn out better people, at least during the climb. Somehow, they become more sensible and sensitive to the feelings of others, as I found during a recent expedition to the top of Africa.

In fact, it is an experience I have had on different mountains in different continents. Once on the trail, climbers undergo a metamorphosis of the mind. The transformation is visible even as they come together from different parts of the world for a pre-climb briefing – in my case, at a hotel in Moshi, about 50km from the Kilimanjaro airport.

They know that, in the days to come, colour and creed do not matter. Nor does money or politics. Only strong legs and good lungs will get them to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa at 5,895m, that stands near Tanzania's border with Kenya. The show of comradeship has led me to think world leaders would stand a better chance of resolving international issues if they hiked up a mountain. The higher ground might clear the air and the misconceptions that seem to cloud summit meetings lower down.

Nobody seems to have left the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh feeling very happy following the recent East Asia Summit – least of all the Japanese and Filipinos. As nations, they felt US President

Barack Obama was not helpful enough in voicing support for their territorial claims against China's.

Can mountain climbing help diplomacy? I hope that, as an individual, I was able to change the mindset of one white person from South Africa. He was in a party of six who passed me as I rested on Kilimanjaro.

I overheard him remarking to his friends: "The Chink is here already." I stopped him to say: "I heard you. That's a derogatory term." "Oh, I'm sorry," he said in obvious embarrassment. "What do I call you?" "Chinese," I replied. "Do you come from China?" "Yes," I said. "I come from Hong Kong and my parents came from Guangzhou which is across the border."

Still in an obvious state of embarrassment, my fellow climber turned to his friends and joked: "Never thought I would learn this on Kili."

And I never imagined my chief guide and his assistant – both Tanzanians – would be able to speak good English even though they spoke native Swahili to each other. One was a Muslim, the other a Christian and each appeared to share similar thoughts on the current ills of today's world. They said many issues came about because there was not enough tolerance for different viewpoints.

Perhaps from a high vantage point, all viewpoints seem more equal.

C.P. Ho is a newsman turned businessman

Women helping one another will also help Asia to grow

Stacie Berdan and **Liesl Riddle** note the power of networking and sharing

In the next 50 years, most economic growth worldwide will take place outside the G7 countries. But that's only half the story. Who are the people who will be the driving force for this growth? Many will be women. But, too often, conversations about growth ignore gender issues, despite the fact that women comprise 40 per cent of the global workforce and account for over US\$20 trillion in consumer spending worldwide.

The question today is not whether women will continue to contribute to the global economy, but by how much – and where.

Although gender equality has been hailed as smart economics and necessary to realise an organisation's full potential, empowering women has been slow to catch on, especially in certain regions of the world, like Asia. This is particularly striking, given the important role women play in Asian economies in key manufacturing and service sectors, such as textiles, and back-office processing and call centres.

In addition, most microlending institutions aim the vast majority of their lending portfolio towards female borrowers. Female migrants – almost half of the world's migrant population – also contribute substantially to Asian economies by sending remittances home.

Yet, gender inequality is still pervasive in the region. Many women across Asia lack access to basic education, are left out of policy decisions affecting their

families, and struggle to advance in their jobs. Women face significant challenges in starting a business and are often left behind as businesses internationalise.

While many of Asia's economies are booming, few women possess a seat at the decision-making table in politics or the economy. Although some women have risen to positions of political leadership in the region and may have served as role models, few have actively promoted women's empowerment and other issues. In terms of the economy, nearly half of the company boards across Asia still lack a single, independent woman director.

Yet the number of women in Asia on the Forbes' list of 100 most powerful women has been rising, from eight in 2010 to 18 this year.

Women understand that balancing work with the traditional female roles of child care and managing the home is a struggle. And they can help guide and support each other to navigate these challenges in the future global economy.

A great example of this mentoring has been taking place at DuPont Japan (25 per cent female), which has had a women's network for the past eight years. The network recently started an initiative designed to help younger women reach higher levels within the company.

Often, success is dependent on access to excellent child care at affordable rates, one of the biggest barriers in a country like Japan. But what about the social

expectations in other countries, such as India, which have not kept pace with increased career expectations of women? A study last year found that India has the highest percentage of stressed women, at 87 per cent. Can women help other women in this capacity? Yes, but it's going to take a cultural shift in both women and men.

Women can share stories of how they've used microfinance loans to start businesses and help not only themselves, but to pull their families out of poverty. Women can work together to push for change in increasing education for girls. But it will take time and some extra help.

Cultural shifts can happen. And although they're specific to country and culture, the feminine culture of communication, sharing and advising other women, is a strong indicator that women will help other women all the way to the top. But women will do it in their own way and at their own pace.

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Democracy is flawed ... and irreplaceable

Masayuki Tadokoro says Japan must reaffirm its values, given there's no viable alternative

Japan's post-war democracy has often been termed phony, a charge arising from the long-maintained single-party rule by the Liberal Democratic Party. Proponents of this argument assert that the absence of "regime change" was attributable to the public's inability to actually elect the government democratically, and underlying this claim is their assertion that Japan's true rulers are privileged bureaucrats who steer the nation out of sight of the Japanese public.

Regardless of how correct this argument might have been, neither of these conditions applies any longer. The LDP's dominance ended in 1993; the Democratic Party of Japan is now the party in power. The prestige of Japan's bureaucrats has been diminished by failures and scandals.

Having won elections on a plank of "political leadership", DPJ administrations have sought to eliminate the influence of bureaucrats in policy proposal/management. This change has been heralded by some people as "the dawn of democracy in Japan", but the reputation of supposedly more democratic Japanese politics has fallen lower than ever.

Public disillusionment with democracy is not, however, limited to Japan. In both the United States and Europe, there is strong discontent. Public sentiment in the West was buoyed by the Arab spring, but it is doubtful that the actual records of the "democratic administrations" that replaced

the dictators could be called encouraging at this early point. On the other hand, China and Russia, which were expected to become more respectful of liberal values and international norms, remain authoritarian and are becoming more assertive.

We first should recognise that democracy and good government are not one and the same thing. Politics is a difficult business, even under democracy. We must acknowledge that the rule of law and respect for human rights are not achievable straightaway through a structure of strident expressions of opinion and elections. Furthermore, it is even questionable whether a democratic state is more rational and efficient than an authoritarian state.

Nevertheless, for the people of Japan and other countries with established democracies, there is no conceivable alternative. Given that, it would be preferable that we reaffirm democratic values, faulty though they may be, and intensify our solidarity on safeguarding those values. The Japanese do not vociferously lecture other countries on norms, but they tend to ignore the fact that Japan's relations with countries that are democratic and with those that are not are qualitatively different.

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