

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Brookings Cafeteria Podcast:
The rise of Chinese President Xi Jinping

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DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, a podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. The last ten episodes of this podcast focused, necessarily, on the U.S. presidential election. I'm proud of all the episodes but I encourage you to find and listen to my interview with Carol Graham, unhappiness among low-income white Americans and also the two election 2016 event rebroadcasts that looked ahead to what challenges the next president faces. The show will continue to offer many discussions with our experts on President-elect Trump's transition as well as policy ideas and recommendations for his administration.

You can also stay up to speed on all the issues facing the president-elect as he transitions to the White House by listening to our recent and upcoming events including ones on the Millennial vote, recommendations on global education, and the future of transatlantic relations among others and as always Brookings experts are publishing their ideas and recommendations on a wide range of policy topics including climate governance, the Middle East peace process, and financial reform, but for this episode of the Brookings Cafeteria, a timeout from U.S. politics.

Instead, Cheng Li, director of the John L. Thornton China center here at Brookings, talks about the rise of Chinese president Xi Jinping through the Chinese Communist Party leadership. Then Laurence Chandy looks at the effect of technology and globalization on inequality. Finally, you'll meet Harsha Singh, executive director of the Brookings India Center located in New Delhi, and find out why it's so important to understand what's happening in India. If you have a question for an expert, you can send it to our email address bcp@brookings.edu and I'll find an expert to answer it. If you attach an audio file, I'll play it on the air. And now, here's my colleague Bill Finan

from the Brookings Institution Press, talking with Cheng Li about his new book, "Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era."

FINAN: Thanks Fred. Cheng, good to see you again. Congratulations on the publication of your new book. It's a monumental and groundbreaking work and we are pleased to have worked with you to publish it.

LI: Thank you. We are honored and really a wonderful experience to work with your team.

FINAN: Your book is a wide-range overview and an in-depth exploration of how power works in the people's republic of China, but the book also has a number of arguments to make about how we should think about the way the Chinese party state works. Before we get to some of those arguments, can you give us a brief overview of how the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese central government work?

LI: Well, the defining characteristics of Chinese political system is the party state in a way that the party control the government. This is actually defined and legitimized through, not only the Chinese Communist Party's constitution, but also the constitution of the people's republic of China and so in a way, the government and the party is the same thing. It's a one-party state and this does not allow the real political competition as what happened in many democracies into a multi-party system. Now China has some kind of so-called democratic party but these are very small. Chinese people said this is like a travel west parties only to show they exist. But having said that, we should also remember that the one-party state does not necessarily mean the leadership is a monolithic group. Actually the divided leaders are divided into different political camps

with different ideology, different socioeconomic backgrounds, and different policy orientation. Now this has become increasingly apparent – like become a reality when you have the so called collective leadership when there are no very very strong politician like dictator Mao or Strao Man Den so you tended to have certain kind of checks and balances. This is what happened in the past three decades until Xi Jinping came to power 4 years ago.

FINAN: And Xi Jinping is the president of China and the General Secretary of the Communist Party.

LI: Usually these two positions are held by the same person in the case of Jian Zemin, Hu Jintao, and now Xi Jinping. Now, in a way, Xi Jinping has changed the the norms and the political collective leadership in a way that he assembled more power. He is not only the first man equal but certainly the first man, you know, it's a much stronger than the other six members of power bureau standing committee, but the question is why did that happen, what caused this, and whether this is temporary or long-term. Now we should interpret it in the context very quickly.

What happened is the four years ago Chinese communist party leadership become malfunction and some of the politicians, like members of standing committee or power bureau, hijacked the leadership and the military become increasingly out of control with the civilian leadership. The corruption become so widespread, in my view, is not only unprecedented in PRC history or Chinese modern history, also unparallel into this world with so many cases involving, you know, a couple of billions, even ten billions of US dollars from corruption. You need to fix that.

FINAN: It was huge.

LI: Yes, but without power how could you Deal with this kind of challenges. So Ji Xiping is best by fact that the his political camp got the six verses 1 ratio majority that allowed him to carry out this bold and really quite strong programs with the anti-corruption or military reform and that explain why he regain the confidence from the Chinese public. But this is the thing. in my view it's still temporary because of the institutional norms and the laws which started from Deng Xiaoping over the past three decades actually remain. The book argue is far more endurance and effective than most people thought, so this is my argument.

FINAN: I want to go back to those four years ago, actually, because you say at the beginning of the book that the Chinese Communist Party must find a new mechanism to choose its top officials and you illustrate that with the case of telling the story of Bo Xilai. You write that Bo Xilai represented the greatest challenge to the party's legitimacy since 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. Who is Bo and what happened?

LI: Well Bo was a party secretary of Chongqing and also one of the 25 members of the Politburo. So he was already a heavyweight politician. Chongqing is the largest city in China. I assume also largest city in the world with a population of 32 million people far more than the whole entire population of Australia or Canada, maybe even double than one of these two countries. So that person also launched a very unique campaign which has two components: one is to sing the red song and then try to you know just to talk about the cultural revolution in a more favorable term.

FINAN: And the cultural revolution, just for listeners, was that event starting around 1965 –

LI: Was the ten years darkness in the Mao Era. This is the era that the husband betray wife, wife betray husband, not for sexual reasons, but for political reason. This is the era that the country or the regime treat the adults like children treat the children like adults. So I grew up in that period and my family suffered a great deal and we lost one brother who is 12 years older than me and he was a college student at Fudan University and he was basically considered as counter-revolutionary. The charge against him was he listening to the enemy's radio, voice of America, because he basically just wanted to practice English, along with BBC and the voice of America.

So when he actually graduated in 1967, was sent to first Liao Nihuninsan, then went to Hunan, then because of faction, know you know, rebellion groups, the grassroots, they got his dossier, which is sent to him by Fudan University, then they actually beating him to death. They consider him such a criminal and then put his body on the railroad, you know, it sounds like he committed suicide and I remember that at that time I was still a teenager and I remember that we got that note said that he committed suicide and we thought that he did but only until almost a decade later when native shanghai came to see my parents and told us that he actually was beaten first and then put his body on the railroad.

Now this is only one of the tragedies, so many thousands of tragedies including Deng Xiaoping' son also – whether he's really committed suicide or just threw out of the window he become disabled and there's so many very sad stories. So I'm fortunate enough to really went through of these difficulties and in a way that the cultural

revolution periods at that time we were young, were brainwash but also we have the revelation after Cultural Revolution know how awful that - how terrible that period. So if you ask me if there are any Chinese leaders I really don't like, I think I don't like Bo Xilai or other leader I think that they have married but Bo Xilai was such an opportunist and he himself also suffered after the Cultural Revolution and but he was very violent and he glorified that horrible decade to the degree that the Wen Xiabao, premier Wen Xiabao and other leaders saw that he was really remnant of the culture revolution and was very very dangerous but also the other things he was quite, you know, disturbing here he really said that he wanted to deal with the underground Mafia.

So he arrest or fire thousands of policemen and executed the former police chief, but what happened is later on, his wife was involved with the murder with the British Policeman called Neil Heywood, the police chief that he appointed to replace the previous police chief who they executed, actually, gave that to the American Consulate too, so the rest was history but that was another turning point in China's, you know, really quite remarkable history then also eventually led the Xi Jinping to come to power.

DEWS: Laurence Chandy is a fellow here at Brookings and along with program director Kemal Dervis, the co-author of one of a series of essays and global debates that mark the 10th anniversary of the global economy and development program. Here's Lawrence on his essay, "Are technology and globalization destined to drive up inequality?"

CHANDY: This is Laurence Chandy, I'm a fellow in the global development program at Brookings. I've written an essay with my colleague Kemal Dervis, looking at the question of what the effects of technology and globalization will be on inequality in

the future. There's a lot of concern about this topic and it's shared by people in our program. There's no doubt that technology and globalization have already acted as a huge force on inequality especially the last 20 years but it's actually a very complicated story and that's what our essay's about. the first area of complexity is that the impact of technology and globalization really depends on what kinds of inequality we're talking about or whose inequality we're measuring. So let's consider first global inequality, that's the difference in incomes between everyone in the world, all seven billion of us. Here the factors of technology and globalization are actually leading to a narrowing in the distribution of income.

The global distribution of income is ultimately a function of two things: the inequality within each country in the world and inequality between each country and dominant effect of the last 20 years and there's been a rapid narrowing of between country inequality as poor countries have caught up with the rich world. Of course, this narrowing of global inequality doesn't mean that everyone's happy. There have been relative winners and losers in this process and this is really expertly illustrated by the way by the so-called elephant charts by Branko Milanovic and Christoph Lackner, if you haven't seen that chart, I strongly encourage you to google it, it's worth a look.

So now let's think about within country Inequality. Now the story of the last 20 years in the US has been of inequality widening quite rapidly and that's been true throughout most of the rich countries of the world, the OECD members and in certainly some of those countries, especially the US but also the UK, we've seen inequality widen especially at the top so we have this phenomenon of the so-called top 1%. In the developing world the story is quite different. We saw inequality widen throughout most

of the eighties and nineties but since then that trend has stopped so within country inequality in the developing world has plateaued and if anything it seems to have perhaps narrowed slightly. We also have very little understanding in the developing world of what's going on at the top of the distribution so we can't really talk about the top 1% in developing countries because there isn't really the data to do it.

Now another thing that makes this whole topic really complex is that technology and globalization affect inequality through multiple channels. These channels don't always operate in the same direction, let me give you some examples. So we know that technology increases the returns to skills, it gives bigger incomes to people who have the greatest skills and are able to harness those in the economy and in the rich world, that effect is reinforced by the effect of trade as rich countries specialize in trading and high skilled activities. In the developing world, there is certainly a premium we see for people who are more skilled and yet the effects of trade is the opposite. Developing countries specialize in lower-skilled activities. We also know that technology has led to an increased role of capital in the production process and that means that people who own capital, that's investors, have done very well over the last 10-20 years. That effect seems to be true globally. We also know that technology has led to new monopolistic markets. If you think of digital platforms think of things like Google and so forth, the owners of those platforms and the people who work for those companies have made huge profits and are making vast wages in what's being described as winner-take-all markets. It's really interesting if you think about those very same digital platforms, while they've created monopolies, they've also lowered energy costs for people who participate on those platforms. Think about uber drivers or people who rent out their

rooms in their house on airbnb or sellers on ebay, a lot of those people have been able to do very well as a result of these new digital platforms. This has also created many new winners and losers and really changed how profits are being shared and distributed in the global economy.

Kemal and I conclude our essay by identifying some of the areas which we're going to be watching closely over the next few years. One of them is the effect of automation on jobs. This is clearly a very big topic right now in the press but there's very little agreement among experts as to how serious a risk automation poses to workers. This is partly a question of the extent of disruption that automation could cause but also how quick the disruption will occur. For us in the global program, we're especially concerned with the effective automation on the developing world and how it might affect the prospects for developing countries to grow quickly and to catch up with living standards in the rich world. Another area where we think is really important to watch is to see how policymakers around the world are going to try and shape the distribution of income in their countries differently, not just to the effects of taxing and spending but trying to shake market outcomes themselves. I think we can expect to see some country governments playing a more prominent role using their own investments to shape the direction, the innovation that research and development take. Finally we're going to be looking for ways of obtaining data that can tell us more about what is going on in this complex story. Right now our understanding is partly limited by the limitations of data themselves and this is an area where there is the need for new innovation on its side.

DEWS: You can find the global debate series on our website by searching for 11 global debates and now back to Bill Finan and Cheng Li.

FINAN: Ji is a central focus of your book, obviously, and can you tell us who he is and about his rise to power? A quick summary.

LI: Well, Xi Jinping grew up in a Cultural Revolution, also suffered himself because his father was considered as a kind of for capital roller - this is Mao was classified as an enemy, although his father was a senior leader, like a vice premium. And he grew up in a cultural evolution but he also faced that same discrimination like, you know, to some extent my family got, but it's a different way. I came from a family that my father was a capitalist, he come from my family is a communist revolutionary and but we both suffer a great deal. He was sent the countryside as a farmer for manual labor when he was a teenager. He spent seven years in Yen Ang, one of the most primitive regions in the country, that experience really actually give him a lot of valuable assets like how to know the real China, how to endure the hardship, and how to know what Chinese parents like and don't like, and so he really treasured that a period. And then he came back to college to study, that's just when the culture revolution still in the latest stage, then he worked as a personal assistant to minister of defense for a few years, then after that he just really gradually, step-by-step, you know, from the local leaders, county leaders, to municipal leaders, to prominent leader, then serve in Fujian Xi Shanghai, a really economically advanced region.

He has been noted for his pro-market approach but on the political front, he is far more conservative and – but I also think that the conservatives are the reason that he wants to put priority on the economic reform and also deal with corruption. So in that regard, anti-corruption, in my view, it's also political measure, so that's a priority. Now we yet to know where he got this political capital how he will suspend it with only for his

own personal power, or will transfer party to make it parties institutional development more solid, more effective – this is the question. Most people still has been cynical, but I'm less cynical; I think we should give him the benefit the doubt.

FINAN: Right and you elaborate on that in the book and make the argument too that it is far too simplistic to cast him as another Putin at this point. But you do say though that there still is a question of whether Ji is going to create problems for the whole idea of collective leadership and that mechanism of creating new leaders with the next Congress to occur. You said you're skeptical of the picture of him as a budding authoritarian but at the same time you do have concerns.

LI: Well, you know, he faced – he confronts three options, especially regarding to selecting the next power bureau standing committee because this is the superior body of the decision-making or leadership called power bureau standing committee, currently has seven people, sometimes could have 9, sometimes could have 5, but among the current seven leaders, five will retire because of the age limit, so how to select the other, the new members, it become a big challenge. The fact that the people will continue to pay attention to this leadership body also tell us the collective leadership actually remains, otherwise there's no reason to pay too much attention, only pay attention to to see, but rather now we certainly pay, not only to see, but also how that new leadership body will be formed. He has three choices: one is to really take all the power, so the power bureau standing committee become his personal cabinet. He appointed one, one, one, and one, two three, and also there's no hurry for finding a successor because like Mao or each of the, I mean, is Mao and Deng led China for 25 to 30 years so he can do the same thing. Some of his critics said that definitely this is Xi

Jinping's choice. I'm not so sure and because you will, in that regard, you will change the party constitution, change the political norm or rhetoric or ideology and the change the institutional framework.

Now at least from the the party's community, which was released just a few days ago, the important plan, the so-called 6-plan, used continuously the definition of revived generations from Mao then Jian to Ji, you know, that's a rhetoric continue to continuations. There's no sign that only Mao, Deng, or Ji, so that certainly undermined some of the critics' cynicism. Now the second choice is that the idea of team of rivals and which is the famous American book, which also led president Obama to appoint Secretary Clinton to be that position, and Hillary Clinton will be the secretary and the United Democrat Party, so that has been practiced in China for the past two decades. Now this means that Ji may go reach out of his own political camp to the opposition camp. Now these factions or camps are not entirely transparent, not legitimate in a Chinese political system. But having said that, if you ask any taxi driver in China in Beijing, Shanghai, they will tell you which leader belongs to which faction.

FINAN: So they know the factions.

LI: The leaders certainly know that, this is, you know, really what Bo Xilai mean, what Zo Yenkun mean. This is all things related with factional politics. but this is that the idea of team rivals, basically, he needs to reach out so in a way the power bureau standing committee will no longer be six verses one ratio as we described in the current party leadership, but rather could be three and four, maybe also, one of the three, the opposition, could be a future leader. Now this will be difficult to accept. In after five remarkable years of consolidating power, you end up with a leadership, actually,

become relative majority and also you can imagine foreign and domestic media will pay more attention to the potential successor and who he is and highly likely will be the other faction. Now so that would not be easy.

The third scenario – option is, actually, China does have election. That election, intra-party election is quite limited but they do let the delegates to the Central Committee every five years, is about 2,000 people, to vote for the 370-ish members of Central Committee, which means that the bottom ten percent, roughly, will be eliminated. But if you want to be in power bureau, you know, the middle level, the top levels, power bureau standing committee, you need to be in the Central Committee. If you are not elected to the Central Committee, you will not be qualified to the high level leadership, power bureau or power bureau standing committee.

So in the past 30 years, there's some of the candidates already determined but actually eliminated in this kind of election. The election never reached a level let central committee member to elect power bureau or power standing committee. Now, you can imagine that the next party congress, Xi Jinping's people, his followers, his like-minded people, will enter the central committee, is about 370 people, where they will open the door to let him to select the next power bureau then open up the Chinese political intraparty democracy in a big way, we cannot know; that also involves risk.

FINAN: Right. Are you skeptical of that Occurring?

LI: No, I'm leaning towards that scenario, but none of the options is easy. That would be a big test for Xi Jinping.

FINAN: I want to pull back to a larger view, as you point out in the book, China today is undergoing enormous socio-economic change and you argue in the book that this will put stress on the current system of leadership selection and that's something taking place outside the party, as you described it, and so how would that happen?

LI: Well, again, I changed my final chapter. I spent a lot of time talking about society. Now i'm optimistic about China largely because I do believe people do not want to go back to cultural revolution. Bo Xilai would never be successful and although this incident, that incident is random, it's bad luck and yet Bo Xilai has no chance to become top leader in China because the way he's really moving back. Now Xi Jinping different from Bo Xilai in profound ways, although both of them are princelings, come from prominent family.

Xi Jinping, really in personal level, is more liked not like Bo Xilai – he's so egoistic, so mean, not only to his lieutenants, but also to his father and the to one of his sons and that's the thing, it's really quite unique, but also Xi Jinping is pro-market, he's not anti-market. Bo Xilai is famous for you know state-owned enterprises and etcetera. You know, Xi Jinping talk about importance of the rule of law. Yes, he may sometimes, you know, or his regime, or his leadership harass some human rights lawyer, but at the same time also talks about the importance of law and dedicated one platinum on legal development, but Bo Xilai completely ignore law and not only arrests human rights lawyers, but also executes some of them and executes some of his political rivals in such a way, so they're quite different in so many important ways.

FINAN: And then it also underscores why you find that life imprisonment for Bo is not an especially wrong judgement.

LI: Correct, but the things is what I'm optimistic is it's not partially about the leadership structure, which I call one party two coalition's or one party two camps. I would be happy to doctor details but the book, probably read the book has other details about why the party despite the one-party state it's not a monolithic group. I'm optimistic about China and you only mentioning Bo Xilai incident was similar with largest one thing's 90-89 camera maybe even things 1976 after cultural evolution but the Chinese society or Chinese economy not affecting the same way and actively than the previous two incident and societies still move forward.

The reason is because society become so Mature. you have the forces like middle class, entrepreneurial class, legal profession, and commercialized media, and NGOs despite some difficulties is still continue to expand. So all these things did not exist or extremely weak in 1989 China or certainly 1976 China. So these forces will push for change now also Xi Jinping is popular in the low and middle level of military, Ji Xinning is popular with general public but he still need to reconsider the relationship with Chinese intellectuals because there's a lot of criticism about Xi Jinping.

So in a way that these criticism also will prevent a dictator emerging in China in my view and I do not necessarily agree with Chinese intellectuals but I'm happy that they have the freedom to express their views, at least limited freedom so that come with hope and this hope will make leaders to to be on the right side of history if you single magical to extreme then you will not be popular. So I think this is the dynamic that make leaders should go along with the history, go along with the society. Xi Jinping to reprove a leader with flexibility with kind of you know good judgment so that also gave me

some hope. So the hope it's not only the leadership, not only Xi Jinping but most importantly with the society, with the social forces which is the witness to emerge.

FINAN: We'll end with that hope and I want to thank you for coming to talk to us today. We've barely scratched the surface of the wealth of insights and information contained in your new book and I would recommend anyone who has a strong interest in how power in China works today should read it so thank you.

LI: Thank you.

DEWS: Cheng Li's book, "Chinese politics in the Ji Jinping era" has just been published by the Brookings Institution Press. You can find it on our website. Finally today, meet Harsha Singh and learn more about the Brookings India Center in New Delhi. Dr. Harsha Singh, welcome to the show.

SINGH: Thank you, thank you very much, very happy to be here.

DEWS: I'd like to start by asking you to just please introduce yourself.

SINGH: I'm Harsh Vardhan Singh, my friends call me Harsha and I have joined Brookings India as executive director on first of August this year. So I'm two months old but I've been involved with Brookings India work for some time. Before that I was in think tanks in Geneva. I taught at a couple of universities in the U.S. for a short while also – wanted to have the experience of teaching in addition to my other professional experiences so in terms of my previous jobs, I have worked in two stints at the World Trade Organization or GAT and WTO. I started with the GAT system in mid-1985 and I left the GAT after working in five different areas in 1997, so 12 years.

Then I was a telecom regulator. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India was formed around the time I left, in fact, I was the first substantive person working other than the authority and the secretary in the regulatory body as economic advisor so I was economic advisor for four years and secretary of the authority for four years. That was the time we brought in a lot of telecom reform, which has changed the face of the industry in India. It's now a completely different situation compared to what it was when I joined. After about eight years I then came to the World Trade Organization again, this time as deputy to the director-general so I was the deputy director general, there are four of us there. To Pascal Lamy and he served two terms and for both these terms he retained the same team so I was for 8 years deputy director general at WTO. Then I started with some think tanks, teaching, as I told you, and in August this year I came back to my country to be executive director of Brookings India.

DEWS: Alright let's talk then about Brookings India: what is it, where is it, what is its mission?

SINGH: Brookings India is one of the overseas centers of Brookings, as you know. So we have Beijing, Doha, and Brookings India, the last one, namely Brookings India, being the youngest of the three.; we are three years old. We have a chairman, India chairman, who I joke with my friends that, you know, he gives us 30 percent of his time formally but since he works 18 hour days, he gives us at sixty percent. And then we have three fellows, one of them has just become a senior fellow and there's me and then we have research associates and centers such a system, so it's very small team but if you see the newsletter of Brookings India, you will never guess it's such a small team because actually a lot of work gets done and very high quality work also.

The areas covered include energy, smart grades, foreign policy, several aspects of foreign policy, and health, smart cities, we did something last year on education, analyzing election data trends, we are thinking of going into quality aspects of health, so that's what is presently the focus of Brookings India. After I joined, I now want to expand that focus to include several other subject matters and of course, as you know, the main issues which would examine the purposes to develop appropriate policy understanding and initiatives which will help fulfill the relevant objectives of the policymaker of the nation or of the region to the extent the nation has those linkages in place, which it does and interest and the global interaction of countries as far as overseas center is concerned.

So I have thought of expanding the scope to include trade and investment and within trade and investment, both issues which relate to development of domestic capacity and domestic parts of the value chain when investment comes in high technology investment and how one can improve the absorptive capacity at home, what are the policies which will help develop global hubs when the investment comes in, what are the complementarities which could be developed between the different kinds of investment, then I also want to begin initiatives on the digital issues so there are additional issues which relate to regulatory processes there are additional issues which relate to use of digital for social entrepreneurship, there are aspects which relate to using the platform for multiple purposes both commercial as well as social objectives, and the hope is to develop policies and better understanding so that the objectives which are emphasized in the government of India's flagship program on digital India can be better met.

Then the issue of jobs and small and medium enterprises is another issue which I think is very important in most countries; India is emphasizing that immensely. At present, India is also trying to look at membership of APEC in order to improve the competitiveness or the functioning environment of the domestic entrepreneurs themselves. I also want to start some work on improving the competitiveness of SMEs. We have gone into the area of, as far as health is concerned, two other aspects of health, one is nutrition and health. We would like to look deeper into it; we have decided to look at the first thousand days of the child, which means from conception till two years so it's both the health of the mother and the child and the first two years are the most crucial phase of a human being. Another is gender & health, so we have gone into that.

There is yet another program where we have decided to look at issues of agriculture – how to increase incomes of small farmers, productivity, and outputs. There are a number of innovative methods which are now used in different parts of India so get more information on that and share that with both policymakers and the farmers so that's another initiative. One other idea is to try and see specific medical devices and look at the quality which should be ensured so that we can we can improve the situation with respect to the quality of inconsistency or devices with international standards. So those are some of the ideas, let's see which ones to take root first. I'm trying on all these fronts. There is another initiative on India and Africa which I would like to take up,

DEWS: So you mentioned that Brookings has centers of research and study in Doha, Qatar and in Beijing, China. Why was Brookings India the third foreign location set up. Why India?

SINGH: The precise reason for me would be difficult to give accurately because I don't have access to those records but I can surmise and pretty well assess the reasons. India is the power both in terms of strategic presence as well as economic prominence. India is a country where the population dividend can give rise to addressing several concerns which the world in the future is going to face. The development of policies in India and the momentum with the Indian economy and polity has right now are of great significance, I think both for the region and the world.

So it's an obvious thought to try and look at these issues from a center-based at the heart of the action itself. Plus, also to have an extended presence with experts who understand India who are working for the objectives of the Indian policy makers as such but from an independent and objective perspective because as my understanding goes, Brookings and Brookings India, the whole purpose is to try and look at issues as you as an expert understand them and then try and see okay, what are the kind of objectives which are meaningful and how could one develop a policy framework or interaction of platforms or insights or database which actually enable implementation of those policies in a more effective way.

So I think in every context there is a critical mass or a critical minimum which, once the threshold is reached then, one has to engage much more deeply with that situation so I think that situation with India had come in fact some time back. So I'm surprised it was only three years ago but there must be reasons why it was only three years ago.

DEWS: The final question Dr. Singh, if there's one thing that you would like listeners of this podcast to know or to understand about India, either coming at it from

the point of view of the executive director in Brookings India or from the point of view of a citizen of India, or both, what would that one thing be?

SINGH: The most important thing which I want to emphasize and since we have an international audience, it's very important to keep that in mind, is that it's now well recognized that India has a very strong momentum for its economic growth and the opportunities which it offers and its capability to participate in global initiatives. There are a number of areas which might be a matter of concern for others, it may relate to trade policy, it may relate to industrial policy, or whatever areas might be of concern of foreign policy, etc. But the one point which I have understood about the Indian emphasis by the main policy maker is that they want to be very active and responsible parts of the global community, they recognize what is needed to be done in economic terms, in social terms, etc., within the country and they are making efforts to do that. The recent goods and services tax initiative of the government is an example of that.

So, while all these efforts are being made, it's important to look at them in the manner in which they are being made. They are being made to enhance the country's capabilities so as to be a more participative and contributing society to the regional and global context. And when you see that as a background, then the perspective which one has to interact with India is that, okay, the direction is one which is a win-win for all of us, how do we enable it so that those objectives which lead to this win-win are enabled for India as well as for us. So it's an understanding of a potential which is being aspired towards through very concrete policies on the ground and once you understand that, then perhaps you can take a more medium term perspective rather than just immediately looking at something which is being done by India and say hey, you're not

where I would like you to be; they will be but they need that space and they need an understanding and common support.

DEWS: Well, Dr. Harsha Singh, executive director of Brookings India, thank you for your time today.

SINGH: Thank you very much.

DEWS: You can find Brookings India at Brookings.in. And that does it for this edition of the Brookings Cafeteria brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network. Follow us on twitter @policypodcasts. My thanks to audio engineer and producer Gaston Reboredo with assistance from Mark Hoelscher. Vanessa Sauter is the producer. Bill Finan does the book interviews and design and web support comes from Jessica Pavone, Eric Abalahin, and Rebecca Visor. And thanks to David Nassar and Richard Fawal for their support. You can subscribe to the Brookings Cafeteria on iTunes and listen to it in all the usual places. Find us on the web at Brookings.edu. Until next time; I'm Fred Dews.