

## INSIGHT

## Common touch

**Kerry Brown** says of all the daunting challenges now facing Xi Jinping, the biggest may be whether he can connect with and mobilise the people – in a way his predecessor did not

The months of speculation are mercifully over. Questions of whether there would be nine or seven are now resolved; who is in and who is out is settled. When the new Chinese Communist Party leadership walked before the world's press last week, there was a feeling of anticlimax. If Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) had wanted to create a process that ended up boring everyone into submission, it worked. In the end, a group of men with very similar backgrounds and life stories, wearing similar suits and acting in uniform ways briefly stood before the press. If they were happy or overjoyed at their current good fortune, they took care to suppress it. Sobriety and understatement were the order of the day.

Among all this, Xi Jinping's (习近平) more expressive language was the single thing that interested most commentators. Even on Weibo, there were hints that people were relieved they now had a leader who at least spoke in a slightly more human way, and did not litter his public statements with references to party theory and slogans the way that Hu was wont to.

Maybe this restraint was due to the fact that these leaders are aware they come into a political context in which there are immense constraints around them. The reappearance of former president Jiang Zemin (江泽民), now 86, on the final day of the party congress, standing on stage next to Hu in the midst of the outgoing Politburo, underlined how impossible it is in China for former leaders to finally relinquish power. The constraints, however, go further than just the involvement of specific individuals.

Institutionally, and structurally, the party leadership is hedged in. If they fail to deliver good growth, their legitimacy is undermined. If they alienate the important forces of vested interests and the elite networks around them, they will be under immediate attack. To left and right, in front of and behind them, their situation is surprisingly precarious.

In view of this, Xi's words about needing to show greater connection with society make sense. He and his team are there after a tightly managed process within the innermost core of the party. Only a tiny number have been truly consulted over who the new leaders should be, and who should and should not be in the new Standing Committee of the Politburo. The contract with the larger Chinese public is simply that a leadership transition should happen without social unrest and contention, and without threatening growth.

The public response of indifference is what the party wants. There were no large

public outbursts of celebration. The whole process happened like a management takeover, in which new faces came in, promising to deliver on the policies and strategies of the people they had replaced, and nothing more.

This strategy might be right – at least for the moment. But as China's development trajectory becomes more complex, and growth in gross domestic product inevitably falls because the current dizzy levels are unsustainable, the need for the party leadership to reach out to the public will grow greater. They must learn to speak to people more directly and with more relevance, and not just act like technocratic managers. Political idealism is sorely lacking in modern China. Politicians function as administrators, delivering on government plans, with their ability to mobilise people seldom called upon.



**It is almost certain that Chinese people will want a more personal relationship with their rulers**



In the future, though, it is almost certain that Chinese people will want a more personal relationship with their rulers. They will want more of a sense of who they are, where they plan to take the country, and what their vision and their qualifications are. Xi showed some awareness of this when he talked of the need to tackle corruption. He also spoke of the problems and challenges that lay ahead. It was a sanguine beginning, lacking in any triumphalism or bombast.

Xi shows he understands that the wooden, opaque public manner of his immediate predecessor was a problem. He has to craft a much more direct, accessible language, because he has the complex job of governing the world's second-largest economy at a time when its challenges are likely to grow more pressing. He is going to have to communicate the need for different policy options to the public in ways his predecessors never did.

A leader must convey to society a positive image of the future, and persuade people of the need to sacrifice now for a better return later on.

The new leadership has been appointed by a process that is opaque, and from within a tiny elite. Using that as a basis for legitimacy won't be good enough as they attempt to create a more broad voice to reach out to Chinese public opinion. They

will need political will, imagination and intuition to be able to rise to the challenge of steering China, without fracture or unrest, towards middle-income status. Resting on their laurels and simply talking of their historic right to be the rulers of China is no longer enough. The gap between ruler and ruled needs to be closed – before the whole body politic is poisoned by cynicism, and most citizens, benignly or actively, become alienated.

If the new leaders are able to build up this personal link, then at least when moments of crisis approach, they will have some political capital to speak to their key constituents to try to mobilise them. But if they remain remote, acting like a privileged sect that runs on its own internal laws with no reference to the wider society, then any crisis will be debilitating, and could lead to their downfall.

And unlike in 1989, deployment of violence and suppression will be unlikely to work this time round. Xi looks like he can create a bond with the people of China. Let's hope he shows more signs of this sooner rather than later, because this, and this alone, remains his most valuable asset. Perhaps it is his only one.

Kerry Brown is executive director of the China Studies Centre and professor of Chinese politics at the University of Sydney

## The full span

**Eve Jardine-Young** says to enjoy the longer lives afforded by medical advances, people must learn to become ever more adaptable

In reasonably affluent societies, life expectancy is now increasing at around half an hour per day. This is based on a reasonable extrapolation of trends around medical research linked to preventative as well as restorative health care. It means that anyone under the age of 20 has a 90 per cent chance of reaching and exceeding the age of 100. All children currently in primary education, who were all born in the 21st century, are more likely than not to see the dawn of the 22nd century.

This has profound implications for our roles as teachers, preparing them for working lives which are likely to extend to being great-grandparents while still in full-time employment. When working for the United Nations, Mark Malloch Brown said the illiterate of the 21st century would be those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn, and it was therefore essential that our education of children now provided them with a passion for lifelong learning, so that their ability to adapt sustained them through life.

The foundations for leadership are best laid by nurturing the development of a clear sense of self, and a personal value system that is based on an authentic and deeply held set of beliefs about how to behave, how to treat others, and an acceptance that our lives are all interdependent. In a more complex world, to lead others we will need to become more confident about making decisions based on imperfect information, choosing not only to do things right, but to do the right thing.

Pupils need to begin to make choices to learn because they see its value, and they enjoy the challenge and lasting joy that it can bring. Developing skills of language acquisition will become more valuable than learning any one language at school because over such long lifetimes we may well wish or need to learn new languages as adults, and to be receptive to that. Learning how to learn will become more valuable than learning any one set of data or bank of knowledge.

Refining communication skills in order to negotiate, persuade and influence others as we come into contact with a greater number of people will equip our children to be self-determining and self-sufficient. Celebrating the likelihood of more than one career, and avoiding "pigeon-holing" ourselves or our children can be a wonderfully energising and enabling approach to parenting.

Above all, perhaps, we need to reflect that a 100 years is an awfully long time to be unhappy. However successful we are by the most evident measurable indicators, we need to be at peace with the choices we have made in life, and to have the courage to make the changes needed if we are not. For each of us, knowing what personal choices will lead to a deep sense of fulfilment brings the opportunity to live abundantly, if we are honest with ourselves and with each other. As part of a good education, we should encourage the sharing of reflective practice, and nurture a register of language that allows us to fail well, rebuild, adjust, adapt, refine, create, restore and support each other in the societies that we will be sharing with our great-great-grandchildren.

Eve Jardine-Young is principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College, UK. This article is part of a series on women and gender issues, developed in collaboration with The Women's Foundation

## Row over think tank's neutrality shows Leung can't keep his own house in order

It looks like Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying has been backed into a corner now that he is being attacked from both inside and outside the administration.

Just when recent polls showed his approval ratings were rising slightly, an unexpected "attack" has come from his much-trusted Central Policy Unit's head, Shiu Sin-por, who is supposed to report directly to him.

Shiu recently sought to create a new position at the government think tank to monitor public opinion, which drew criticism that the unit was trying to shape public opinion.

It is just another sign that Leung is destroying the government's consultation system. And with the administration now facing constant criticism, Hong Kong's core values are being eroded.

It would appear that Leung cannot even put his own house in order.

Some of the pledges he put forward during election campaigning, such as seeking change while maintaining stability, have become a political laughing stock, seriously affecting the integrity of government policymaking.

Many of his supporters, especially those from the younger generation who had pinned their hopes on him, have turned against him. This prompted Shiu to say that the government needs to engage in public relations battles to drum up support for its policies, and heed views expressed in the new media about its policies.

We don't know how effective Shiu's latest strategy would be, but it would certainly further

**Albert Cheng** says the chief executive's credibility is now being undermined with attacks from both inside and outside the government



alienate Leung from his young supporters.

Leung doesn't seem to understand that Hong Kong people want more than just being able to put food on the table or have a roof over their heads. To them, especially the young, it's about being able to attain one's dreams as well as the common values accepted and respected by democratic societies the world over.



**Most ridiculous was Shiu's comment that the unit is neither neutral nor independent**

And, while Leung struggles keep to his own house in order, he has also been finding it difficult to recruit talented people to join his government.

One example is housing adviser Michael Choi Ngai-min, who is chairman of Land Power International. Choi recently made headlines by suggesting that a Kai Tak site reserved for a sports stadium be used for public housing.

It seems Choi wasn't Leung's first choice. If Leung had wanted a top adviser on property, surely

his No 1 choice would have been Centaline Property Agency's founding boss Shih Wing-ching. Shih also owns the highly popular free daily – *AM730*. So, having Shih on his team would have been ideal.

On top of the problem of a less-than-ideal governing team, some of Leung's top officials seem to have hidden agendas. Combative Chief Secretary Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor has been expanding her power, for one. Most recently, she was named chairwoman of the re-opened Commission on Poverty. The commission has been one of Leung's main priorities and Lam now seems to be trying to steal the limelight.

Leung also seems less involved in some other significant areas of governance, for example, in financial policies and economic and monetary affairs. Keeping a tight grip on these major policy areas are Financial Secretary John Tsang Chun-wah, Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury Chan Ka-keung and Monetary Authority chief executive Norman Chan Tak-lam.

Tsang might have kept a low profile of late, but he is understood to be highly regarded by Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office director Wang Guangya (王光亞), who has given him a free hand.

Even the ultra-left members on Leung's team, such as Home

Affairs Secretary Tsang Tak-sing and policy adviser Shiu, don't seem to give him much respect.

Leung's recent appointment of Sophia Kao Ching-chi as a full-time member of the Central Policy Unit was another grave mistake. He gave her wide-ranging powers to scrutinise the recruitment of members to all government advisory bodies. But has Leung considered public opinion as well as the reactions from within the civil service?

Most ridiculous was Shiu's comment that the Central Policy Unit is neither independent nor neutral. He stressed that the governance team is never neutral, either. Yet, the Civil Service Code says otherwise; it covers all full-time members of the policy unit, which means they are part of the civil service, which must remain politically neutral.

Shiu should remember that the unit is funded by the government and is accountable to the chief executive, the chief secretary and the financial secretary. It serves as a policy research unit, not a political tool.

Leung is definitely caught between a rock and a hard place at the moment, with enemies on all sides. It won't take half a million protesters taking to the streets to force him out of office; his own people are slowly doing it already.

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## Unchanged for 50 years? Not Hong Kong's legal system

**Lau Nai-keung** says row over Elsie Leung's remarks a sign of ignorance

A month after rejecting a motion to discuss the remarks about our judicial system made by former justice secretary Elsie Leung Oi-sie, the Legislative Council's justice and legal affairs panel invited her and the current justice secretary, Rimsy Yuen Kwok-keung, to attend its meeting next Tuesday.

Leung has declined the invitation, fearing it might have set a dangerous precedent for turning such meetings into McCarthy-style hearings. But the continuous bombardment from our dissidents should encourage her to clarify her remarks at some point. It is nevertheless pathetic that she should have to defend her right to free speech in this supposedly open society.

This fiasco originated from some remarks she made in a closed-door talk, in which she criticised our judges for a lack of understanding about relations between the central government and the SAR, and for interpreting the Basic Law only from a common law perspective. She also noted that it was not the legal system that was enshrined in the Basic Law to remain unchanged for 50 years.

Her first remark is a fact; I would challenge any judge to declare that he is well-versed about the relations between the central government and the SAR and that he adjudicates cases using the perspective of the civil law system in the interpretation of the Basic Law. As far as I am aware, there are none, and our judges all seem rather smug about this professional ignorance and insist this is in the spirit of "two systems".

This is exactly why some people are so sensitive about her remark; it touches a raw nerve. This issue has to be brought up, but attacking Leung is not a constructive starting point for discussion. For one thing, this issue cannot be settled within the SAR and, at a certain stage, the central authorities will have to be brought into the picture, and they will not be intimidated by any institution in Hong Kong and summoned by its Legislative Council.

The charge that Leung's remarks undermine judicial



**There is no specific case currently under adjudication that Leung could meddle with**

independence in Hong Kong is totally unfounded. I don't blame a layman for being misled into believing this baloney, but coming from the supposedly authoritative professional bodies such as the Law Society and the Bar Association, plus retired Court of Final Appeal judges, this is inexplicable. They, of all people, should know exactly what judicial independence means. It means that when deliberating on cases, our judges are free from the interference of other branches of government.

To begin with, there is no specific case currently under adjudication that Leung could meddle with, and, as vice-chairwoman of the Basic Law Committee, she holds no authority as it is only a consultative body. She, like any other Hong Kong citizen, is free to express her opinions – even if they do not please some people. Kicking up such a fuss over her remarks is going too far.

As for changing the legal system, haven't we inherited from the good old days a noble institution called the Law Reform Commission, and is it not tinkering with our legal system? There have in fact been quite a number of changes since the handover and these have been welcomed by the legal profession as well as the general public. There is nothing wrong or even unusual about changing the legal system; it is routine.

Anyone who has a rudimentary knowledge of the Basic Law will tell you that the "two systems" refer to the capitalist and the socialist systems, and that the former, which is practised in Hong Kong, shall remain unchanged for 50 years from 1997. It would take quite a lot of ignorance and a long stretch of the imagination to make the jump to the legal system. Perhaps that's a very good argument for implementing national education in Hong Kong.

Lau Nai-keung is a member of the Basic Law Committee of the NPC Standing Committee, and also a member of the Commission on Strategic Development