RCCL Conference on Judicial Reform in China (19-20 August 2016)

— Pinky Choy

Judicial reforms have been an integral part of China’s rule of law efforts. Several important measures have been launched since the Fourth Plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 2014. Having been implemented for almost two years, it is time to critically review the process and policy implications of those reform measures. Due to this reason, on 19-20 August 2016, the Centre for Chinese and Comparative Law (RCCL) of the School of Law of City University of Hong Kong (CityU) held a conference to investigate the implementation of the judicial reforms efforts in China and its theoretical implications.

This one and a half days’ conference brought together 19 scholars to examine various issues relating to China’s judicial reforms in recent years, offering an in-depth study of China’s judicial reforms from empirical and comparative perspectives. One thing worth mentioning is, among these 19 scholars, a number of them are internationally recognized Chinese law scholars who have been researching on Chinese judicial reform for many years.
The conference was kicked off by the welcome speech of RCCL Director Prof. Xin He. Soon after that, chaired by Dr. Peter Wang of our Law School, the first of the six panels of this conference started. Prof. Hualing Fu of the Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong, Dr. Peter Chan of our Law School and Prof. Susan Finder of the School of Transnational Law of Peking University presented to the participants their research relating to the profiles and achievements of the first post-Cultural Revolution generation of law students, the empirical studies of judicial conciliation in China, as well as the significance of live broadcast of trials. Prof. Susan Trevaskes of the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science of Griffith University and Dr. Yuqing Feng of the School of Law of Southeast University then commented on the three scholars’ insightful presentations. Audiences also actively participated in the discussion during the question and answer session and posed difficulty questions to the presenters.

The second panel, chaired by Dr. Mark Kielsgard of our Law School, focused on the judicial reforms under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. Prof. Susan Trevaskes and Dr. Ling Li of the Department of East Asian Studies of the University of Vienna presented their papers at this panel while Dr. Kwai Ng of the Department of Sociology of the University of California, San Diego and Dr. Peter Wang acted as the commentators.
The third panel was chaired by Prof. Baifeng Chen of the School of Law of Zhongnan University of Economics and Law. Three scholars, namely Dr. Meng Hou of the School of Law of Peking University, Dr. Xiaohong Yu of the Department of Political Science of Tsinghua University and Prof. Zhong Liu of the School of Law of Tongji University presented papers on various issues relating to the institutional obstacles to judicial reform in China. Prof. Qinghua Wang of the School of Law of China University of Political Science and Law and Prof. Hualing Fu then gave critical comments on the three papers.

Panel four, chaired by Prof. Susan Trevaskes, offered a general discussion about judicial reforms in China. Prof. Stéphanie Balme of the Centre for International Studies (CERI) of Sciences Po Paris who joined the conference via Skype, presented her assessment on China’s judicial forms for the past 35 years. After that, another presenter Prof. Yongjun Li of the School of Law of Jilin University discussed the theoretical problems behind China’s current
judicial reform. Dr. Meng Hou and Prof. Albert Chen of the Faculty of Law of the University of Hong Kong acted as the commentators for this panel.

Panel five of the second day was chaired by Dr. Ling Li. Prof. Qinghua Wang discussed the role of the court in social control in China while Dr. Fen Lin of the Department of Media and Communication of CityU presented the empirical studies carried out by her and Prof. Xin He of our Law School relating to defamation litigation in China. Prof. Baifeng Chen and Dr. Xiaohong Yu were the commentators of this panel.

Panel six, which was also the last panel of this conference was a book comments session chaired by Dr. Meng Hou. Prof. Xin He and Dr. Kwai Ng firstly presented their work to the participants. After that, being commentators, Prof. Zhong Liu and Dr. Ling Li shared their views on the relevant book project and gave valuable comments to the two authors. Other participants also joined the discussion.
In conclusion, while the time was short, the conference was fruitful and thought-provoking and the atmosphere throughout the whole conference was enthusiastic. The insightful and inspirational views of all the speakers who are experts in the field on various issues relating to judicial reform in China, as well as the critical questions and constructive comments of all other conference participants made the conference a great success. It is believed that this conference has laid a good foundation for further in-depth discussion on matters relating to judicial reform in China.