

Political change in China is 'almost inevitable' but Beijing has 'nothing to fear': Anson Chan

Asian pro-democracy advocate Anson Chan says China has 'nothing to fear' in allowing Hong Kong full democracy.

China's Communist leadership has signalled the Special Administrative Region can elect its chief executive in 2017 and all members of the legislature three years later.

Chan, a former chief secretary of Hong Kong who successfully ran for election to the territory's legislature, says there's an 'increasing trust' of Beijing in Hong Kong.



"I think the Central Government should be pretty relaxed and regard the implementation of the development of representative government in Hong Kong as a showcase, a testing ground for how democracy might be introduced in stages within mainland China as a whole," she told INSEAD Knowledge in

an interview on the sidelines of the Leadership Summit Asia 2008.

Chan says she's confident Beijing will keep its promises regarding the pace of democracy in the former British colony but adds the challenge is going to be "how we define what is meant by universal suffrage."

For Chan, democracy means much more than a 'one person, one vote' electoral system. It involves making government responsible and accountable, "being open and transparent (and) allowing maximum participation by the public."

While she says she has no political ambitions, other than to 'mentor' the next generation of leaders, she plans to continue to speak out on the issue of constitutional development in the years ahead. Another key issue will be that of good governance, a topic she cares 'passionately' about.

"No economy can continue to grow at the pace the Chinese econ has grown in the several decades since (Deng Xiao Ping's) open-door policy and there is a real prospect that growth might slow down. I think in the light of that, there is perhaps an added urgency to putting in place some of the institutions of civil society."

Visit **INSEAD Knowledge**
<http://knowledge.insead.edu>

Among the most important, are the rule of law, an independent judiciary and a “more vigorous and freer press.”

“I think it’s almost an inevitable process of economic liberalisation (in China) that there will be a degree of political liberalisation. Not at the pace that you and I might wish to see but nevertheless I think the Central Government (in Beijing) will continue to take small steps forward on the political side.”

Corruption will also need to be tackled. Chan says China’s government is ‘alert’ to the situation but, again, it’s a question of whether Beijing is ready to bring in the necessary “institutional underpinnings to really deal effectively with endemic corruption.”

Hong Kong, which cleaned up its act through the introduction of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in the 1970s, could provide a model for the mainland, as could Singapore, even though there is clearly a difference of scale.

“There is increasing collaboration and co-operation (between Hong Kong and Beijing) on dealing with corruption. They are very interested in and they know how the ICAC was established in Hong Kong, why it was necessary, what are the powers that an effective ICAC needs to have. But there needs to be a very strong political will because there will be a great deal of vested interests involved.”

Corruption, she says, has become ‘so much a part of the mindset’ in China.



“One can appreciate that in the days when everything was in scarce supply, to even get a light bulb you had to pay somebody under the table to get a light bulb, so when demand far outstrips supply you can understand how in that sort of environment corruption takes root, but I think the country as a whole is now at the stage of development where there has to be some serious attempt made to deal with corruption and I believe the leadership is alert to this.”

Chan, who says she has no plans to run for the post of chief executive as she would be in her early 70s by then, says she remains optimistic about China’s future. “If you look at the current generation, the

next generation of leaders, the technocrats, the people who are party secretaries and leaders in the provinces, a lot of people comment on how impressive they are.”

“I think also it’s an inevitable process of the country opening up, the fact that more Chinese are being educated overseas, they can see for themselves the advantages of democracy as well as some disadvantages. Nobody pretends that democracy is a panacea for all ills.”

Anson Chan was the keynote speaker at the INSEAD Leadership Summit Asia 2008 held at the school’s Asia campus in Singapore.

Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/economics-politics/political-change-in-china-is-almost-inevitable-but-beijing-has-nothing-to-fear-anson-chan-1790>

Download the Knowledge app for free



Visit **INSEAD Knowledge**
<http://knowledge.insead.edu>