

# Tighter control

**Michael Tien** says China cannot make the transition to a modern, rules-based nation if the abuse of power by local officials goes unchecked. He suggests tapping the country's youth to renew the ranks

Most see the saga of blind activist Chen Guangcheng (陳光誠) as an international incident. I see it mainly as a domestic matter whose resolution is vital to our national interest as China evolves into an orderly modern state. Friends have advised me against speaking out on this case, given its sensitivity. But, as a deputy of the National People's Congress, staying quiet at such critical moments would constitute a dereliction of duty.

You might recall the case of the milk activist Zhao Lianhai, which became a cause célèbre for many Hong Kong NPC deputies. Then, we helped to resolve the matter to some satisfaction. I believe we can do the same here.

It is clear from Chen's actions that the central government is not the author of his misery. Otherwise, he wouldn't have made a direct video appeal to Premier Wen Jiabao (溫家寶) to look into his complaint and take appropriate action to right the perceived wrongs.

China is a big and complex country. The arm of the state may not be long enough to reach every corner of the country. As a Chinese saying goes, "The mountain is high and the emperor is far away". Time and again, it is local officials, who, with their unchecked powers, have got the central government entangled in ugly incidents that have tarnished the country's reputation.

We are not in possession of all the facts surrounding Chen's case. From news reports, we see he was subjected to extrajudicial house arrest after serving his sentence for two convictions: wilfully causing the destruction of property, and inciting a crowd to cause traffic disruptions. It is inconceivable that a blind man could be capable of wilfully causing property destruction, and, even if true, did that offence and causing traffic disruptions really merit a prison sentence of over four years?

Governance and the administration of justice vary from province to province, and even from county to county. In the case of Wukan village earlier this year, a dispute was peacefully resolved by the decisive intervention of the party secretary of Guangdong, Wang Yang (汪洋), who has been hailed as an enlightened leader and model administrator capable of defusing an explosive situation. If senior local officials in Shandong (山東) had done likewise, Chen's case would not have escalated into something that grabbed the attention of the international press and foreign governments and caused China so much distress and embarrassment.

Down the centuries, the administration of justice has been a headache for national leaders of this sprawling country. Even going back to dynastic China, there has been the time-honoured practice of aggrieved folks making the long trek to the capital to petition the central authorities to right wrongs. But this petition

system, in its modern incarnation, is far from perfect, and some local officials have even been known to resort to forcibly escorting petitioners back to their home province.

Wen stated emphatically in his work report in March that the government is serious about implementing the rule of law across the country – an essential step in China's development as a rule-governed modern state. But the rule of law can only take root if officials at the local level buy into it, and if there are effective checks and



**Being responsive to grievances is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of wisdom**



balances against egregious abuses of power which often entail forcible land confiscations.

A functioning modern state needs workable, healthy safety valves for the resolution of popular grievances. When the dust has finally settled on Chen's case, the central government should seriously and thoroughly look into the circumstances underlying his cry for justice. This is a necessary step if the government is to effectively promote social stability and ensure that the system serves the people.

Implementing the rule of law takes officials who are imbued with its spirit. As I see it, each year, some 6.5 million students graduate from mainland universities. These graduates, with their ingrained sense of fair play and justice, would make excellent officials and should be encouraged to join the ranks of the civil service, especially at the local level.

This would not only improve local governance, but would also provide gainful employ-

ment to an army of young people who can serve a vital national purpose. They are China's best guarantee of a dependable system of civil administration that can dispense justice and fair treatment.

When local officials flout the laws, they undermine the nation's social stability. The abusive application of local power runs counter to the national interests. Being responsive to individual or collective grievances is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength and administrative wisdom. These are virtues China needs, now that it is a major player in international affairs. Treating our people right not only spares us international embarrassment, it also restores our ancient reputation as a nation of civility and good order.

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## Study in bias

**Su-Mei Thompson** and **Lisa Moore** call on universities in Hong Kong to remove the barriers that stop women moving up academic ranks

The University of Hong Kong is recruiting a new vice-chancellor, and this seems an opportune moment to examine the gender imbalance in academia in Hong Kong and ask why a profession that seems a natural calling for women remains such a male bastion, especially at the top.

On the surface, academia in Hong Kong is filled with women. Employment rates in universities are nearly at parity – 52 per cent men and 48 per cent women. But the true picture is of an inverted pyramid. At the lowest ranks – administrative support and junior researchers – the numbers of men and women are about equal. Among junior academic staff, however, men outnumber women two to one. The number of women higher up the chain plummets even further, with men outnumbering women six to one in senior academic positions in 2011.

The reason for the under-representation of women at senior levels is not for lack of highly educated, talented women. It is, rather, symptomatic of the glass ceiling in academia.

Roughly equal numbers of women and men enrol in postgraduate programmes – 4,976 and 5,064 for the 2011 academic year, respectively. However, there is a startling lack of women attaining tenured professorships or dean appointments and, to date, Hong Kong has not appointed a woman as vice-chancellor of any of its tertiary institutions.

Why are there so few women in senior academic positions? Research in 2008 by a City University student on the career choices of male and female science and engineering doctoral students sheds some light on this issue. The women chose to pursue primarily teaching-oriented postgraduate studies while the men chose research-oriented positions.

The impact of this is that women end up being excluded from the tenure track, given the emphasis on academic publications as a critical factor in tenure appointments. There are also the inevitable lifestyle disincentives. Women with children are much more likely than men with children to opt out of the tenure track, and the peak years for academic publications towards tenure coincide with peak childbearing years for women.

A 2012 report commissioned by the British Council shows that women's under-representation in academic leadership is a global phenomenon and has serious negative consequences. It represents a waste of skills and perpetuates social injustice through the exclusionary structures, processes and practices in higher education. It also results in a gender bias in knowledge and innovation, limiting the influence women can have in shaping education and addressing global issues in research and innovation.

Hong Kong's colleges and universities need to be more proactive about dismantling entrenched gender biases that deter women from staying in the academic pipeline to attain senior roles.

HKU still has the opportunity to break the mould for academia in terms of a more transparent nomination and appointment procedure and a genuinely diverse slate of candidates. Let's hope the university rises to the challenge.

Su-Mei Thompson is CEO and Lisa Moore is research associate at The Women's Foundation. This article is part of a monthly series on women and gender issues, developed in collaboration with the foundation

## Hong Kong needs a time-out from self-serving legislators

**Lau Nai-keung** says the filibuster fiasco exposes a disturbing lack of ethics

In the Western mindset, filibustering is procedurally correct and therefore lawful. This is based on several thousand years of blind belief that law is ultimately traced to God, and therefore rules should be obeyed and abided by.

China, however, is a goddess country, and multiple deities provide ethical role models. Laws are judged by whether they are consistent with common sense and are workable. Legality has no overriding authority, and in fact most Chinese think that rules should be adaptable to changing conditions and not be rigidly fixed.

As such, filibustering as a practice is by itself neither good nor bad, but a procedural loophole that can serve a purpose. If that purpose is good, then it is OK; but if it is bad, then no way.

In other nations' parliaments, a filibuster is employed to stall the passing of bills to stimulate further debate and buy time for a possible reversal. In our case, the battle lines have been drawn. There are no further debates inside or outside the Legislative Council, and no new points raised. The result of the vote has already been written on the wall.

A minority of three just wanted to make use of this procedural technicality to delay the inevitable and ultimately sabotage the whole system.

The Chinese mind will ask: is this good for Hong Kong? Should we allow this to go on? Even the Democratic Party has to admit that, according to their rolling opinion polls, the majority of Hong Kong

citizens are against the filibuster. What is lawful does not make it right.

There will be a backlash. Many people will clamour for some new rules to end this kind of pointless waste of public money and our honourable lawmakers' precious time. I must say I am among those in favour of this refinement of our developing system.

But, again, unlike most Westerners, Chinese don't particularly believe in systems, and hold the idea that all systems are man-made. The Americans used to be so proud of their system that Francis Fukuyama said it signalled "the end of history", but it has now been brought down by some greedy people in power.

I am doubtful whether just plugging the leaks in our system will solve the problem.

Filibustering can be stopped even in our present system. Some pundits have pointed out that Legco president Tsang Yok-sing could have intervened during at least four points in the proceedings, but he chose not to in an attempt to show his impartiality and open-mindedness. Some even conjectured that as Tsang wants to run in September's Legco election, behaving this way would gain him votes. Only when things seemed to be getting out of hand and public opinion was clearly against this ugly show did Tsang exercise his authority to stop it, again with his eyes on the polling stations.

The self-serving petty political calculations on all sides at the expense of public interest is

disappointing, to say the least. Voters on the whole are becoming more alienated. This will lead to a low turn-out rate in the Legco election, which may not work to Tsang's advantage.

The point is that, no matter what systems and procedures we have at hand, the most important thing is to establish ethical standards for our politicians. They are there to serve us, not to play self-serving games.

The Western arguments are that voters can punish politicians who misbehave by voting them out. These post hoc measures are sound but only remedial; Chinese want to do better by creating an ethical environment so that only the good guys who truly want to serve the public will ever enter the political arena in the first place.

Common sense tells us that if we pick an agent to represent us, we should at least pick an honest one who will faithfully act on our behalf rather than some crook who patently pursues his private agenda under our name. Using ethical standards as our yardstick, I am sad to say that most, if not all, of our legislators do not qualify.

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## Uzbeks court China, but on their own terms

**Raffaello Pantucci** and **Alexandros Petersen** say close ties with South Korea act as a hedge

Among the many items festooning souvenir shops in the Silk Road city of Bukhara are a set of stamps commemorating Uzbekistan's 15th anniversary of independence. Pride of place alongside President Islam Karimov on these stamps is not a prominent Uzbek, but, rather, the then president of South Korea, Roh Moo-hyun. For Uzbekistan, a close embrace with Korea is a good balancer against a dominant China.

Uzbekistan is in search of a post-Soviet model for development. Initially an eager partner of the West in the wake of the September 11 attacks, it fell out of favour following a headline government response to violence in the city of Andijan in 2005. This led the nation to look to the Asia-Pacific as a model or partner. But this has not simply meant closer ties with China.

Analysts say the government has learned a lesson from Kyrgyzstan, where the economy is now almost entirely dependent on Chinese trade; Tajikistan, which is increasingly reliant on Chinese development; and Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which are increasingly dependent on China as an energy consumer. Unlike these poor or natural-resource-heavy economies, Uzbekistan prides itself on being an industrial hub.

Uzbekistan chose to court Beijing on its own terms. Cognisant of the utility of China as a balancer against Russia, Karimov

has been more active in the Chinese-instigated Shanghai Cooperation Organisation than the Russian-led alternatives in the region. But, at the same time, the Uzbek government tries to limit the import of Chinese consumer goods. High tariffs generally keep foreign products out, but Chinese ones are informally targeted, according to those active in trade with China.

In contrast, Uzbekistan has embraced a close relationship with South Korea. With strong ethnic links on the ground through a residual Soviet Korean population, Karimov has welcomed Korean investment. It has been far more comforting for Uzbekistan to welcome medium-sized South Korea, a manufacturing nation that has made the shift from authoritarian government to controlled free-market economy.

To what degree has this policy worked? Can Uzbekistan successfully keep the Chinese behemoth at bay? China clearly has a footprint in the country, but has so far bided its time. As Uzbekistan gradually edges its economy forwards, it may find that increasingly the scope of China's presence will be determined in Beijing and Guangzhou.

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## A multilateral bridge will lead us to growth

**Jomo Kwame Sundaram** says global agencies can rise above politics and market short-sightedness

Recent developments, including the defeat of incumbent governments in France and Greece, suggest that the public's tolerance for policies that do not reduce unemployment has collapsed.

The economic crisis has wiped out over 50 million jobs after years of weak growth and increasing inequality in the world's rich countries. Since 2007, employment rates have risen in only six of the 36 advanced economies, while youth unemployment has increased in most markets.

In the near term, the global crisis is likely to become worse as many governments prioritise fiscal austerity and tough labour-market reforms. Meanwhile, despite quantitative easing, many companies have limited access to credit, depressing investment and reducing job creation.

With inequality and unemployment higher, and incomes and domestic markets shrinking, everyone hopes to recover by exporting – an obviously impossible solution. And, while financial globalisation has not enhanced growth, it has exacerbated volatility.

Public investment and basic social protection can help to turn this around, by creating millions of jobs. But, despite strong evidence to the contrary, the presumption that public investment crowds out private capital continues to discourage government-led recovery efforts.

So, how can the world escape a

cul-de-sac constructed by the short-term perspective of financial markets and electoral politics?

Although inclusive multilateralism has been battered by various challenges, it remains the best option. In 2009, recognising that market forces alone will not generate the investments needed for climate change mitigation as well as affordable nutrition for all, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon proposed a Global Green New Deal, especially to generate renewable energy and increase sustainable food production.

Under recent French leadership, the International Monetary Fund, after decades of promoting economic liberalisation, has become more careful of its previous prescriptions. Likewise, recent initiatives by the International Labour Organisation are all directly relevant to addressing the current stasis.

Unique among international organisations, the ILO's inclusion of both workers and employers as social partners allows it to help lead the processes needed to ensure recovery and growth. So, perhaps more than ever in recent decades, inclusive multilateral institutions are on the same page. Now their efforts need the support they deserve.

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