

## How China sees itself, Asia and the world

By Farish Noor

**XI's VISION:** *China's development model recognises that a country as large as China cannot progress unless and until its population is well-housed, well-fed and well-educated*

CHINA's ascendancy in world affairs is an undeniable fact as is its increasingly visible role outside the country itself. The creation of the Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank (AIIB) is its latest venture and it is clear that China wishes to play a key role in the development of the communicative and logistical architecture across Asia, too. Yet some of us may wonder about how China sees itself and its role in the rest of Asia, and what sort of future it envisages for itself.

To that end, the speeches of its leader, Xi Jinping, compiled in the latest work *The Governance of China* (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2014) is instructive in many ways.

*The Governance of China* is a compilation of nearly 80 speeches by Xi himself, president of China, and general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) from 2012 until now. What makes this work doubly relevant and important is its timeliness — all of the speeches are relatively recent, with many of them from 2014 — and the fact that they address audiences closer to home. Though the collection includes addresses that were made abroad, in places like Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe, many of them are, in fact, speeches that were delivered to the public in China and to members of the CPC. In this sense, they offer us an “insider's glimpse” into the workings of the CPC and the machinery of the Chinese state.

Xi came to power after nearly four decades of reform, that were initiated by Deng Xiaoping at the 11th Congress of the CPC in 1978. Since then, the old image of China as a Communist state that was exporting revolutionary Communism abroad has been discarded and replaced by the new model of scientific, development-oriented socialism tempered by Chinese values and cultural identity, leading to the hybrid model that distinguishes the China of today. This has created a country whose vast population of almost 1½ billion, and which spans an area of 9.6 million sq km is poised on the verge of economic take-off, and which seeks to create a prosperous and developed society by the year 2021.

Xi's speeches demonstrate the pragmatism and realism that is at the heart of the Chinese development model, which recognises that a country as large as China cannot progress unless and until its population is well-housed, well-fed and well-educated.

Again and again, in his speeches to his fellow citizens and party members, he emphasises the need for realism, pragmatism, innovation and the absolute necessity for national resilience and preparedness for whatever political contingencies may arise caused by internal and external variable factors.

To that end, Asia looms large in his speeches, for Xi recognises China's need for allies, partners and friends in the Asian domain. It is here that he outlines, in broad strokes, the vision of the future, where China will play a key role in its development as well as the development of its neighbours, for there is the often stated view that China can only succeed in an Asia that is stable, peaceful and prosperous.

Here, too, we find his view of Asia as the broader canvas upon which China's success story will be painted: His speeches reiterate themes from Asia's past, including the terrestrial and maritime Silk roads, and the need for Asia to build a connective logistical network that integrates the various

countries and nations of Asia together, repairing a historical break that came with colonialism in the past.



*China aims to play a key role in its own development and that of its neighbours for it can only succeed in an Asia that is stable and prosperous*

The other distinguishing feature of this work is that it defines Asia in self-referential terms without the West as its constitutive Other. Apart from one speech that specifically talks about China-American relations, the West is curiously absent from his speeches, with the exception of the regular mention of the “century of humiliation” that China suffered at the hands of Britain as a result of the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60). The impression that the reader is left with is that of an Asia that is in the process of self-determination and self-definition, on terms of its own without the need of an external referent or dialectical Other.

All in all, the publication of Xi’s speeches in this collected work is timely. To say that this is an important book would be a case of understatement: it is a vital and essential work that ought to be obligatory reading for statesmen, policy-makers, technocrats, economists and strategists, who wish to understand how China sees itself, Asia and the rest of the world, and gives us a glimpse into the future to come.

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