

Comment by Michael C H Jones
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Can China change its political culture the way in which it has changed its economic culture.

Deng Xiaoping played a great number of roles during his 92 years. He is known for many sayings - no doubt mostly pinched from others - of which I especially like "you cross the river one stone at a time", and "it does not matter what colour the cat is as long as it catches the mice" and Tiananmen "gives the CPC a twenty year breathing space". One wonders whether the current Chinese Communist Party leaders - the 7 man Politburo - really understand. A situation where "in practice, the Politburo Standing Committee acts as the most powerful decision-making body in China, and its decisions de facto have the force of law" is untenable even in the medium term.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politburo_Standing_Committee_of_the_Communist_Party_of_China

The pressures of domestic and international "events" makes governance or rather policy formulation and implementation so complicated as to require all sectors of society to contribute meaningfully beyond Party ideology or "straight-jacketing". Especially in a country that is more than continental but civilizational in its fundamental nature.

I have for decades briefed extensively the international media particularly the English speaking Americans and Europeans on issues of empire with emphasis on a comparative narrative of European territorial conquest, American international financial hegemon and historical Chinese cultural envelopment. In the case of China it has always been border related, perhaps spheres of influence, where Xi'an, Nanjing and subsequently Beijing have won and lost substantial parts of Korea and Vietnam, Manchuria and Mongolia, and in recent decades over-run Buddhist Tibet and Muslim Xinjiang. In future years there will be "trouble" in Russia's Far East and perhaps Siberia as well as in Northern Burma, Thailand and Laos.

Indeed in the 21st century no matter where you travel globally there seems to be Chinese - Chinese students, business people, tourists and immigrants. They bring with them their cultural heritage, civilization, not unlike the old Anglosphere of "white settlers" - however with more than 20% of the world's population the Chinese bring a lot of economic and social clout which will become political in time. Western global norms and international institutions are under challenge - and most regions of the world are beginning to feel the pressure.

There are immediate trip-wires - China-Japan Relations, Chinese Taipei reunification, Hong Kong SAR "Democracy". Can the Chinese political system, its CPC governance, effectively respond to these realities?

The Hong Kong SAR is the litmus test for Beijing. It is both domestic and international re "One Country, Two Systems"

<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1529167/full-text-practice-one-country-two-systems-policy-hong-kong-special>

Yet the language, tone and substance of this 9th September 2014 released White Paper is directed more to Mainland readers, who may be reassured, but will be most unsettling to perhaps a majority of Hong Kong citizens, who arguably are more in tune with 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Liu Xiabo who is presently in jail, and his Charter 08

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_08

Post 1978 China changed its economics, not only under Communist Party rule but historically - China looked out to the world, embraced international trade and foreign ideas, a mind-frame with limited exceptions unknown to civilizational China, the Middle Kingdom - self-contained and omniscient. Between 1895 and 1945 China fought a fifty year territorial war with Japan, and like the Western imperialists, they were expelled and an independent New China born. So to another fifty year campaign, a cultural war of governance in Hong Kong SAR, 1997-2047. A struggle of ideas that may well determine the future of Chinese Taipei/Taiwan? Militarily and financially the US will both withdraw and deminish, so the outcome of this contest is vital for the Nationalist Party President Ma Ying-jeou who assumed office also in 2008.

Political parties and factions are flourishing in Hong Kong - this is unstoppable unless at the point of a gun, one suspects Tiananmen style. Former PRC President Jiang Zemin's Three Represents ideology was an attempt to undermine and hold back this development/eventuality in China, for over a decade it has papered over fundamental disagreements. The objective to open up the CPC to "the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people", including businessmen and managers, is self-defeating. Firstly because of China's accelerating international connections. Secondly because of the diversity of interests brought on by rapid urbanisation and rising living standards.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Represents

The Red Conservatives in the Party are hysterical about precedents set by Hong Kong's Democracy Movement. The Internationalists or Progressives think they can manage a limited or Guided Democracy. The non-Party Radicals including Charter 08 demand the end of the Party-State and the introduction of western style 'rule of law'. It is a steadily heating up pressure cooker. How then to peacefully resolve the contentions? Perhaps a factionalised Australian Labor Party or an ideological brew such as the US Republican Party. Or the Chamber proposal of 1994, namely the mutual recognition of the Chinese Communist Party and Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) as legal competing entities throughout a reunited China. No group would get everything, but most would get something - except of course the current ruling elite, so it is unlikely to happen for a few more decades. But the Hong Kong Democracy Movement will not wait - universal suffrage is the battle cry of the Occupy Central protesters. And the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in Beijing is far away.

