

Panel: Political Reform in China (Cosmos & Violet Room)

Date/Time: Tuesday, December 11, 2012 / 12:45-14:00

Talking Points for: John Delury, Assistant Professor, Yonsei University

Xi Jinping made two highly symbolic trips since his selection as Party Secretary, both of which draw attention to how the question of political reform is bound up with the past. In late November, Xi took the new Politburo Standing Committee to the National History Museum where they toured the exhibit on modern China's "Road to Rejuvenation." The message was that Xi is pursuing the same object as virtually all of modern Chinese leaders—national wealth, power and prestige (roughly in that order). Then on his first trip outside Beijing he traveled to Shenzhen, in a manner orchestrated to evoke Deng Xiaoping's famous trip in 1992, restarting "reform and opening-up" after the trauma and tragedy of 1989. For Deng, political reform meant "administrative reform," streamlining the bureaucracy, decentralizing economic decision-making, and perhaps most boldly, separating Party and government functions. In the even longer history of political reform efforts—as displayed at the National History Museum—political reform refers largely a pattern of incremental changes that ultimately, often in desperation, shift into a fundamental change of the system. Whether the political crises of 2012 have brought China the brink of that kind of change, or whether things will continue in a piecemeal fashion, is the essential question.

*** The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.**