China’s Road Towards Democratic Governance:
An Analytical Overview of China’s Political
Development since the Reform

Yu Keping
Washington D. C., May, 2011

www.chinainnovations.org
I. China’s Reform Is A Comprehensive Social Progress, Including Big Political Progress

- Over the last 32 years, China has created an economic miracle. In the 32 years between 1978 and 2010, China’s GDP grew at an average annual rate of more than 9.5%, increasing from 326.4 billion yuan (US$ 44.2 billion) in 1978 to 39.8 trillion yuan ($6.06 trillion) in 2010.

- China’s economy has overtaken the economies of Japan and Germany to become the world’s second largest. China also successfully withstood the global economic crisis which ravaged Western developed countries, achieving GDP growth of 11.2% in 2010. China’s foreign reserves has exceeded 3 trillion USD and is even the largest holder of US foreign debt nowadays.

www.chinainnovations.org
The past three decades have witnessed China’s rapid development, which astonishes the whole world. However, the world’s attitudes towards the implications of China’s development are very complicated.

Many people in the West might say, “yes, China has changed greatly in economy and is rising as a new economic power in the world. But China’s politics has no big progress and particularly no great changes in her democracy.” In my view, it is a misunderstanding.

Achievements in political field are obvious too. Here I just take some examples of “the first time” reform in Chinese political history.
The Largest Free Direct Election in Chinese History Was Carried out over Huge Numbers of Villages and Towns

www.chinainnovations.org
Direct Voting for the Head of Villagers and the Party Secretary at the Village

www.chinainnovations.org
Public Recommendation and Direct Election of the Party Leaders at Township Level, Pingchang County, Sichuan Province
“Direct Election of the Township Leader”, Buyun Township, Suining City, Sichuan Province
Civil Society Has Been Emerging and Playing An Increasing Role in Social and Political life

www.chinainnovations.org
Government Begins to Encourage CSOs
1. Microblogs opened new channels for the expression of public interests
5. “Civil Society” was written into the draft of the 12th Five-year plan of Shenzhen city, but wasn’t adopted in its final version.
The First Award of Chinese Social Innovations
1. “Loving Heart Package”, China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation
“淮河卫士”项目（Guard of Huaihe River”, Research Center for the Ecologic Protection of Huaihe River, Shenqiu County, Zhoukou City, Henan Province）
“Human rights” Was Once Criticized in the Past as A "Bourgeois Rights," Now It Has Become A Basic Political Value and Was Written into the Constitution of China
Safeguarding Migrant Workers’ Rights, Quanzhou Trade Union, Fujian Province

www.chinainnovations.org
Rights-defending by Trade Union Yiwu Municipality of Zhejiang Province

www.chinainnovations.org
“Rule of Law” for the First Time Become A Goal for Political Development and is Stipulated in Constitutional Provisions

www.chinainnovations.org
The whole legal system has been established by the end of 2010.
Popularizing Law at Street
Constructing Government under Rule of Law

www.chinainnovations.org
Accountability, Transparency and Service-Oriented Become the Requirements of Government
Public Hearing of the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Guiyang Municipality, Guizhou Province
“Democratic Consultation”, Wenling City, Zhejiang Province
Public Budgeting System Reform People’s Congress of Huinan Town, Nanhui District, Shanghai City

www.chinainnovations.org
Reform on Administrative System at Township level, Xian Ning City, Hubei Province

www.chinainnovations.org
Electronic Supervision on the Administrative Examination and Approval, Shenzhen City

www.chinainnovations.org
One-Stop-Shop Administrative Service
II. Map Lines, Features, Dynamics and Internal Logic of China’s Political Development

www.chinainnovations.org
Five Roads on the map of China’s Journey Toward Democratic Governance

- 1) From monistic governance towards pluralist governance;
- 2) From centralization towards decentralization;
- 3) From the rule of man towards the rule of law;
- 4) From regulatory government towards service-oriented government;
- 5) From Party democracy towards social democracy.

www.chinainnovations.org
Characteristics of China’s political development since the reform

- Incremental political reforms based on path dependence.
- A pluralist structure of governance led by the Party.
- A vertically and horizontally integrated structure of governance.
- The core value of stability is placed above everything else.
- Both rule of law and rule of man are important instruments for governance.

www.chinainnovations.org
Changes in Chinese Governance Rooted in Fundamental Changes in the Economy

1) China began to transform its planned economy into a socialist market economy
2) People’s livelihood dramatically improved and their new political demands emerge
3) Different interest groups begin to form and these groups need channels for expressing their interests and influencing decision-making.
4) The Impact of globalization.

www.chinainnovations.org
Political development has its own internal logic

- 1) The CCP has transformed from the revolutionary party into the ruling party
- 2) China is a developing power and social stability are preconditions for economic development
- 3) China is in big transition from traditional society into modern one, and “incremental reform” must be followed
III. Challenges and Reform Focus in the Near Future
Formidable challenges still persist

1) The basic democratic institutions of election, deliberation and supervision are far from perfect.
2) An effective mechanism of checks and balance of power is still not in place.
3) The channels for public participation need to be further broadened
4) Lack of mechanisms to counter the selfish behaviors of state bureaucracy
5) Corruption is still rampant in today’s China
6) Delivery of public service by the government is far from enough
7) Lack of mechanism to realize “Dynamic Stability”
8) Political transparency needs to be enhanced;
9) Administrative costs are still very high;
10) Rule of law still lags behind.
11) Civil society in China is still immature;
12) Relationships among major public organs need to be reshaped.
Among Major Governance Reform in the Near Future Including:

- 1. Firmly pushing forward rule of law;
- 2. Emphasizing much more upon innner party democracy and social democracy;
- 3. Putting much more upon social justice to reduce apparent disparities;
- 4. Delivering more high quality of public service in order to establish a service-oriented government;

www.chinainnovations.org
5. Encouraging government innovation to make government more open, accountable and efficient;

6. Improving ecological governance to keep sustainable development;

7. Punishing sternly corrupted officials to build a clean government.

8. Strengthening and Innovating Social Management.
Any Comments are Welcome!