

CHINA'S NEW LEADERSHIP A SOLID PATH, A BRIGHT FUTURE

by DAVID WONG

The once-in-a-decade leadership transition for the world's second largest economy appears opaque and mysterious to Western media. China continues to tip the world's balance of power in its favour. This in turn fuels intense curiosity on the election process of its leaders as the world's most populous nation plays an increasingly crucial role in global affairs. The Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom, H.E. Ambassador Liu Xiaoming, gave a speech entitled "A Solid Path, A Bright Future", aimed at explaining the outcome of the recent Communist Party of China's 18th National Congress in a private lecture chaired by economist Jim O'Neill, chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management. In attendance were David Milliband MP, the former British Foreign Secretary and 80 other stakeholders with business interests in China's foreign policies. BBeyond's David Wong also attended the lecture.

As the world watched the re-election of President Obama, halfway around the globe Beijing hosted the Communist Party of China's (CPC) 18th National Congress, arguably the world's most important political meeting for 2012. Whilst incumbent President Obama and Republican nominee Governor Mitt Romney embarked on trailblazing campaigns, spent over two

billion dollars between them in advertisements and engaged in televised debates, China prepared itself for a new generation of helmsmen in a smooth top leadership transition. As China undergoes profound changes and is faced with unprecedented opportunities for development and risks, its new leaders have the challenging task of steering the economic juggernaut towards a path of sustainable growth and equality.

Ambassador Liu, who was also present at the 18th CPC National Congress, describes the process as solemn and taking place in strict accordance with the institution and procedures stipulated in the CPC Constitution, noting that the whole process was clear, predictable and reflected the progress of democracy in CPC. The new CPC Central Committee and Disciplinary Committee consists of 506 members, all of whom are elected through lengthy procedures that include democratic selection, assessment by organisational department, nomination by political bureau and deliberations among delegates to the 18th National Congress. The selection of party officials has become more transparent whilst government agencies publicise their budget and expenditure in a practice that is increasingly widespread across the country.

Ambassador Liu also addressed questions on how the CPC has maintained its vigour and vitality – despite being 91 years old, why the CPC has enjoyed continuous support of the Chinese people, why the CPC has been able to keep abreast with time and where the CPC's confidence in its chosen socialist path with Chinese characteristics stems from.

High on the 18th CPC National Congress's agenda, China vows to move forward with political reform and commits to broaden and promote people's democracy – a Chinese style democracy adapted to Chinese realities aimed at fulfilling the Chinese nation's dream for democracy. In a brief speech that mentioned the word 'democracy' 18 times, Ambassador Liu acknowledged the fact that China, despite being the world's largest developing country with a vast land area, huge population and multiple ethnic groups, has weak economic foundations and unbalanced development across rural and urban areas. In order to address these uniquely Chinese challenges, there must be Chinese solutions or Chinese style democracy.

One of the key outcomes of the 18th National Congress is the report delivered by outgoing General Secretary Hu Jintao. The report is a political manifesto and action guideline of the CPC that offers insight to China's plan and ambition for the coming decade. Moreover, the report took over one year to complete and is the culmination of a lengthy drafting procedure that espouses principles of democracy by soliciting input from non-CPC members and dozens of intuitions. The report set the target of not only doubling GDP, but per capita income level by 2020 on the basis of the 2010 level. This is the first time the CPC has issued a clear guideline for the growth of individual income. The report also highlighted China's ambition to build a fair society – a society guaranteed by fair rights, opportunities and rules where all Chinese people have equal right to participation and development.

As China marches forward with modernisation, it puts equal emphasis on economic, political, cultural, social and ecological development. Among these five aspects, preserving the environment was newly incorporated at the 18th Congress. It highlights China's ambition to not only build a rich, strong and democratic nation, but a desire to leave a beautiful and environmentally sustainable country for future generations to come.

The 18th CPC National Congress reiterated that China would stick to the socialist path with Chinese characteristics, the socialist theory with Chinese characteristics and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. Every country is uniquely shaped by its history, culture and natural condition, which in turn shape its development path. China respects the choices of different nations and appreciates the richness brought by diversity; in light of this, Ambassador Liu shared an ancient Chinese saying that goes: 'Oranges grown on the south of River Huai taste sweet, while on the north sour.'

It means the same fruit may have completely different tastes in different environments. In today's world if we copy other countries' model I am afraid it would be a case of oranges grown on the north of River Huai.

In a speech that drew inspiration from the Gettysburg Address, Ambassador Liu stressed the importance of fulfilling the Chinese people's expectation for a better life by "achieving development of the people, for the people and by the people". The year 2013 will be a major milestone for China with a new leadership taking up their responsibilities.

When asked about the Chinese leadership's views on the outcome of the American election and its impact on global affairs, Ambassador Liu responded with a smile and said "the Chinese welcome President Obama to play a positive role", which drew laughter and cheers from the audience.

In response to the question "Is the Chinese leadership more concerned about the current instability in the European Union or the United States?" Ambassador Liu remarked that the United States remains China's single largest trading partner; on the other hand, the European Union as a group of countries is the largest trading bloc with China. The 18th National Congress sent out a clear message that China seeks to develop friendly cooperation with all countries on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence.

In his short tenure as the Chinese Ambassador in London, Ambassador Liu has made over 250 appearances at various events from corporate and political gatherings to universities and high schools to help strengthen and promote Sino-UK relationships. "So far, I have not been invited to any kindergartens yet" he added, which drew a standing ovation from the audience.

H.E. Liu Xiaoming is a Chinese Diplomat and the current Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He previously served as Chinese ambassador in Cairo, Egypt between 2001 and 2003 and in Pyongyang, North Korea from 2006 to 2010. Ambassador Liu graduated from Dalian University of Foreign Languages with a major in English and undertook further studies in the USA, obtaining a Master's degree in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Foreign Affairs at Tufts University in 1983.

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VISITING DALMORE AND THE NOVAR ESTATE

Visiting Dalmore

The Dalmore distillery is idyllically situated in the Scottish Highlands, on the banks of the river Alness. If you visit it, as we did, from London, you would take a half hour or so drive from Inverness airport and marvel at the breathtaking scenery along the way. Forests alternate with lakes, the odd seal is languidly spread atop a rock, and the majestic landscape is quite undisturbed by human intervention as far as the eye can see.

The Dalmore is at the doorstep of the Novar Estate, a 20 000 acre property owned for centuries and to this day by the Munro-Ferguson family. Visitors are often entertained at the Ardtalla, a relatively recent conversion of a stable block that combines the charm of an old house with the comforts of a 5 star hotel.

Every room is different at the Ardtalla but all are spacious, with large sink-in beds and fantastic views across the meadows and towards the forests. The central hall consists of several large entertaining rooms, including a cosy sitting room with a wood burning fireplace and a games room on the upper floor.

Our visit began, appropriately enough, with a welcoming dram of the King Alexander III whisky in the reception room of the distillery itself. Lunch was a delicious venison stew and baked vegetables, followed by a pistachio and raspberry pie, washed down with a robust Bordeaux.

We were introduced to the distillery by degrees, in the order in which the whisky is made, preceded by a brief history of Dalmore and the Mackenzie

Clan who owned the distillery until it was acquired by Whyte&McKay. The distinctive stag head on the Dalmore whisky bottles refers to the story of how the Scottish King Alexander was saved from a stag by an ancestor of Clan Mackenzie (family motto is "I Shine")

The limited Alexander III release refers to the same story. The Mackenzies live to this day in one of the few owner-occupied Scottish castles, Castle Leod, a few minute drive from Dalmore. Dalmore takes great pride in the quasi-artisanal production of its whiskies. For the uninitiated, whisky is produced from malted barley, yeast and water – in this case, Highlands water from the Alness river.

The fermentation takes place in large vats and the wash makes its way to the distillery room which is something to behold: vast copper stills, each one different from the other, distil and condense the precious liquid until it is carefully adjusted for strength.

The Dalmore is unique in its maturing process that also gives it its unique character. The raw spirit spends varying number of years in six different casks, depending on the finish required. Wooden casks from Marsala, Madeira, Bourbon, Cabernet Sauvignon, Port and Sherry Oloroso are used for maturing the whisky, each infusing it with subtle but detectable scents and flavours of caramel, coffee, chocolate, citrus, red fruit. The preponderance of this or that depends on the length of time the whisky has aged in a particular cask. The matured alcohol varies in strength too, ranging from 40 to 48 degrees. From robust to mellow, each vintage has its own character and complexity, with some of them reminiscent of cognac in their sweetness.

