

ROBERT LAWRENCE KUHN

The seven who will run China

To discern China's future, one should know China's leaders, especially Xi Jinping, who was last Thursday elected general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, the nation's top leader.

I am not aware anywhere of better prepared state leaders. All members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of CPC Central Committee have run large geographic regions and/or ministries; six have led at least two provinces or major municipalities (as Party secretary or governor/mayor), many of which would be among the top 25 countries in the world in terms of population and among the top 35 in terms of GDP. Xi Jinping led three dynamic regions — Fujian and Zhejiang provinces, and Shanghai — that were by population, economic vitality and social challenges the equivalent of three European nations.

In this essay, I offer brief personal observations of China's new leaders.

Xi Jinping

Xi differs from his colleagues by family background and the travails of his youth. His revolutionary hero father, Xi Zhongxun, was a leader in implementing Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the early 1980s. Earlier, however, under leftist extremism, Xi's father was humiliated and imprisoned several times, over a period spanning 16 years. When the ideological madness spawned the "cultural revolution" (1966-76), the teenage Xi Jinping was "sent down" to a poor, remote mountain village where, for six years, he chopped hay, reaped wheat, herded sheep, and lived in a cave house. Xi gained by the harsh experience. Although the offspring of a political leader, Xi is known for the common man's touch. Xi said: "Many of my practical ideas stem from my life during that period, which has influenced me every minute, even today. To truly understand common folk and society is fundamental!"

When Adam Zhu (my business partner) and I met then Zhejiang Province Party Secretary Xi Jinping in 2006, he was characteristically cautious. "We should not overestimate our accomplishments or indulge ourselves in our achievements," Xi told me, advising China to see "the gap between where we are and where we have to go" and to aspire to "our next higher goal," which he described as "a persistent and unremitting process."

"To understand our dedication to revitalize our country, one should appreciate the Chinese people's pride in our ancient civilization," Xi said. "We made great contributions to world civilization and enjoyed long-term prosperity, then suffered national weakness, oppression, humiliation. Our deep motivation is rooted in our patriotism and pride." But, he continued, "compared with our long history, our speed of development is not so impressive. We should assess ourselves objectively."

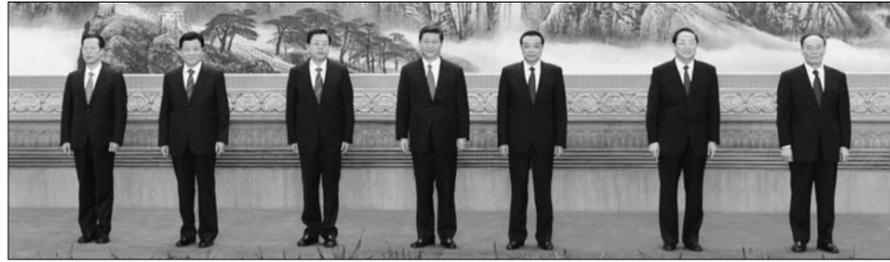
My impression of Xi Jinping is that he is friendly, courteous, open-minded and engaging. Radiating a strong physical presence, he carries himself with the ease of someone comfortable with authority and empathetic with guests, and he manifests none of the airs of a high official impressed with his own status. He believes in being "Proud, not complacent. Motivated, not pompous. Pragmatic, not erratic."

Xi, certainly, upholds the primacy of the Party. Yet, recognizing China's "earthshaking change," he advises Party officials to embrace greater change — to "emancipate our minds and overcome the attitude of being satisfied with the status quo, the inertia of conservative and complacent thinking, the fear of difficulties, and timid thinking." Though Xi is likely to quicken reform, political as well as economic, he will maintain stability as the touchstone.

China's leaders "constantly draw theoretical lessons from our work, and use them to guide our practice," Xi explained. "These are not long-winded theoretical exercises," he added with a smile. "We don't discuss theory all day long without making decisions. Leaders must be decisive and action-oriented."

Li Keqiang

When I met Li in 2005, he had recently become Party secretary of Liaoning province in China's northeast, the country's old industrial heartland that had fallen behind when its massive State-owned enterprises (SOEs) were ill-suited for a consumer-driven market economy. Li began championing the national policy



The elected members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping (center), Li Keqiang (third from right), Zhang Dejiang (third from left), Yu Zhengsheng (second from right), Liu Yunshan (second from left), Wang Qishan (right), and Zhang Gaoli (left) meet the press on Nov 15 in Beijing.

of "Revitalizing the Northeast." The key, he told me, was to find market-sensitive ways to restructure large SOEs while at the same time to create a fertile environment so that private businesses could flourish.

Li has been described as low-key, clear-minded, smart, responsive, prudent, tactful. I was struck by his determination to try innovative ideas and his decisiveness to tackle seemingly intractable problems.

After arriving in late 2004, Li left his footprints across the province, visiting cities at a rapid rate. His plan was to build Liaoning's economy on three pillars — the Jinzhou Bay region in the southwest; Shenyang, the capital, in the center; and Dalian, the modern city on the sea. In these two major urban clusters, Li targeted specific industries to develop world-class capabilities such as equipment manufacturing. A major initiative was to renovate Liaoning's poor residential areas, the sprawling shantytowns, so that 1.2 million people could move into new homes.

A leader of Peking University's student union and then secretary of the CPC Youth League, Li points out that senior officials "also need to study while we are working. Otherwise, our work will lack originality." His focus on "originality" reflects China's leaders push for the nation to become creative and innovative, to use new thinking to solve multi-faceted problems now manifest in virtually every area of national development.

Li earned his doctorate under the distinguished economist Li Yining (no relation), whom I know to be an intellectually demanding reformist, unimpressed with political status. Li Keqiang became governor of Henan province at 43, the youngest in China and the first with a PhD. Li's administrative experience as Party secretary, as CEO, of two large provinces — Henan with 95 million people and a GDP now almost \$500 billion, and Liaoning with 45 million people and a GDP now almost \$400 billion — is unparalleled globally.

Zhang Dejiang

Zhang is a three-term member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee who has run four administrative regions — Jilin, Zhejiang and Guangdong provinces, and the Chongqing municipality — a combined total of roughly 215 million people and a current GDP of over \$1.7 trillion (\$2.7 trillion based on purchasing power parity, PPP). This is a population larger than Brazil's (fifth globally) and a GDP the size of India's (ninth globally). Using PPP, the combined GDP is larger than Russia's (sixth globally).

Zhang studied Korean and when he was Party secretary of Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture in Jilin, he delivered reports in Korean. In Party congresses, Zhang began and ended his speeches in Korean.

When Zhang was running Chongqing (having replaced Bo Xilai, the former Party secretary of the municipality; after the shocking scandal), he was concurrently vice-premier in charge of industry, where he supported indigenous innovation, particularly in large SOEs. Yet, appreciating the role of the private sector in China's growth model, Zhang worked to repair the damage done to Chongqing's business owners by his predecessor. He quietly restored their confidence, recognizing entrepreneurs' vital contribution to China's development.

Yu Zhengsheng

In 2010, then Shanghai Party Secretary Yu told me that to solve the financial crisis, "while consumption has to be stimulated, investment is also needed — but in low-carbon, environment-friendly industries so that we can live in harmony with nature." He continued, "What way of life should we adopt? Life in the West, particularly in the US with its large number of vehicles, depends on huge consumption of energy."

Can China afford this way of life, Yu asked? "China has achieved great economic success, but many severe problems have arisen, especially widening income gaps and strained human relations. So the issues awaiting solution are how to produce a harmonious environment."

When working on Expo 2010 Shanghai, I saw Yu's pragmatism and candor. Interviewing him for China Central Television before the Expo opened, I inquired about his happiest experience. "The happiest hasn't come yet," he responded. "Only when the closing ceremony confirms a safe Expo, will I have the greatest pleasure."

Liu Yunshan

A three-term member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Liu served for 10 years as head of the CPC Publicity Department, where he led the transformation and development of China's cultural industries, especially media and entertainment. Due to the sensitivity of ideology and limited financial investment, the dramatic achievements have been underestimated by outsiders.

While China maintained required regulation of the media to ensure social security, Liu effected the modernization and popularization of media communications. This restructuring, underreported abroad, unleashed creative competition and enabled greater diversity. The Internet, new media, television, press, publishing and film experienced great growth, even approaching world standards in technology and content. Significantly, media enhancement benefits all citizens irrespective of class or income — critical in a nation where social imbalances are its most divisive problem.

Liu also enabled increasing openness in China's international communications. Regarding my commentaries about China, Liu advised me personally: "Let facts tell China's story," he said. "The truth is told best in an honest, matter-of-fact way. Painting rosy pictures doesn't work; beautifying us isn't helpful. Real-life stories count. Dig out life experiences; reveal innermost thoughts. That captures the real China."

Influence of communications comes from capability of communications; impact of communications comes from power in discourse; and trust of communications comes from transparency in actions. This philosophy, consistent with many modern communications theories, comes from Liu.

When I met Liu five weeks after the devastating Sichuan earthquake in 2008, he said that the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee had held five meetings specifically on earthquake relief work, several late at night.

Only a dozen minutes after the earthquake took place, Liu himself called the president of CCTV and told the national broadcaster to start live broadcast 24 hours a day to let people know what was going on in the progress of the rescue and relief work.

"The West attacks us on human rights," he said, "but these meetings, and the monumental relief work we've done, including our media reports, reflect our deep respect for human rights and transparency of our media."

Liu said the Chinese people welcomed "constructive and good-intentioned criticism," but "disagree with it when Western politicians and media make irresponsible accusations."

"We will not accept criticism with ulterior motives," he said. "Obviously China has many problems. We have 1.3 billion people. The trend is positive: our problems are 'growing pains.' We want more journalists to visit China, not fewer."

Wang Qishan

In 1984, 200 young economists gathered for what would become an historic

conference on pricing in China's emerging market economy. The main organizer was a 36-year-old rural policy expert, Wang Qishan, who a quarter century later would become vice-premier in charge of finance with responsibility for China's economy. In his remarkably diverse career, Wang was also chairman of China Construction Bank, vice-governor of Guangdong province, party secretary of Hainan province, and mayor of Beijing.

Wang is known for his capacity to solve problems and manage crises; his nickname is "fire-brigade captain." Significantly, he co-lead the rounds of the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, the highest-level continuing contact between the two superpowers.

Wang combines humor with sophistication. With the Olympics approaching, an American financier requested his business card. "You won't need my card," Wang, then Beijing mayor, said with a smile. "If the Olympics is successful, I'll be too high to help you," he joked. "If it's not, I won't have a phone!"

Zhang Gaoli

Zhang was Party secretary of Shenzhen, the city that pioneered reform, and of Shandong, a province with 95 million people and a GDP now approaching \$800 billion (China's second-largest). Zhang told me how, in 2007, late one night, he was suddenly asked to run Tianjin, the industrial hub in North China. In 2011, Tianjin led all administrative regions in China with a growth rate of 16.4 percent and a per capita GDP of about \$13,000.

When I visited Zhang in Shandong in 2005, he asserted that any idea that is in line with international practice and conducive to innovation may be tried — and tried boldly. "Without development there's no way out; without growth we'd have no material strength and no problem could be solved," he said, yet adding, "our social development is lagging behind our economic development."

"We must strive for coordinated, sustainable, and balanced development of society, economy, regions, human being and nature," he said. Educated in planning and statistics, Zhang appraised each of Shandong's 140 counties using dozens of indexes — economic, social, education, and healthcare.

"Results count more than words," Zhang told me more than once. "Opportunities are everywhere. If you're quicker in seizing the first opportunity, you'll have advantages in seizing future opportunities." To know what's really happening, Zhang said, "you must go yourself" — and he is known to visit subordinates, unannounced, in their offices. "I'm not interested in reports," he said, "only results." Zhang promotes a down-to-earth work style of intense effort and low profile. His motto: "Do more. Speak less."

When foreign protesters interrupted the pre-Olympic torch relay (2008), then Vice-President Xi Jinping said, "The world is like a huge birdcage where all kinds of birds coexist. If you drive away the noisy ones, you lose wonderful variety and color. The key is to mind our own business well."

If relaxed self-assurance reflects how China's new leaders think, this augurs well for China's future.

China's new leaders, led by Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, face formidable challenges. They are ready — but one danger is high expectations. A senior aide confided, "Xi is ready; but it won't be easy."

The author is an international corporate strategist and investment banker who advises multinationals on doing business in China. A longtime counselor to China's leaders, he is the author of *How China's Leaders Think. His biography of former president Jiang Zemin, The Man Who Changed China, was China's best-selling book of 2005. Dr. Kuhn is a frequent commentator in the international media.*

WHAT'S THE BUZZ

After studying another three years, postgraduates earn only 500 yuan (\$79) a month more than a college student when they apply for an identical job. So is it worth studying for a PhD? China Daily's mobile phone news readers share their views:

I am now working after finishing my postgraduate studies. In the long run, if postgraduates are willing to make the effort and learn more, they have better chances of promotion. Besides, postgraduates have a broader social network too. As far as I am concerned, we should not make that much comparison in work as long as one enjoys his/her job. One's efforts will be paid some day sooner or later.

ZHANGYAWEN, Zhengzhou, Henan province

There is no direct correlation between postgraduate study and one's salary and no need to make such link. Otherwise, even though one is undergoing a post-graduate program, one will not enjoy the happiness of obtaining more knowledge, renewal of thoughts and cultivation of disposition.

QIUBOCHENG, Huzhou, Zhejiang province

I don't think this problem should be considered in only one way. For example, it is hard to find a decent job. Many of my former university classmates who will graduate next year from graduate school still fail to find a job. But even so, I have started thinking of further study. It is crucial to find the right way to one's life goals.

YISHENGWUHUI, Beijing

The city one lives in will influence a person's life, so if you are not satisfied with your city, to further your study in a postgraduate program might be the easiest way for you to alter the situation. Also, if your ultimate goal is to find a job instead of going into academia after graduation, there is no need to do postgraduate studies as you can find a relatively satisfactory job when you graduate from college. In my opinion, postgraduate study can teach one many things, hopefully everyone makes the decision that is right for them, rather than just following the crowd.

A READER, Beijing

According to my experience, do not rush to go to graduate school right after graduating from the university. It is better to find one's specific interest after working for a couple of years and improve oneself by taking an on-job postgraduate course. I began to work as a civil servant when I got my master's degree, but I have no advantage over my colleagues who have only a bachelor's degree. The reasons for that are pretty simple: work experience is more important than a diploma; a diploma does not necessarily mean someone is capable.

JASON, FOSHAN, Guangdong province

Due to the unreasonable supply-demand structure in China's job market now, there are a few positions for research talent, which makes postgraduate studies less related to employment. As a result, companies are reluctant to increase their cost to hire postgraduates, to whom they are supposed to pay more. Yet it has become the easiest decision for university graduates to make to go on to postgraduate school, given the emphasis China's education places on examination results. Besides, people always hold the stereotype that it is easier for postgraduates to find a better job, which is not the actual case.

MAYLOVE, Beijing

LETTERS

What's Chinese for 'hello!'

In most language textbooks for the use of foreigners, the standard Chinese greeting is *ni hao ma?* This is how foreigners who have learned Chinese before coming to China greet a person they meet here.

In Xu Lin's article about Confucius Institutes published on Nov 5, I was shocked to see the "question" in the headline as the title and wondered how much Hanban (Chinese national office for teaching Chinese as a Foreign language) was responsible for this fundamental mistake.

Not only 25 years of observation, but also the answers I have got from native Chinese speakers — educated people — on the topic show that *ni hao ma?* as a translation of "hello!" is wrong.

Ni hao ma? probably comes from the American "how do you do?", which is not quite in use today. Once more, it seems that most Chinese think all foreigners are Americans.

When you meet your neighbor in the stairway, do you ask him about his health, business and family? No Chinese would say *ni hao ma?* to a person who has just been introduced to him/her. He/she would not say that to an old friend either unless it is a long-time-no-see situation. *Ni hao ma?* is a question, not a greeting.

Among acquaintances, Chinese greet with expressions referring to life, such as: Have you eaten?, Why have you got up so early?, or Are you going out?

LISA CARDUCCI, via e-mail

Readers' comments are welcome. Please send your e-mail to opinion@chinadaily.com.cn or letters@chinadaily.com.cn or to the individual columnists. China Daily reserves the right to edit all letters. Thank you.

The opinions expressed on this page do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily US Edition.