

CHINA POLITICAL AND SOCIAL 2002

Speaking Notes

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL WORLDS OF CHINA AT THE OUTSET OF 2002, AS SEEN FROM BEIJING? ECONOMICS AND TRADE ONLY TELL A PART OF THE STORY.

FOR BEHIND ECONOMIC GROWTH AND INTERNATIONALIZATION VIA WTO MEMBERSHIP, THERE IS THE DAILY LIFE OF ONE BILLION, TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTYFOUR MILLION CHINESE PEOPLE, AND THE GOVERNMENT WHICH RULES THEM. THEY FACE IMMENSE, SEEMINGLY INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS, SOME BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE VERY ECONOMIC EXPANSION THAT THE WORLD CELEBRATES. THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT NOT ALL CHINESE ARE BENEFITTING FROM THE EXPANSIVE OPENING TO THE WORLD OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM – INDEED, FAR FROM IT. THE EXCITEMENT GENERATED BY THE HIGH RISES IN SHANGHAI AND THE FASHION SHOWS IN BEIJING DISTORT OTHER REALITIES.

ALLOW ME TO LIST A FEW OF THE PROBLEMS THAT THE CHINESE PEOPLE FACE EVERY DAY, AND AS WE SPEAK...

- MIGRANT WORKERS: AS ALWAYS WHEN LOOKING AT CHINA'S VAST POPULATION, NUMBERS VARY, FROM 80 MILLION TO 160 MILLION. THESE WORKERS ARE LEFT UNEMPLOYED OR UNDEREMPLOYED

IN THEIR RURAL COMMUNITIES. THEY LIVE A MARGINAL EXISTENCE IN CITIES. THEY CAN BE SUBJECT TO THE MINISTRATIONS OF OFTEN CORRUPT, DISHONEST AND ABUSIVE EMPLOYMENT COMPANIES; AND THEY HAVE MINIMAL RIGHTS TO SOCIAL SERVICES FOR THEMSELVES OR EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN. WHEREVER THEY ARE REGISTERED, THEY DO NOT HAVE RIGHTS TO LIVE ELSEWHERE. THEY ARE ESSENTIALLY STUCK WHERE THEY ARE.

- RURAL POVERTY: THE WORLD BANK STATES THAT 200 MILLION CHINESE LIVE ON LESS THAN THE EQUIVALENT OF 1\$ PER DAY, PEGGED AT Y8.28. TODAY, THAT CAN BUY YOU ONE SIMPLE MEAL FROM A FOOD STALL IN BEIJING, OR FOR AN EMERGING MIDDLE FAMILY, THE COST OF RENTING A VIDEO FOR THE EVENING.

AT THIS TIME THE INCOME GAP BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS CONTINUES TO INCREASE, WHILE THE AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES – EDUCATION, HEALTH, INFRASTRUCTURE – IN RURAL AREAS DECREASES. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT ONE OFTEN READS, EVEN IN CHINESE NEWSPAPERS, OF SERIOUS RURAL DISCONTENT AND EVEN RIOTS.

- CORRUPTION: ACCORDING TO THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S OWN STATEMENTS, THE PROBLEM IS PERVASIVE, AND DOES NOT SPARE OFFICIALS HIGH OR LOW. IN ADDITION TO THE 'TAX' THAT CORRUPTION IMPOSES ON AN UNDEFINABLE SWATH OF ECONOMIC AND GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES, IT EXERCISES A

CORROSIVE EFFECT ON PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT , AND ESPECIALLY, THE PROBITY OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ITS LEADERS. AS CHEN YUN IS QUOTED AS SAYING: 'NOT FIGHTING CORRUPTIONS WILL DESTROY THE COUNTRY; FIGHTING CORRUPTION WILL DESTROY THE PARTY.' WHERE ALL THIS WILL LEAD IS VERY UNCERTAIN.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT: IT IS INDISPUTABLE THAT THE CHINESE PEOPLE HAVE ENJOYED AN INCREASINGLY LARGE DEGREE OF PERSONAL AND ECONOMIC FREEDOM SINCE THE 1978 REFORMS. LOOSE FORMS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ARE INCREASINGLY TOLERATED, IN SOME CASES EVEN ENCOURAGED TO FILL THE VACUUM AS THE STATE RETREATS FROM THE PROVISION OF RELIABLE SOCIAL SERVICES. SO, BRAVO FOR ECONOMIC RIGHTS.

BUT POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS REMAIN, FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES AND INDEED AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, EXTREMELY CONSTRAINED: THE RULE OF LAW AND DUE PROCESS ARE GAINING RHETORICAL SUPPORT IN SOME CIRCLES, BUT THE PRACTICE IS EXTREMELY UNEVEN, JUDGES CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE SERVANTS OF THE STATE, AND IN ANY EVENT CAN ONLY BUT RARELY FORCE IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR DECISIONS WHEN THESE GO AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF OFFICE HOLDERS. PRESS FREEDOM IS INCREASING, BUT MANY AREAS REMAIN STRICTLY TABOO: WRITINGS CRITICAL OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY, ON CHINA'S SENIOR LEADERS, TAIWANESE

INDEPENDENCE, FALUNG GONG, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, ETHNIC DIVISIONS, AMONG OTHER, VARYING SUBJECTS ARE STRICTLY FORBIDDEN AND VIOLATIONS CAN RESULT IN LENGTHY IMPRISONMENT.

DENG XIAOPING'S FAMOUS DICTUM – 'WENDING YADAO YIQIE' – STABILITY OVERIDES EVERYTHING – REMAINS AT THE CENTER OF CCP THINKING. THIS WILL LIKELY CONTINUE TO DEFINE THE PARTY WELL AFTER THE 16TH PARTY CONGRESS IN SEPTEMBER OR OCTOBER, SUGGESTING THAT CHINA'S LEADERSHIP IS NOT YET READY TO ABANDON THE LENINIST ORIENTATION OF ITS BIRTH. THE PARTY MAY EXPERIMENT WITH ELECTIONS AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL, CONDUCT LIVELIER SELECTION PROCESSES FOR DELEGATES TO PARTY CONGRESSES, CONSIDER INCREASING THE SCOPE OF INDEPENDENT ENQUIRY AND ACTION AT THE LEVEL OF PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESSES. CONDUCT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS AND SEEKE VIEW OF NON-PARTY INTELLECTUALS AND EVEN FOREIGNERS, BUT THERE IS NO SIGN THAT IT INTENDS TO REDUCE, IN ANY MEANINGFUL WAY, IT MONOPOLY ON POWER.

THESE REALITIES – AS SIGNIFICANT IN THEMSLEVES AS THE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT I DESCRIBED AT THE OUSET - CAUSIONS US AGAINST MAKING TOO MANY STRAIGHT LINE PROJECTIONS ABOUT CHINA'S SHORT-TERM FUTURE.

STILL, IT'S WORTH MAKING THE POINT THAT CHINA IS AN IMMENSE COUNTRY, WITH A QUARTER OF THE GLOBE'S POPULATION, GEOGRAPHICALLY ALMOST THE SAME SIZE AS CANADA, A COUNTRY, AS WE ARE CONSTANTLY REMINDED, WITH 5,000 YEARS OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BAGGAGE. YOU CAN FIND IMMENSE PROGRESS IN SOME GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS AND IN THE COMPETENCE OF GOVERNANCE, AND INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS IN OTHERS.

TO THINK OF CHINA PRIMARILY AS A PROTO-POWER WITH STUNNING NEW CITIES, MANDARIN POPULAR MUSIC – AKA MANDO-POP – SMOOTH-TALKING ENGLISH-SPEAKING CADRES AND BUSINESSPEOPLE IS A SERIOUS ERROR. SO IS CONSIDERING THE CHINESE AS PREDOMINANTLY A DESPERATELY POOR AND MALIGNED PEOPLE FRONTED BY THE WORLD'S BEST PR FIRM IS EQUALLY MISLEADING. WHAT CAN BE SAID QUITE CATEGORICALLY IS THAT, IN THESE EARLY YEARS OF THE NEW CENTURY, CHINA IS POSITIONED, DETERMINED AND SKILLED TO PURSUE ITS RISE TO POWER STATUS, AND IMPACT VERY SIGNIFICANTLY ON THE WORLD.

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