

COMMENTHK

NEW BLUEPRINT | HONG KONG SAR

Synergizing HK's first five-year blueprint and Policy Addresses

Tu Haiming says two instruments will form a framework to drive the city's sustained and high-quality development

Public consultation for Hong Kong's first-ever five-year plan is set to begin in the second quarter of 2026. Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu has repeatedly emphasized that the introduction of this blueprint will not alter the existing governance framework, particularly the preparation of annual Policy Addresses and Budgets. Instead, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government will ensure that these annual policy packages are closely aligned with Hong Kong's first five-year plan.

Local authorities have adhered to a policy of "positive noninterventionism" for decades, with governance largely driven by annual Policy Addresses and Budgets. In the past four years, Lee's Policy Addresses have reflected his governance philosophy, policy priorities, and responses to social concerns. While the public is familiar with this approach, the introduction of a comprehensive medium-term development plan is relatively new. Clarifying the distinct but complementary relationship between Hong Kong's first five-year plan and the Policy Address is therefore essential before the public consultation begins.

Fundamentally, Hong Kong's first five-year plan defines where Hong Kong aims to be in five years, while the Policy Address sets out what must be done in the immediate year. Take the development of the Northern Metropolis as an example. Hong Kong's first five-year plan will establish its overarching strategic positioning as an "international innovation and technology city" and set medium- to long-term targets. The Policy Address then breaks these grand goals down into concrete annual milestones. Furthermore, Hong Kong's first five-year plan retains a relatively stable rigidity throughout its cycle and would only be adjusted in the event of major disruptions, such as a pandemic. The Policy Address, by contrast, can be dynamically adjusted to reflect annual economic shifts and fiscal realities. Together, they combine strategic stability with operational flexibility, ensuring that the development "blueprint" translates smoothly into an actionable "construction map".

The way the two documents are drawn up also differs. The Policy Address is prepared under an executive-led approach: The chief executive consults widely through seminars, public engagement



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and Legislative Council question-and-answer sessions before finalizing the text. LegCo's role in this process is mainly advisory.

By contrast, drafting Hong Kong's first five-year plan involves a more structured and institutionalized process. First, it introduces a collaborative research mechanism between the executive and the legislature. LegCo panels will be involved from the outset, jointly examining more than 120 topics, each supported by empirical research, reports, and public hearings. Second, it creates an alignment mechanism with the national 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), including synchronized time frames, consistent functional positioning with national strategies and central support in resource allocation through direct communication with relevant central authorities. Third, it establishes an expert consultation mechanism. To align with Hong Kong's national positioning as "10 centers, two hubs and one ecosystem", and to generate synergy with other Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area cities, this mechanism has been formed under the coordination of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the CPC Central Committee and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council.

Consequently, Hong Kong's first five-year plan is not a closed-door administrative exercise but a highly collaborative undertaking backed by executive-legislative synergy and guided by national strategy.

Moreover, the two documents diverge in their strategic focus. Hong Kong's first five-year plan targets macro-level, long-term imperatives, selecting critical pathways that will decisively shape Hong Kong's future competitiveness — essentially focusing on "doing the right things". The Policy

Address functions as an annual policy compendium. It responds to immediate needs and ensures the smooth running of public services, focusing on "doing things right" by turning long-term strategies into specific yearly tasks.

Legally, the Policy Address is rooted in Article 64 of the Basic Law, which requires the SAR government to present regular policy addresses to LegCo, though it lacks strict legal binding force. By contrast, Hong Kong's first five-year plan will hold a quasi-constitutional status. It will require formal approval by LegCo, be filed with the Central People's Government, and be aligned with the national 15th Five-Year Plan. This alignment is further underpinned by Article 37 of the National Development Planning Law, which supports the SARs in integrating into the national development framework. Failure to meet the core targets of Hong Kong's first five-year plan could therefore trigger not only LegCo scrutiny but also accountability mechanisms at the central level.

The five-year plan will also help address the long-standing problem of fragmented policy-making. Because the Policy Address operates on an annual cycle, it is vulnerable to political and electoral rhythms, making it harder to sustain long-term reforms and mega-infrastructure projects. By spanning five full years, the five-year plan will bridge one chief executive's term and extend into the next, creating a "relay-style" institutional arrangement. While an incoming chief executive may adjust tactical priorities, the overarching strategic direction endorsed by LegCo should not be easily reversed, thereby safeguarding continuity.

Without a farsighted blueprint, development risks losing its direction amid a volatile and complex global environment. Hong Kong's first five-year plan will serve as a strategic navigation chart, steering the overall direction, broader picture, and long-term goals. Yet even the best strategy risks remaining on paper without an annual timetable. The Policy Address will act as an operational task list, breaking down objectives, announcing concrete measures and ensuring phased implementation. Together, the two instruments will form a mutually reinforcing framework to drive Hong Kong's sustained and high-quality development.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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Preserving the human spirit is vital in the age of artificial intelligence

Xu Yangsheng, president of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, recently said that "Rather than being merely a technological tool, artificial intelligence blends new ways of thinking, behavioral norms, and value judgments." His message carries a lot of weight. It reminds us that AI offers not only opportunities, but also significant risks.

Most people in the first instance believe that AI is just a tool. We humans will use it to our advantage, given the values that we cherish. Xu was telling us that AI is changing our lifestyle and potentially reshaping our values. Humanity could be adversely affected if we are not mindful and allow AI to get the better of us.

AI is convenient and becoming extremely powerful. Given the human weaknesses that we all share, some of us will be tempted to use AI to cheat or to gain an unfair advantage, thereby hurting others. Even normally fair-minded people could convince themselves, "If I do not cross the line, others will." Any "line" that had existed before could then be erased. The world will become more dangerous for everybody.

This is why maintaining the human spirit and ensuring proper governance in the use of AI are paramount. Without proper governance, honest people will get ripped off. The world would descend into chaos. Xu urged the younger generation to master AI tools, maintain independent thinking, stick to moral bottom lines, and embrace the digital era with reason, responsibility, and cultural sensitivity.

I have studied human nature for decades and have concluded that independent thinking is rare. In this age of AI, renowned philosopher Zhou Guoping's reminder is most timely. He stressed that we must hold fast to humanistic warmth, moral judgment, and work incessantly to become a better human. Unfortunately, this cannot be taken for granted.

Happily, China is a true civilization state. This means that the Chinese civilization is widely shared and cherished by its people. Chinese civilization treasures the principle of self-cultivation or personal development. It is very liberal and not at all authoritarian. "The world is one family" (*Book of Rites*); "The sea accommodates all rivers"; "An enlightened person emulates the heavenly bodies in following their right paths" (*I Ching*); "First in priority is people, second is institutions, the emperor is the last" (Confucian philosopher Mencius); "Wisdom, benevolence, and courage are the three great virtues" (*Book of Rites*); "If mistakes have been made, have the courage to correct them" (*Analects*). Daoism is China's homegrown religion, but Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam were welcome to China.

Some commentators believe the civilization state idea is authoritarian and rejects alternative ways of life. They do not know that China's civilization is highly accommodating. In fact, a country that dispels alternative ways of life and tries to maintain one single culture and considers alternative ways of life inferior is not truly civilized. The human spirit is "colorblind": There should be no discrimination because all humans should be respected as equals. This does not rule out that some ways of life in every civilization may be uncivilized and should not be allowed in the civilized world. Examples are slavery, human trafficking, discrimination based on gender, abuse of animals, and forgery.

Because the Chinese culture is attractive, it has been espoused by the non-Han emperors like Kangxi and Qianlong in the 17th and 18th centuries. These two Manchurian emperors were well versed in the Chinese classics and they were also skilled calligraphers. Kangxi reigned from 1661 to 1722, and was known for his accomplishments as a politician, scientist, calligrapher, and poet. Qianlong, who reigned from 1735 to 1796, was not only an accomplished poet, but also masterminded the encyclopedia called *Siku Quanshu*, which took 13 years to complete.

Chinese culture holds the human spirit as supreme, encourages learning and critical thinking (*Analects*): "learning without thinking makes one lose understanding; thinking without studying is dangerous". Again, *I Ching* contains the advice "Virtue encompasses everything." So Chinese culture is all about personal development. With strong personal development, one can hold steadfast to one's humanity and well-developed virtues. Only then can we overcome our inclinations to cut corners and take advantage of the opportunities that AI can offer to do unethical things.

My attention was drawn to two lawsuits involving AI. One happened in China, the other was in the United States. Baidu — sometimes described as the "Google of China" — was charged with defamation based on AI hallucination. It posted news saying that a lawyer was charged for crimes that he never committed, and had been sentenced to three years of imprisonment. Baidu claimed that AI hallucinations cannot be detected in advance. Clearly this is not a valid excuse, because it hurts an innocent person.

Anthropic, a US AI firm, sued the US Department of War, claiming that Washington's decision to blacklist it from government work violated its First Amendment rights. Anthropic wanted to block its Claude model from being used for domestic mass surveillance or fully autonomous lethal weapons, but the US government wants to punish it for this.

These examples show that while proper governance is needed, enforcement will be challenging, unless we all uphold the human spirit.

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Chinese culture comes to the fore in the 21st century

Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's former ambassador to the United Nations, who served as president of the UN Security Council from January 2001 to May 2002, perceptively wrote in his book *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy* that "the Chinese Communist Party should instead be called the Chinese Civilization Party".

The book was published in 2020, and as if to confirm the correctness of his observation, China in 2023 held its First Forum on Building up China's Cultural Strength. The theme of that meeting was "Towards Greater Cultural Confidence and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations". The theme for the 2024 meeting was "Chinese Modernization and the New Cultural Mission", while that for 2025 was "Deepening Reform of Cultural Systems and Mechanisms, Stimulating Cultural Innovation and Creative Vitality". The official write-up frames this year's meeting as "striving to write a new chapter of cultural prosperity".

Rising powers have always sought, alongside material strength, the capacity to set the terms in which they are described, admired, imitated, and remembered. The United States did this through Hollywood; the Soviet Union through Bolshoi tours; postwar Japan through the quiet diplomacy of anime and Studio Ghibli; South Korea through K-pop, K-drama, and K-cinema. There is every reason for China to do the same, not only to promote increased self-confidence in the civilization of China, but to project China's soft power as well.

The phrase recurring across all three forums — "mutual learning among civilizations" — is a noble aspiration. China must not repeat the mistakes of the many empires throughout human history. At the height of their power, they thought their culture and civilization were the best in the world, disregarding others. Remember British author Rudyard Kipling's poem about the "white man's burden", suggesting that white men's duty was to "civilize" nonwhite people? There is no doubt that Chinese civilization encompasses some of the richest creations of men and civilizations. However, the most durable achievements of modern Chinese culture have rarely been acts of pure self-assertion; more often than not, they are acts of synthesis, marrying a foreign form to



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a native spirit, or an ancient story to a modern interpretation.

Consider the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto*, composed in 1959 by two conservatory students, He Zhanhao and Chen Gang. It pours the melodic language of Yue Opera and the ancient legend of lovers transformed in death into a pair of butterflies into the European concerto form — solo violin against full orchestra, with the sonata architecture of exposition, development, and recapitulation. The result is neither Western nor traditionally Chinese, but a synthesis of two cultural heritages, instantly moving audiences from both.

The *Yellow River Cantata*, written by Xian Xinghai in 1939 in the cave dwellings of Yan'an during the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and reborn three decades later as the *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, runs the synthesis the other way: The full symphonic apparatus of the West is harnessed to a subject wholly and unmistakably Chinese — the great river that cradled the civilization, and the spirit of the Chinese under siege. Where the *Butterfly Lovers* offers tenderness, the *Yellow River* offers grandeur. Together, they show how capacious the strategy of synthesis can be.

Literature shows the same pattern. Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* took hard science fiction and produced a trilogy that, in Ken Liu's English translation, won the 2015 Hugo Award for Best Novel — the first translated work and the first by an Asian author to do so. Adapted since for television by both Tencent and Netflix, and counting among its admirers readers Barack Obama and Mark Zuckerberg, it is exactly the achievement the forums mean by cultural confidence — a Chinese writer mastering a foreign form and carrying it back into the world on his own terms.

It is against this long history of synthesis that the forum's engagement with artificial intelligence in the arts should be read. The newest experiments attempt to wed the most advanced technology to the oldest forms. Technology companies and museums have begun training generative models on the vast corpus of classical landscape painting, so that an algorithm can produce, in seconds, an ink-wash scene in the manner of the Song masters; the Palace Museum, alongside firms such as Tencent and Baidu, has poured resources into digitizing, animating, and reanimating the imperial collections. In music, AI tools are used to harmonize and recombine traditional melodic material, to restore degraded recordings, and to generate new works in old idioms. An excellent example is the AI-generated animation of Zhang Zeduan's handscroll painting *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*. Such works not only increase the awareness and pride of the Chinese people in their heritage but also deepen foreigners' understanding of the richness of Chinese culture by introducing it through modern technology.

Whether the cultural strength of this kind can be summoned by the forum and policy is among the genuinely open questions of the present Chinese moment. The works most often invoked as evidence of Chinese greatness — the Tang poems, the Song landscapes, *Dream of the Red Chamber* (originally a novel, but since filmed), the *Butterfly Lovers* itself — emerged as often from the unplanned interior of the civilization as from its official ambitions, and sometimes in quiet tension with them. The *Butterfly Lovers* was written by students; the *Yellow River Cantata* in a cave; *The Three-Body Problem* by an engineer at a power plant. A state can fund, convene, digitize, translate, and promote; whether it can also call forth the works that will still be performed and read a century hence, only time will tell. But Mahbubani's reframing holds a real insight: A party that understands itself as the steward of a civilization, rather than merely the government of a state, has set itself a longer and more interesting task than the ordinary business of politics.

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