

Yu Keping and Chinese Intellectual Discourse on Good Governance

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Abstract

By reviewing the ideas of Yu Keping, one of the most prominent Chinese theorists on Chinese-style democracy and a key contributor to Chinese intellectual discourse on good governance, this article has two objectives: to fill a research gap in China studies by examining influential discourse during the past decade; and to shed light on Yu's controversial conception of Chinese-style democracy, which is intertwined with his views on good governance. We find that the discourse revolves around the call to "move China towards good governance." First, the ultimate objective of China's political reform is to move towards good governance, and not towards what Western social scientists call "democracy." Second, "good government" and civil society are two keys for achieving good governance, which demonstrates that Yu's basic orientation is liberal. Third, governance reform, constituting a major component of China's political reform, has achieved much progress.

Keywords: Yu Keping; Chinese intellectual discourse; good governance; democracy; governance reform

A brief survey of the Chinese-language literature since the late 1990s indicates that the notion of good governance (*shanzhi* 善治) is now widely used in China. When *shanzhi* was used as a keyword or as an article title in a search of papers in the China Academic Journal Network Publishing Database (*Zhongguo zhiwang* 中国知网), we found 804 and 607 articles, respectively, all of which were published in the past decade.¹ The *shanzhi* discourse covers wide-ranging themes, including China's civil society, administrative reform, social management reform, grassroots-level governance in rural and urban areas, and anti-corruption measures. This discourse has been extended not only to China's practitioner community, as manifested in the widely-acclaimed programme on "Innovations and Excellence in Chinese Local Governance" (IECLG hereafter),

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1 As of 23 January 2013. Owing to space constraints, when non-Yu Keping Chinese scholars are only briefly mentioned, we will not cite their publications.

but also to the official lexicon.² It is not unusual for officials at the ministerial/provincial levels and below to cite the term and air their views on *shanzhi*.³

Such a vibrant intellectual discourse, however, remains under-researched in Western scholarship. Opportunities to examine how this discourse may shed light on intellectual and political developments since the late 1990s have thus been lost. This article aims to start filling the gap by reviewing the views of Yu Keping 俞可平, a key contributor to that discourse, and other representative scholars wherever necessary. Yu, deputy director since 2001 of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (*Zhonggong zhongyang bianyi ju* 中共中央编译局) (CCTB hereafter), an important think tank under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), not only introduces relevant international theories to China but also applies them to his analyses of Chinese politics; these analyses are shaping the Chinese view of good governance. Yu has developed his own intellectual network. At its core is the CCTB's China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics, the most influential institute devoted to research on local government innovation and the promotion of good governance in China. Several of Yu's CCTB associates, for example, He Zengke 何增科, Yang Xuedong 杨雪冬 and Zhou Hongyun 周红云, have emerged as major players in the good governance discourse. Other participants include affiliated scholars at research centres on Chinese government innovations at ten universities,⁴ as well as other like-minded scholars throughout the country. Owing to the consistent efforts of Yu and his colleagues, discussions about good governance have assumed a major position in Chinese academia.

An examination of Yu Keping's good governance discourse will also shed much needed light on his conception of Chinese-style democracy, which is intertwined with his views on good governance. Along with several others, Yu is "the most watched Chinese theorist on the Chinese style of democracy."⁵ However, Yu's notions of democracy, as succinctly expressed in his famous 2006 article, "Democracy is a good thing," have elicited controversy.⁶ For example, when exploring how Chinese intellectuals and political elites think about China's political trajectory, Andrew Nathan does not consider Yu as a liberal thinker. For

2 See, for example, *People's Daily*. 2011. "Zai liangxing hudong zhong xunqiu 'shanzhi'" (Seeking "good governance" during the process of positive mutual exchanges), 3 June, <http://leaders.people.com.cn/GB/14813198.html>. Accessed 24 May 2013.

3 According to our discussions with a professor who teaches at an elite Beijing university's top-ranking public administration school, a course on "good governance" has been taught at this school's in-service training programme for bureau-level (*siju ji*) officials organized by the Central Organization Department since 2010, and for bureau-level (*dishi ji*) officials in non-central party-state agencies (e.g. Beijing and Wuhan) since 2008. As of June 2013, this course had been taught in 16 classes (involving over 1,000 cadres). The teaching content is technical and non-political, i.e. emphasizing the importance of NGOs and citizen participation in dealing with social issues. Discussions with a Beijing-based professor, Shanghai, June 2013.

4 For a list of such centres, see Chinainnovations.org. 2014. "The network of government innovation research centers," <http://www.chinainnovations.org/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=78>. Accessed 20 March 2014.

5 Leonard 2008, 141.

6 Yu 2009a, 3–5.

Nathan, the ideas Yu expresses in his “Democracy is a good thing” article are nothing new in CCP history.⁷ In contrast, Cheng Li holds that Yu stands in the liberal wing of the political establishment, that his attempt to offer a road map for China’s democratic future is his most important contribution, and the associated views are “intriguing and thoughtful.”⁸ There is also confusion: as one China scholar nicely wrote, “what is he really arguing for? ... Does he want to promote what we in the West understand as democracy, or not? Is he using a sophisticated form of vagueness to sneak truly democratic ideas into the Party discourse, or using sophisticated vagueness to buy tolerance for the authoritarian enterprise among liberals and pro-democrats?”⁹

Much of the confusion stems from Yu’s use of the word “democracy.” In propagating the view that democracy embodies a set of universal political values, Yu argues that it is incorrect to assert that China, as a socialist country, should not embrace democracy. But, Yu’s Chinese-style democracy does not include the *essential* element of what most in the West call democracy, that is, *selecting top power holders through competitive elections*. Following the Schumpeterian definition of democracy,¹⁰ this article does not consider Yu’s Chinese-style democracy a “real democracy.”¹¹ To promote conceptual clarity, with the exception of references to Chinese-style democracy and socialist democracy, we will not use the “d” word to describe Yu’s political views.

To help explain why Yu’s writings appear vague and confusing, we will look for insights in the political sociology of intellectuals to reveal Yu’s personal character, which the next section will discuss in detail. This article will also join the literature on “the man and his ideas” that focuses on the “ideas” of a few prominent Chinese intellectuals to illuminate larger political issues. This scholarship was prevalent during the Mao Zedong era but has been marginalized since the late 1970s.¹² Moreover, such scholarly inquiries have been dominated by historians.¹³ Nevertheless, in studies of Chinese politics, there has been a small but growing literature based on the assumption that “ideas matter.”¹⁴

This article reveals that the good governance discourse revolves around the call to “move China towards good governance,” a discourse which consists of three major arguments. First, the ultimate objective of China’s political reform is to move towards good governance, which comprises the ten elements of legitimacy, transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness, effectiveness, civic

7 Nathan 2008, 29–30.

8 Li 2009, xxxi.

9 Feedback from an anonymous *China Quarterly* reviewer.

10 Huntington 1991, 5–13; Diamond 1999, 7–10.

11 Cf. Li 2008, 4; Nathan 2008, 26–27.

12 For an excellent review, see Lee and Goldman 2002, 1–4.

13 For representative works, see Hamrin and Cheek 1986; Goldman 1994; Goldman and Lee 2002; Gu and Goldman 2004; Cheek 2006; Goldman 2009. A number of scholars of Chinese literature, culture and society also touch on this subject. See Hao 2003; Davies 2007; Leonard 2008.

14 Representative works include Chen 1997; Misra 2003; Wang 2006; Lynch 2007; Nathan 2008; Fewsmith 2008; Gilley and Holbig 2009.

participation, stability, cleanness, and justice. Second, “good government” and civil society are two keys for achieving good governance. Yu has articulated the importance of government innovation as part of the development of good governance, and has promoted in particular local-level innovations as part of efforts to seek realistic approaches to Chinese-style democracy. Meanwhile, to promote the growth of Chinese civil society, Yu has worked to correct government misconceptions on the allegedly negative roles of civil society. Third, political reform in post-Mao China, which in the terminology of this discourse is called “governance reform” (*zhili gaige* 治理改革) and is mainly about “government innovations” (*zhengfu chuangxin* 政府创新), has been as successful as the Chinese economic reform. Much progress has been made in terms of the ten elements of good governance mentioned above. Therefore, China has already embarked on the road to good governance. Nevertheless, there still exist serious obstacles and the road ahead remains difficult.

Because Yu’s good governance discussions have never embraced the *essential* element of democracy, the ultimate objective of political reform Yu advocates is not about moving China towards what Western social scientists call democracy. Nevertheless, Yu remains liberal in his basic orientation: he has repeatedly emphasized the importance of rule of law, civil society, and citizens’ civil and political rights for China’s political development. In particular, Yu has been actively promoting local government innovations and the growth of civil society.

Three data sources have been used for this research: all available academic and journalistic articles discussing good governance appearing in *Zhongguo zhiwang*, along with the relevant academic books, written by Yu and other Chinese scholars (including a small number of journalists and government officials); online debates (mostly criticisms) of Yu from the domestic “old left” and Western-based “right” (i.e. Chinese intellectuals in exile); and an interview and many discussions with Yu’s CCTB associates,¹⁵ as well as with other Chinese scholars.

Understanding Yu Keping: Insights from the Scholarship on Intellectuals and Politics

Tensions between intellectuals and political elites have always existed. Pierre Bourdieu maintains that intellectuals “are a dominated fraction of the dominant class.” Namely, intellectuals are dominant because of their cultural capital but concurrently they “are dominated in their relations with those who hold political and economic power.” This contradictory position leads to intellectuals’ dual personalities and ambivalence towards establishment authorities.¹⁶ Nevertheless, as Jerome Karabel puts it, “Given the considerable benefits of compliance and the

15 Interview with Yu’s CCTB associates, Beijing, October 2011.

16 Bourdieu 1990, 145; see also Karabel 1996, 208–210.

high costs of opposition, it is hardly surprising that most intellectuals ... will reach an accommodation with the powers-that-be.”¹⁷

In a major politico-sociological study of Chinese intellectuals, Zhidong Hao argues that there are “conflicts over values, knowledge, and authority in decision making” between intellectuals and political elites.¹⁸ Notably, conflicts over values – i.e. political control and regime survival for CCP leaders versus democracy and human rights for PRC establishment intellectuals – have been the primary factor leading to intellectuals’ dual personalities. Although many withdraw from politics to pursue scholarship (for example, Chen Yinke 陈寅恪), or become dissident intellectuals (for example, Liu Binyan 刘宾雁), the majority of establishment intellectuals choose to compromise their academic integrity and conform to the Party line (for example, Sun Yefang 孙冶方).¹⁹ “A dual personality, if not a split personality, was inevitable.”²⁰

Yu Keping is no exception. Yu holds a high-ranking position (the deputy director of the CCTB), which effectively makes him an establishment intellectual. This fundamentally determines his political stance of remaining loyal to the Party.²¹ His intellectual behaviour is profoundly affected by the Marxist-Leninist discipline demanding obedience to Party regulations. Yu regularly writes short articles to justify Party policies. On these occasions, Yu relies on Party vocabulary, and if the issue of socialist democracy is concerned, Yu strictly follows official expressions. But, more often, Yu’s publications are academic. In many of these works, Yu employs the “art of oblique criticism”²² to voice his dissatisfaction over the slow pace of political reform, and uses “roundabout ways”²³ to express his innovative and bold political ideas. Besides citing top leaders’ words and Party documents, Yu generally chooses non-politically sensitive vocabulary and relies on influential Western theories.

Yu is deeply influenced by the Confucian literati tradition, and his personality is also characteristic of the Red Guard generation of intellectuals.²⁴ Regarding himself as the conscience of society, Yu has a strong sense of responsibility and social justice. For example, “to advance socio-political progress through academia,” Yu launched the IECLG programme, using the CCTB’s own research funds to run the programme.²⁵ As an “experienced and skillful” intellectual, having what Juntao Wang calls “the innovative capability” that is commonly possessed by the Red Guard generation intellectuals,²⁶ Yu has managed to carve

17 Karabel 1996, 220.

18 Hao 2003, 66.

19 Ibid., 61–68. Also see the chapters on PRC establishment intellectuals in Hamrin and Cheek 1986.

20 Hao 2003, 64.

21 Establishment intellectuals are those members of the intellectual elite “who held key posts or monopolized resources” (Gu and Goldman 2004, 7), and as “a subgroup within the ruling elite, they had a deep interest in perpetuating the system” (Cheek and Hamrin 1986, 3).

22 Cf. Davies 2007, 42.

23 Cf. Hao 2003, 136.

24 Wang 2006, 171–72. For a detailed discussion of Yu’s personal experience, see Li 2009, xxii–xxvii.

25 Yu 2006, 171.

26 Wang 2006, 136, 172.

out a limited public space in which to discuss good governance. The working mechanisms²⁷ Yu employs include publishing academic articles and short journalistic articles, delivering speeches and talks at academic meetings, organizing workshops and conferences, undertaking government research projects, creating a special journal entitled *China Governance Review*, and implementing the IECLG programme.

Good Governance: Yu Keping's 1999 Interpretation and Adaptations

Before turning to Yu Keping's works, it is necessary to discuss briefly how good governance is understood in international academic and practitioner circles, about which there exists a huge literature. For the purpose of this article, we sketch only what is relevant to our topic.

Traditionally, governance was a synonym for government. Beginning from the early 1980s and in response to the incapacity of traditional public administration and the welfare state to solve problems in providing public services, governance reform took place in the West.²⁸ Since then, "governance refers to the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred. The essence of governance is its focus on governing mechanisms which do not rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government."²⁹ This new understanding has been incorporated into the New Public Management (NPM) movement in the West. Its dominant objective is to cut costs by modifying Weberian bureaucracy.³⁰

The notion and agenda of good governance first emerged at the end of the Cold War.³¹ The first international development organization (IDO) to raise the notion was the World Bank in its 1989 report on Africa. "Good governance included some or all of the following features: an efficient public service; an independent judicial system and legal framework to enforce contracts; the accountable administration of public funds; an independent public auditor, responsible to a representative legislature; respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government; a pluralistic institutional structure, and a free press."³² In short, "'good governance' marries the new public management to the advocacy of liberal democracy."³³

When IDOs provided loans to developing and transitional countries facing financial crises, the recipient countries were required to meet strict conditionalities of good governance. It was hoped that carrot-like conditionalities would

27 "Working mechanisms" refers to the means through which intellectuals intertwine with elite politics and influence other aspects of politics (Wang 2006, 90; Goldman 2002, 501).

28 Kettl 2000.

29 Stoker 1998, 17.

30 See, e.g., Kettl 2000, 2002; McLaughlin, Osborne and Ferlie 2002.

31 Doornbos 2004, 373; World Bank 1992, 4–5.

32 Leftwich 1993, 610.

33 Rhodes 1997, 50. There are differences of opinion regarding the meaning of good governance. See Weiss 2000; Doornbos 2004; Nanda 2006; van Doeveren 2011.

result in the “dismantling of ‘over-developed’ state structures in the Third World and former Soviet bloc countries” and the building of multiparty democratization.³⁴ However, most IDO efforts failed. Among the many reasons, the lack of state-building is particularly noteworthy. Because many recipient countries do not possess even a rudimentary modern state infrastructure, the central concern of the good governance agenda shifted to how to build (rather than to cut back) the Weberian bureaucracy. This new orientation, to a large extent, was adopted by the donor community after the mid-1990s.³⁵

In sum, the IDO good governance agenda required that developing countries implement measures of an administrative-technical dimension, which focused on carrying out NPM-style policies in the early 1990s and building a modern public administration after the mid-1990s. The political-constitutive dimension focused on imposing a Western-style democracy on non-Western soil.

Against the backdrop of this international discourse, Yu Keping’s 1999 “Introduction to governance and good governance” was the first influential article on the topic published in China. After reviewing Western definitions, Yu states that “governance basically refers to the using of authority to maintain order and to meet public demands within given confines.”³⁶ “Governance” differs from “government” in that, in the former, governing mechanisms rely on the authority of both state and non-state sources rather than solely on the state. Furthermore, in addition to the traditional top-down and coercive modes of governing, other modes such as collaboration, negotiation, social networking and consensus-building can also be employed.³⁷ The direct reason why the IDOs have tended to use the notion of governance over that of government since the 1980s is that the IDOs have advocated a reliance on the mechanisms of governance to address those failures resulting from solely resorting to market methods or government planning and commands.³⁸

Yu notes that although mechanisms of governance can fix some of the problems brought about by “market failures” and “government failures,” there also exist “governance failures” as well as other problems. The following question thus emerges: how do we overcome governance failures? Among the theories proposed in response to this question, “the theory of ‘good governance’ is the most influential,” states Yu.³⁹ For Yu, “good governance is the process of social management aiming to maximize the interests of the public. Its defining feature is that it is the cooperative management of public life between the state and citizens, a new relationship between the state and civil society, as well as the ideal situation between the two.”⁴⁰ Good governance comprises the six basic elements of

34 Doornbos 2004, 380–81.

35 Fukuyama 2004, 1–42.

36 Yu 1999, 38.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 39.

40 Ibid.

Table 1: **The Ten Elements of Good Governance**

Element	Yu Keping's elaboration
Legitimacy	A situation whereby social order and public authority are respected and voluntarily followed by the citizenry.
Transparency	Information is accessible to all citizens.
Accountability	Governmental and non-governmental organizations are accountable to the public or to those whose interests may be affected by their decisions.
Rule of law	The belief that the law is the highest authority in public and political management, everyone is equal before the law, and enforcement of law should be impartial.
Responsiveness	Government officials and organizations must respond to citizen requests in a timely and responsible manner.
Effectiveness or efficiency	Management efficiency that makes the best use of resources for public interests.
Participation	Political participation by citizens in social and political life, and not only political participation but also civic participation in other areas of social life.
Stability	Peace, order, safety, solidarity, cohesive public policy, and so on.
Cleanness or integrity	Government officials and other institutional decision makers obey the law, are clean and honest, do not abuse their power for their personal gains or seek rent through their power.
Justice or fairness	Equality with regard to political rights and economic rights for citizens of different genders, classes, races, educational qualifications, religious and political beliefs.

Sources:

Yu 1999, 39–40; Yu 2002, 23–24; Yu 2011, 17–18.

Note:

With the exception of legitimacy and responsiveness, Yu's elaborations on the other eight elements are from Yu 2011, 17–18.

legitimacy, transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness, and effectiveness,⁴¹ to which four others were added by Yu in 2002, namely, civic participation, stability, cleanness and justice.⁴² Yu's elaboration on the ten elements is summarized in [Table 1](#).

These understandings are largely in line with international literature. Nevertheless, Yu's work reveals an explicit attempt to adapt the good governance discussion to the Chinese context. First, Yu argues that good governance means returning power to society from the state, i.e. the scaling back of state interventions while encouraging a larger role for civil society in social problem-solving. For him, "without a sound and developed civil society, there will be no real good governance."⁴³ Furthermore, the key to the successful cooperative management of public life is providing the citizenry with the necessary means and sufficient rights of participation, which occur only in democratic regimes. With these

41 *Ibid.*, 39–40.

42 Yu 2002.

43 Yu 1999, 40.

views in mind, during the following decade Yu consistently promoted the growth of Chinese civil society.

Second, Yu has coined the term “good government,” which in his opinion was an ideal political system model until the 1990s, when good governance began to emerge as a new ideal. Elements of good government include “a good legal system, clean and honest officials, high administrative efficiency, and good administrative services.”⁴⁴ In 2004, Yu developed these views further, adding that good government is the key to achieving good governance.⁴⁵ This was especially the case in China. Third, in 2000, Yu stated that against the backdrop of the current globalization era, good governance is the ideal political model for countries throughout the world. He further noted that, going beyond good government, the Chinese government should move towards good governance.⁴⁶ Since then, this call has been repeatedly revisited and refined by Yu and other like-minded scholars.

A certain level of vagueness exists: what is the exact meaning of Yu’s concept of good governance? What political ideas does Yu’s good governance discourse advocate? Many of Yu’s initial views have been developed or even changed in the following years. We will answer these questions in the remainder of the article.

After his initial 1999 introduction to good governance, Yu extensively applied the term to his analyses of Chinese politics. Owing to Yu’s efforts, as well as support from the CCTB, Yu’s 1999 interpretation and its later development rapidly spread to Chinese academic and policy circles, and with only a few exceptions, it was generally accepted. Although a small number of Chinese scholars have raised doubts or critiques, Yu has never responded directly. However, by continuing to publish academic and journalistic articles, and through the IECLG programme, Yu simply overwhelmed the voices of criticism, with the result that they had little impact.

Encouraging the Growth of China’s Civil Society

For Yu Keping, active citizen participation is indispensable for good governance. But, only when citizens can form associations, or civil society organizations (CSOs) in Yu’s terminology, will their political participation be effective.⁴⁷ Therefore, much significance should be given to the growth of CSOs.

Yu writes that, “Since reform and opening up began in 1978, a relatively independent civil society has risen rapidly in China, where it has played an increasingly important role” in nearly all aspects of China’s transition.⁴⁸ Yu defines civil society as, “a public sphere outside the sphere of government and the market economy that comprises all kinds of civic organizations not affiliated with the

44 *Ibid.*, 39.

45 Yu 2004, 17.

46 Yu 2000, 23–24.

47 Yu 2008a, 156–57.

48 Yu 2009a, 78.

government or business.”⁴⁹ According to Yu, CSOs are unofficial, not-for-profit, voluntary, non-political and non-religious, and independent,⁵⁰ and to varying extents, China’s CSOs share these common features.⁵¹ Because the majority of CSOs have been established and led by the government, it is often the case that Chinese CSOs are not non-governmental, independent or confrontational. Moreover, as most Chinese CSOs only emerged after the 1980s, they are still transitional and immature.⁵²

Yu deftly summarizes the treatment China’s civil society has received as a mixture of “macro encouragement” and “micro restrictions.”⁵³ China’s constitution stipulates that Chinese people enjoy the freedom to form CSOs. In principle, this stipulation lays the legal foundation for Chinese civil society.⁵⁴ Furthermore, with the introduction and expansion of markets, with the retreat of government from society and the economy, and with citizens increasingly distancing themselves from politics, the macro environment has been conducive to the growth of CSOs.⁵⁵

In contrast, the micro environment has been negative or even hostile.⁵⁶ Government officials lack a correct understanding of Chinese CSOs – for example, they regard Chinese CSOs as appendages of the government or as Western imports, or they view them as dissident forces opposing the party-state.⁵⁷ As a result, government officials tend to be wary of CSOs and restrict their development. In addition, the Chinese legal and regulatory frameworks are not favourable: “there is no mother law for supervision of civil society organizations, only a random assortment of laws and regulations.”⁵⁸ Existing laws and regulations make the registration of CSOs difficult. All Chinese CSOs must accept the leadership of both the civil affairs department at their respective level, which is responsible for their approval and registration, and the government department in charge of their area of activity, which is responsible for daily oversight.⁵⁹ This regulatory system of dual leadership “results not only in conflicting policies and duplicate supervision but also in some civil organizations going unsupervised and having nowhere to turn for help.”⁶⁰

Over the past several years, the discourse has gradually shifted from general discussions on the positive impact of CSOs to a focus on specific CSO roles to help the government address social problems. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 17th CCP Congress in 2010 urged “strengthening and innovating in social

49 *Ibid.*, 38.

50 *Ibid.*, 41.

51 Yu 2008a, 162.

52 *Ibid.*, 162–68; Yu 2009a, 73–74.

53 Yu 2009a, 63.

54 *Ibid.*

55 Yu 2008a, 140–45.

56 Yu 2009a, 64.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*, 79–80.

59 *Ibid.*, 65.

60 *Ibid.*, 84.

management.” In response to the Party’s call for innovation in social management (*shehui guanli* 社会管理), Yu and his research team undertook a government project entitled, “An assessment system regarding China’s social management.”⁶¹

Yu’s team raised the notion of “social governance” (*shehui zhili* 社会治理), which consists of social management and social self-governing. The team wrote that “social management refers to the government’s regulating and managing of social affairs, social organizations, and social life,”⁶² and “social self-governing refers to self-management of the general populace over grassroots public affairs.”⁶³ The former is governmental while the latter is non-governmental, with CSOs as the principal players.⁶⁴ Yu’s team contended that social management and social self-governing are equally important. By arguing that both the government and CSOs are indispensable for relieving social conflicts and to maintain social stability, in actuality Yu was highlighting the unique role that CSOs can play.

“Good Government” and the IECLG Programme

Yu Keping is realistic about underscoring the role of government in advancing China’s political development. Good governance is the ideal political model in an era of globalization, “[b]ut under the current situation in China, it is firstly needed to realize good government in order to achieve good governance.”⁶⁵ To make the Chinese government “good government,” Yu initiated the IECLG programme in 2000 to encourage local government innovations.

In his 2004 article, “Good government: key to moving to good governance,” Yu outlines a set of requirements for good government and urges that the Chinese government reform along these lines. Yu argues that the specific content of good government will vary depending on the national context. In the case of China, good government should consist of the following eight elements: democracy, accountability, service, quality, efficiency, professionalism, transparency and cleanness.⁶⁶ Consequently, China must have a government that is democratic, accountable, service-oriented, high quality, efficient, professional, transparent and clean. After the publication of this article, many other Chinese scholars wrote about the ideal type of good government towards which the Chinese government should move.

What does good government mean? Confusion may emerge as its elements overlap with those of good governance (see [Table 1](#)). The IECLG programme

61 Yu et al. 2012, 2.

62 Ibid., 3.

63 Ibid., 4.

64 Ibid.

65 Yu 2006, 67.

66 Yu 2004, 17.

is indicative of Yu's concept of good government. So far, six rounds of the IECLG programme have been conducted, 1,913 local government innovation projects have applied, and 139 were awarded as the final winners.⁶⁷ The first category of awarded projects is of an administrative reform nature, including innovations that aim to: strengthen institution-building with respect to public services and improving the quality of provision of public services; simplify administrative investigations and approval procedures, and reduce government regulations; take action to help and protect the rights of disadvantaged social groups; widen the scope of social security provision and promote social justice; transform the structure and functions of government, promote "administration by law," and enhance governmental performance and strengthen governing capacity; resolve social conflicts and maintain social stability; perfect the management system of state-owned assets; reform the management system of urban communities; and spread the use of e-government.⁶⁸

The second category is mainly of a political reform nature, including innovations that aim to: improve rural governance mechanisms, especially village-level elections; gradually expand competitive elections (mostly at the township level); explore new forms of deliberative democracy and to democratize government decision making; publicize information about government affairs and make government more transparent; strengthen the monitoring of government power; expand the channels for orderly participation by citizens; and perfect the management system of CSOs and take advantage of the constructive role of civil society.⁶⁹

The first category of awarded projects focuses on how to make the government more efficient, competent, fair and service-oriented; the second focuses on how to promote an accountable and transparent government, as well as how to empower ordinary citizens and increase political participation. As will be discussed in detail in the final section of this article, although the latter type of innovation is political reform-oriented, the nature is merely consultative. Adopting participatory, consultative and deliberative practices so that citizens become involved in government policymaking and in the selection of village and township leaders does not weaken the final say of the Party.

Despite its limitations, the political agenda of Yu's IECLG programme is to find realistic breakthrough points for political reform from the bottom up. The choice of awarded projects is indicative of Yu's envisioned direction of future political development, and Yu often uses the projects as manifestations of China's political progress, which we will turn to next.

67 Chinainnovations.org. 2012. "The list of awarded projects of the sixth 'IECLG Program of China'," 8 January, <http://www.chinainnovations.org/Item/34883.aspx>. Accessed 9 August 2013.

68 Yu 2012, 130–153.

69 Ibid.

Moving Towards Good Governance: Justifying Party Rule and Establishing the Ultimate Objective of Political Reform

The upholding of the Party leadership, the defining feature of political development in post-Mao China, has been under constant attack by China scholars in the West and Chinese liberals; they claim that since 1978 there has been no meaningful political reform in China. Criticizing this view as “a bias and misconception,”⁷⁰ Yu justifies political development during the reform era through his good governance theory.

In his 2008 book chapter, “Toward good governance: the evolution of China’s governance in the past 30 years and its future trends,” Yu asserts that, “China’s political reform, to a large degree, has been governance reform,”⁷¹ which is not about changing the fundamental political framework of Party rule into a Western multiparty system with a separation of powers. Rather, it focuses on the *technical* dimension, i.e. “the government management system” or “the public administration system.”⁷² In Yu’s view, China’s governance reform, constituting a key component of the political reform, has been as successful as its economic reform. For Yu, governance reform also refers to government innovation, and the wide-ranging experiences of successful innovations in Chinese local governance, as discussed in the preceding section, lend empirical support to this claim.

“Judged by such criteria [of the ten elements of good governance], China’s governance reform has made great progress in the reform era, but many apparent insufficiencies and substantial shortcomings also exist.”⁷³ This statement is further elaborated on by He Zengke, Yu’s close CCTB associate, as presented in [Table 2](#).⁷⁴ The table summarizes the achievements and reform measures in a wide variety of areas, suggesting that the good governance theory is a useful analytical instrument for justifying Party rule. Furthermore, the political achievements demonstrate that China has indeed embarked upon a road towards good governance.

It should be emphasized that besides justifying Party rule, Yu Keping also firmly asserts that the “ultimate objective of China’s governance reform is to realize good governance”;⁷⁵ “no matter what kind of political reform China undertakes, and no matter what kind of governance model will take shape in China in the future, for far-sighted Chinese leaders, the objective of governance reform has been very clear, which is democracy, rule of law, justice, accountability, transparency, cleanness, effectiveness, and harmony.”⁷⁶ What exactly is the

70 Yu 2008b, 2.

71 Ibid., 3.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 22.

74 Although Yu’s 2008 book chapter and other works have discussed the achievements and shortcomings of China’s governance reform, none has taken the format of [Table 2](#).

75 Yu 2008b, 21.

76 Ibid., 22.

Table 2: **Justifying Political Development in Post-Mao China through Good Governance**

Criterion	Achievements or important reform measures
Legitimacy	China has been transforming its basis for legitimacy from legitimacy based on revolution to legitimacy based on democratic elections. Examples include: implementing direct elections for village committees since the mid-1980s and more recently for urban neighbourhood committees; electing village Party secretaries through a “two-votes system” (<i>liangpiao zhi</i> 两票制); in recent years experimenting with new methods to elect township leaders; and replacing single candidate elections with competitive elections at various levels of the party-state agencies.
Rule by law	Formally raising the objective of “building a socialist country under the rule of law” at the 1997 15th CCP Congress to replace the long-time practice of governing by rule by men; implementing an initial socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics, with many achievements in terms of enacting new law; and, more recently, placing judicial reform on the agenda.
Transparency	Disclosing information regarding public affairs at the village, township, SOE, and party-state agency levels; conducting public hearings at people’s congresses; implementing e-government projects, and so forth.
Accountability	Strengthening the monitoring of people’s congresses over governments; strengthening self-monitoring and self-disciplining of the administrative and the judicial systems; and strengthening media monitoring.
Responsiveness	Many local governments have put in place 24-hour “mayor’s hotlines” so that citizens can register their complaints; many local governments have initiated special columns in the media to facilitate communications between government and citizens, and so on.
Participation	China has made progress in expanding orderly political participation by citizens, e.g. village self-governance, a larger role for the people’s congresses, expanding citizen participation in the selection and promotion of party-state officials, and establishing new institutions to facilitate citizen attendance at legislative and administrative decision making.
Effectiveness	The government has done a great deal to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, e.g. four rounds of bureaucratic restructuring, simplifying administrative investigations and approval procedures, and adopting a “government affairs supermarket.”
Stability	Post-Mao leaders have maintained political stability despite the rapid economic growth and the dramatic social transformation because, first, they have balanced the relationship between the speed of promoting reform, the speed of actual development, and the actual limits of the populace to bear the reform costs; second, they have effectively addressed the social security concerns of the rural and urban poor; and third, they have relieved ethnic conflicts in western China.

Table 2: Continued

Criterion	Achievements or important reform measures
Cleanness	Since the mid-1990s, the extent of corruption has been reduced because of adoption of the following important measures: divestiture of businesses operated by the military, the armed police, and the judicial departments; reforming government purchasing; replacing fees with taxes; instituting family income and personal income declaration systems for leading cadres, and so forth.
Justice or inclusiveness	Although the income gap between the rich and the poor is widening, the achievements are in the mainstream, including: the rapid rise in people's living standards, the reduction of those living in poverty from 250 million to 30 million, great improvements in providing employment and social security, and important progress in protecting the rights of women, children, the disabled and minority groups.

Source:

He, Zengke 2002, 16–19.

ultimate objective of political reform for China? We will address this and other related issues in detail in the following section.

Yu Keping and the Good Governance Discourse: A Conclusive Analysis

On most occasions, Yu's view is that "good governance [comprising ten elements] is the process of social management aiming to maximize the interests of the public" (see Table 1).⁷⁷ In 2010, Yu furthered our understanding of good governance by demonstrating that good governance not only encompasses most of the elements of democracy, for example, the rule of law, participation, transparency and accountability, but also those elements that "are often considered to be absent in a democratic system" – efficiency, stability, fairness and integrity.⁷⁸ In this sense, the concept of good governance is even broader than the concept of democracy. However, this argument creates confusion over the relationship between good governance and democracy. It also raises the issue of the political implications of Yu's good governance discourse.

We hold that the political achievements in terms of Yu's ten elements of good governance (that were elaborated upon by He Zengke) (see Table 2) require a proper evaluation. In a recent authoritative and comprehensive study of the nature of political reform in local government innovations, most of which have received recognition by Yu's IECLG programme and have been recognized as among the most successful in China, Joseph Fewsmith reveals some serious limitations.⁷⁹ For example, when examining the new approaches to inner-Party democracy in terms of the selection of township leaders in Sichuan province and the "Wenling model" of democratic consultation and participatory budgeting in

⁷⁷ Yu 1999, 39.

⁷⁸ Yu 2011, 19.

⁷⁹ Fewsmith 2013, 16.

Zhejiang province, Fewsmith finds that almost all of these political experiments came about as the “personal” projects of reform-minded local leaders.⁸⁰ Once these leaders were transferred to other posts, the experiments generally tended to wither. For such reforms to continue, the most important impetus is an “appeal to higher-level authorities,” rather than an appeal to the constituencies of local citizens.⁸¹ Thus, the *accountability* element is not brought into play. In fact, most innovative practices are not self-sustaining and have not been institutionalized. In contrast to assessments by Yu Keping and He Zengke, Fewsmith concludes that local political experiments have yielded “limited results.”⁸² He argues that the constraints are “structural”: *participation* by ordinary citizens in the selection of township leaders or in government policymaking is substantially circumvented by the principle that the Party controls cadres.⁸³

Therefore, China scholars in the West should be aware that the statement, “the Chinese government has become democratic, accountable, transparent and responsive,” as is repeatedly asserted by Yu and other participants in the good governance discourse, does not necessarily imply that the government has moved in the direction of what most in the West would call democracy. Borrowing from Ethan J. Leib, using words such as “democracy,” “accountability,” “participation” and “transparency” to describe the new features of the Chinese political system is “a bit too capacious.”⁸⁴

Yu’s claim that the ultimate objective of China’s political reform is to move towards good governance is concerned with the following questions: what is the ideal political system for China? What will be the characteristics of any future Chinese-style democracy? Will the non-*technical* dimension of Party rule be reformed in some fundamental manner, and, if so, how and when? These questions are addressed rather vaguely as Yu does not provide clear answers. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: Yu’s good governance discourse has never embraced the *essential* element of democracy. We therefore conclude that it is conceptually problematic to argue that the concept of good governance is a broader term than the concept of democracy. The ultimate objective of Chinese political reform – moving in the direction of good governance – is not about moving to what Western social scientists call democracy.⁸⁵

However, that Yu does not embrace the *essential* element of democracy should not lead to a complete rejection of Yu’s promotion of good governance or to a negation of what Yu and He Zengke have praised as political achievements. Although local government innovations, or governance reform in general, fall within the *technical* confines of China’s political framework, to varying degrees

80 See also He, Baogang, and Thøgersen 2010; Saich and Yang 2003.

81 Fewsmith 2013, 167.

82 *Ibid.*, 176.

83 *Ibid.*, 97.

84 We agree with Leib’s criticism (2005, 4) of the common scholarly treatments of the newly adopted participatory and deliberative practices by local Chinese governments.

85 Cf. Nathan 2008, 26–27.

there has been progress in terms of building a modern administrative state that is more professional, competent, clean, efficient, service-oriented, fair and caring. Additionally, Party rule has become more consultative and deliberative. These changes have contributed to the resilience of Party rule since the late 1990s.

Other scholars evaluate local government innovations more positively. Baogang He and his collaborators have conducted extensive research on local political reform innovations which are regarded as having “a high degree of experimentalism with consultation, deliberation, and limited forms of democracy.”⁸⁶ They theorize that, during the past decade, China has developed a unique Chinese-style authoritarianism. This model is a combination of traditional command authoritarianism, consultative authoritarianism and the “apparent anomaly” of deliberative authoritarianism. The experimental consultative and deliberative practices have been “an important ingredient in the reproduction and resilience of authoritarian rule.”⁸⁷

As commonly acknowledged by Chinese practitioners and academics, Yu’s IECLG programme plays an important role in promoting local government innovations. Among the IECLG programme’s five objectives, one is to discover the positive experiences of government innovation and then to propagate and spread them to other parts of the country; another objective is to encourage local governments to adopt innovative methods when tackling public problems, and hence to promote good governance at local levels.⁸⁸

According to Yu, because central leaders always feel that it is extremely risky to make “big” moves in political areas, it is more practical to experiment with political reform measures first at local levels. If local political experiments go well and the broader political conditions become ready, they can be adopted as national policies. As He Zengke comments, “He [Yu Keping] wants to find [promising] political reform experiences [at local levels] on time, make them known to party-state officials and top leaders [through the IECLG programme], and provide manageable experiences for China’s political system reform.”⁸⁹ Political reform should be step-by-step. Yu hopes to use the IECLG programme as a bridge between political experiments at the grassroots level and political system reform at the macro level, as well as a bridge between officials and academic circles.⁹⁰ The IECLG programme has served as a *de facto* platform and venue through which Yu can advance his political agenda.

In addition, Yu’s good governance discourse also actively advocates several key elements of democracy such as civil society, the political and civil rights of citizens, and rule of law to protect citizens’ rights. It is particularly noteworthy that Yu has been writing extensively to correct government misconceptions about the allegedly damaging roles that civic associations would play in the

86 He, Baogang, and Warren 2011, 271.

87 *Ibid.*, 283.

88 Yu 2006, 162.

89 Yu 2009b, 187.

90 Yu 2006, 164–65, 166.

hope of creating a more favourable environment for the growth of Chinese civil society.

Overall, Yu remains liberal in his basic orientation. He has been actively promoting citizens' rights to political participation, the growth of civic associations and civil society, local government innovations, and other types of political development. Democratization cannot emerge from nowhere, and preparations encompassing the various elements of democracy remain necessary prerequisites.⁹¹ In this sense, Yu is constructing the necessary building blocks for a possible democratic breakthrough in the future.

Yu's dual personality is manifest in this discourse. As an establishment intellectual, he does not challenge the CCP by openly embracing even a minimalist Schumpeterian notion of democracy. The phrases "governance reform" (rather than "political reform") and "moving China towards good governance" (rather than "moving China towards Schumpeterian democracy"), as well as related discussions, essentially are "roundabout ways" to express Yu's innovative political ideas.⁹² Yu's more "neutral" notions of governance and good governance allow him to engage in extensive discussions about the benefits of governance reform without opening a "Pandora's box" of political reform, and hopefully to lay down a lot of grounds, if the more technical ones, for more political changes in the Chinese system in the future.

Owing to Yu's decisive impact, China's good governance discourse serves the purpose of expressing certain political views, most of which are Yu's views. The discourse is non-ideological and non-dogmatic, and it does not compete with the official ideology or other non-official alternatives. In particular, it has not been involved in the new left–liberal debate. The limited criticism of the discourse is mostly academic and has had little impact. Consequently, this discourse is low profile, which partially explains why it has received little attention in China studies.

In broad terms, neo-conservatism refers to those reform-era schools of thought that advocate a middle path between the "old left" and radical liberals.⁹³ It follows that, since the late 1990s, a new type of neo-conservatism revolving around the call to "move China towards good governance" has become popular in China's academic community and, to a lesser extent, in government circles and among practitioners. "Moving China towards good governance," located on the centre-right side of China's ideological spectrum, is the latest attempt to re-conceptualize the reform path, and it is also the latest intellectual effort to propose solutions to CCP rule. Similar to earlier varieties of neo-conservatism, it is a novel intellectual attempt to search for a new developmental model for China.

91 For a comprehensive list of elements of liberal democracy, see Diamond 1999, 11–12.

92 Cf. Hao 2003, 136.

93 Cf. Fewsmith 2008, 88. With respect to neo-conservatism, there are differences of opinion among those who study Chinese intellectual politics. See Chen 1997, 593; Goldman 2002, 525–26; Wang 2006, 10. Major examples of neo-conservatism include "neo-authoritarianism, statism, nationalism, postmodernism, the third way, China exceptionalism, neo-Confucianism, and new leftism" (Nathan 2008, 32).

摘要: 俞可平是关于中国式民主理论最有声望的中国思想家之一、以及中国国内关于知识分子善治话语的最重要学者。通过考察俞可平的相关著作,我们试图达到如下两个目的:善治话语作为过去十余年中国一个有影响力的知识分子话语,但在中国研究中尚未得到充分的学术关注,本文旨在填补这个空白;俞可平的中国式民主理论在海内外颇受争议、有许多令人混淆之处。因为俞可平的中国式民主观与他关于善治的观点是相互关联的,通过讨论他的善治理论,本文试图理清这些混淆。本文发现中国的知识分子善治话语围绕着“让中国走向善治”的呼吁,包括三个观点:第一,中国政治改革的最终目标是走向善治,不是走向西方社会科学家所说的“民主”。第二,“善政”和公民社会是达到善治的两个关键,这表明俞可平的基本倾向是自由主义的。第三,中国的治理改革,作为政治改革的一个主要部分,已经取得了很大成绩。

关键词: 俞可平; 中国知识分子的话语; 善治; 民主; 治理改革

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