

No such thing as a 'Chinese model'¹

After 115 cardinals elected a new pontiff on St Peter's throne, White Smoke billowed from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel in Rome.

The same morning, although a new Emperor had just been selected in the Middle Kingdom, nobody could see the White Smoke over the Great Hall of People from Tiananmen Square. It was probably due to the heavy pollution in the Chinese capital, but Xi Jinping had succeeded Hu Jintao as China's new 'core' leader.

A couple of days earlier, Yu Zhengsheng, a member of the Politburo's Standing Committee had been unanimously 'elected' chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

A Chinese website explained: "the CPPCC is a patriotic united front organization of the Chinese people, serving as a key mechanism for multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and a major symbol of socialist democracy."

Though it sounds good, it is not clear to me what this 'socialist democracy' is. Yu Zhengsheng, in his inaugural address, told the delegates that China will follow its own path and shun 'extremist' ideas of change based on foreign models (i.e democracy).

Yu Zhengsheng advised his colleagues to reject "impetuosity and extremist attitudes that lose contact with national conditions, we need to more strictly follow the socialist path of political development with Chinese characteristics. We will not copy models in Western political systems under any circumstances."

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Like Yu, most Chinese leaders speak of a Chinese Model of governance.

In an article in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Eric Li, a Shanghai venture capitalist and 'political scientist' explained about the great 'meritocracy' prevalent in China.

He wrote: "A person with Barack Obama's pre-presidential professional experience would not even be the manager of a small county in China's system," adding about Xi Jinping: "By the time he made it to the top, Xi had already managed areas with total populations of over 150 million and combined GDPs of more than US\$1.5 trillion."

Li believes: "China will continue to rise, not fade. The country's leaders will consolidate the one party model and, in the process, challenge the West's conventional wisdom about political development and the inevitable march towards electoral democracy."

But what is the Chinese model?

At first sight, it does look much worse than any other 'system', particularly democracy. An agency report mentioned: "China's single legislative, the National People's Congress (NPC), is almost the wealthiest in the world with 83 billionaires counted among its delegates. ...The China-based *Hurun Global Rich List* has identified 31 people having more than one billion dollars in personal assets, among the listed billionaire delegates to the Parliament. ...The Hurun list identifies the remaining 52 billionaires as delegates to the CPPCC. According to the list, the average fortune among the 83 billionaire delegates is 3.35 billion dollars."

Knowing that an ordinary Chinese worker earns less than 7,000 dollars as average annual wage, is this a model?

Yu Zhengsheng said that the Chinese should shed 'impetuousness and extremist attitudes', is it the reason why 300 million Internet users are censored? And what about the 100 million daily messages on Weibo, the Chinese Twitter, which disappear from the cyberspace and do not reach their destination?

A new study by the University of New Mexico discovered that it takes censors between 5 to 10 minutes to take down a post. For example, a banned keyword triggers an automated system, which keeps the message from displaying publicly, and then it vanishes from the Chinese netizens screens.

During the last few weeks, the Americans have been complaining that the People's Liberation army was hacking their systems. It was mostly ignored in India, where 'common men' are more interested by the latest scams involving the government. One can understand.

But now it appears that India has also been the victim of a large security breach. Hundreds of systems, from DRDO to the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), have been breached and thousands of sensitive files have leaked ... to China.

Early this month, India's technical intelligence wing, National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) apparently cracked open a file called 'army cyber policy'. Soon Indian security experts tracked the origin of the attack in the Guangdong province of China.

Thousands of top secret CCS files and documents related to surface-to-air missile and radar programmes from defence research & development lab would have gone to China.

President Xi Jinping likes to talk of the "ultimate great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation"; adding that this is "the Chinese nation's greatest dream in modern history". But who trusts the Government in China today?

The only hope is the Chinese people themselves; thousands demonstrated when, on New Year's Day, an editorial in the *Southern Weekly* was censored; the powers-that-be had to finally back down.

One can only hope that the new Chinese President realizes that a model of governance cannot be based on rogue and corrupt practices against its own people or its neighbours. A tough task ahead!

The day China will have a truly democratic and transparent system, White Smoke will surely appear on Tiananmen Square.