

China Macro View

Takeaways from China Investor Conference 2012

- **No abrupt policy shift in the near term** – The mainstream view, with which we agree, is that the economy may stage a mild rebound in 4Q. This reduces the need to roll out fresh stimulus in the near term. Leadership transition may not lead to immediate policy shift. Reform measures that have been planned will likely continue to be implemented, but the expectation is that a new reform agenda will only be revealed in the fall of 2013.
- **The new leadership may accept slower growth** – Most experts believe China's potential growth rate would be 6-8% in the next decade. In response to government consultations, the majority of China's think tanks propose to set the growth target at 7.5% for 2013 to help stabilize expectations of growth. We think the growth target may be set at 7% to manage expectations of the local governments and leave room for structural reforms.
- **The incoming leadership emphasized the importance of reform** – Vice Premier Li Keqiang, who is expected to become premier in the new government, emphasized recently that the priority of the economic work is to lift efficiency in the economy, and the current problems in China's economy will have to be solved by reform. Based on past experience, new reform agenda will await the 3rd plenary session of the 18th Central Committee in the fall of 2013. But reform measures that have garnered broad support can proceed as planned, including income distribution, VAT reform and financial reform (such as easy entry, interest rate liberalization, deposit insurance, and capital market development).
- **The Central Bank may pay more attention to price stability** – According to the 12th five-year plan (FYP) on financial reform, the PBOC will pay more attention to inflation, including asset inflation. Meanwhile, the importance of traditional monetary aggregates (M0, M1 and M2) is declining, and that for total social financing is rising. The FYP aims to bring the share of direct financing in total social financing to 15% from the current 10%.
- **Structural tax cut is expected to be expanded** – Replacing business tax with VAT for selected service industries will benefit not only the service industries but also manufacturing industries purchasing relevant services. It is estimated if the current reform is expanded nationwide, tax reduction can reach about RMB400bn. The government is also considering cutting SME tax further, which would benefit a wide range of enterprises while limiting tax losses.

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Takeaways from China Investor Conference 2012

Citi hosted the China Investor Conference in Beijing during 29-30 Oct 2012. Speakers included policy makers and government-related experts from a wide range of areas. Here are the key takeaways.

Macro outlook

Policies are already accommodative – Fiscal and monetary policies have already been loosened since 4Q/2011. Broad money growth may exceed 14% this year. Fiscal policy is more expansionary with revenue growth falling and spending growth accelerating.

The economy has shown signs of turning around – Economic data since Sep have been mostly positive, including the share of longer-term loans in total new loans, export growth, PMI, industrial production and recruitment intentions. YoY growth may have bottomed, and sequential growth is improving.

There will be no stimulus if the economy rebounds – Assuming policies have a lagged effect of 3-4 quarters, the economy should rebound in 4Q/2012. If macro data in Oct do not deteriorate, it would confirm growth bottoming, and there will be no major policy change as a result.

Trade outlook is still gloomy amid weak external demand – Traditional advantage is being eroded and new competitive advantage has not been established. In addition, the government is not expected to use exchange rate or tax rebates as tools to boost export. Export growth is estimated at 7% in 2012 and 2013, and import growth at 6.1% in 2012 and 6.5% in 2013, assuming a constant real effective exchange rate.

FAI may grow by 20% this year – The accelerated approval of projects by NDRC and local governments may not be matched by additional financing. Among total FAI, property investment makes up about 20%; infrastructure investment accounts for 23%; and capacity investment constitutes 57%. If capacity investment slows in 2013, infrastructure investment will need to be accelerated to pick up the slack. The macro expert expects nominal FAI growth of 20% this year (19% in real terms, 2ppts higher than last year) and property investment growth of 16% (relative to 29% last year).

Consumption may accelerate in 4Q this year but new policy support is not expected – According to the consumption expert, retail sales growth tends to be higher in 2H than in 1H. So far this year, the sales of the following commodities have increased faster than average: communication goods, building materials, furniture, driven mainly by the construction of economically affordable houses, increased property sales in the second- and third-tier cities. However, vehicle sales increased by 2.5% YTD, the lowest in the last 13 years. There is also a slowdown in sales of electronic goods, following the expiration of government subsidies. This year, the government has no new policy initiatives for promoting consumption by providing subsidies, partly due to slower fiscal revenue growth. The subsidies for energy saving products are aimed at both consumption and production of these goods, and the effects on consumption is limited, given the relatively high prices for these goods. There is no consensus on car purchase subsidies.

There will be no strong rebound due to incomplete destocking – Growth will likely stabilize but the expert does not expect a strong rebound. The main reason is that de-stocking is incomplete as enterprises still hope for a large stimulus and have not cut inventories sufficiently. Ideally, industrial inventory growth should be lower

than industrial production growth, but that was not the case in Sep. This would affect the strength of an industrial production rebound, which could exhibit an L shape.

Growth may reach 7.6-7.7% this year and 8% next year – The macro expert expects growth to reach 7.7-7.8% in 4Q, and about 7.5% in 1H next year before accelerating in 2H. Annual growth this year can be 7.6-7.7%. Based on optimistic assumptions, including expansionary fiscal policy (deficit 2% of GDP), supportive monetary policy (not raising M2 and credit growth but rather increasing M1 growth to above 13% and the share of longer-term loans), and stable RMB, growth in 2013 may reach 8%. FAI growth can be slower than 2012 while consumption growth can be higher. PPI may stop falling in 1Q/2013. CPI inflation is estimated at 3% next year.

China's think tanks have proposed growth target of 7.5% for 2013 –

Government is now asking for advice on next year's policy. According to the expert, policies may be eased further but not significantly. In response to government consultations, the majority of China's think tanks propose to set growth target at 7.5% for 2013 to help stabilize expectations of growth, while others suggest to bring growth target down to 7%.

Reform and longer-term growth

The good old days are over – The non-conventional measures taken in the advanced economies mitigated the crisis. However, the fundamental problems still exist, including high financial leverage and government debt, a low savings ratio and excessive development of the service sector. As a result, the crisis has been prolonged. In China, the factors contributing to rapid growth have weakened or reversed, due to fewer surplus labor; relatively lower service industry productivity; lower productivity of maintenance investment; and deficient innovation capacity.

The incoming leadership emphasized the importance of reform – Vice Premier Li Keqiang, who is expected to become premier in the new government, emphasized recently that: (i) the priority in the future is to lift efficiency in the economy; (ii) the current problems in China's economy will have to be solved by reform; (iii) price stability should be given more importance.

Most believe China's potential growth rate would be 6-8% in the next decade –

According to estimate made by a leading government think tank, medium-term potential growth is close to 8% (7.5-8.2%). Another expert is more cautious, and estimates potential growth at 7.2% for 2011-15 and 6.1% for 2016-20, based on the assumption that labor supply growth is turning negative, investment growth would be lower together with diminishing return of capital, and total factor productivity growth would be flat.

But there are optimists as well – One expert thinks China can achieve a sustained 8% growth or above up to 2030, providing China can adopt the following six policies: (1) to encourage consumption and use consumption as the growth driver; (2) to develop the service industry; (3) to promote industry upgrading; (4) to promote agricultural modernization; (5) to speed up investment in infrastructure; and (6) to increase investment overseas. The development of the service industry can provide value and jobs for China's economic growth. If the employment with the service sector can be raised to 50% of total employment in China, an additional 100 million jobs can be created.

Growth engines in the future include: (i) investment will continue to grow at relatively fast rate, especially investment intended to boost consumption and improve the population's living standards; (ii) industrialization still has a long way to go, and industry-related service sector can develop further; (iii) urbanization is an important source of growth, but it follows industrialization, and investment system needs to be reformed to meet the needs of urbanization.

Fundamental reform measures will only be known in a year – Based on past experience, new reform measures will only be approved during the 3rd plenary session of the 18th Central Committee in the fall of 2013. But reform measures that have already been contemplated and have garnered broad support can proceed before then, including income distribution, VAT reform and financial reform (such as easy access, interest rate liberalization, deposit insurance, and capital market development). Reform will likely take place in areas where the tension is the severest. One of the experts thinks the investment-driven growth model will not change following the leadership transition, and reform will only be triggered by crisis.

The main way to boost consumption is to increase household income – On rebalancing between consumption and investment, the government has realized the limitation of short-term consumption stimulus. The current strategy is to increase disposable income (especially for low-income households, including by tax cuts), expand social security and ensure product safety (such as food).

Monetary policy and financial market

The Central Bank may pay more attention to price stability – According to the 12th five-year plan on financial reform, the PBOC will pay more attention to inflation, including asset inflation. Meanwhile, the importance of traditional monetary aggregates (M0, M1 and M2) is declining, and that of total social financing is rising. In particular, the FYP targets the share of direct financing in total social financing of 15% (currently around 10%). However, total social financing is not under the PBOC's control, and cannot become the operational target.

The PBOC may not take drastic policy measures in the near term – The recent RMB appreciation is related to BOP surpluses. The PBOC has reduced intervention in the market and wishes to let the market to balance the supply and demand. As inflation may rise in 2013, the chance of a rate cut is slim. RRR cut may be possible depending on the direction and size of capital flows. PBOC stopped cutting interest rates and RRR after Jul partly due to a housing price rebound in recent months. Instead, the PBOC is using reverse repos to inject liquidity.

Credible reform may strengthen RMB in the longer term – RMB exchange rate will likely be driven by two competing forces in two separate scenarios. In the reform scenario, rebalancing itself would reduce the pressure on RMB appreciation against the dollar, but the optimism on policy and economy may lead to a stronger RMB. The net impact is likely biased toward further strengthening of the RMB. In the no reform scenario, the authority would hope the RMB to strengthen so that it could attract a steady capital inflow to support growth, but the pessimism on policy and economy could actually weaken the RMB. The net impact will likely be on the depreciation side.

The authorities are strengthening banking supervision – They will increase the decision making power of the board and allow the chief risk officer to report directly to the board, or to the shareholder's conference. CBRC is going to take the

following measures next year: (a) introducing Basel III requirements on capital adequacy. The bank regulator is expected to announce by year-end plans for the transitory period, and new instruments that can be used to meet capital requirement; (b) giving more attention to bank liquidity; (c) raising the bank reserves for bad loans; (d) strengthening the supervision of the core banks, including the Big Four, State Development Bank and the Bank of Communications. More capital will have to come from the Chinese government, as the latter is the largest shareholder of the biggest banks (60-70% of the shares through Central Huijin Co.).

There are pending issues on deposit Insurance – To establish a deposit insurance mechanism for China's commercial banks has become a consensus in China. However, there are discussions and disagreement with regard to: (a) whether to set up a deposit insurance company or a fund; (b) who will be responsible for managing the deposit insurance entity: PBOC or CBRC; (c) the work scope and authorities of the deposit insurance mechanism in China. Some are concerned about the potential risk of moving from the current (informal but effectively) full insurance system to a partial insurance system.

Loan-to-deposit ratio may become a monitoring indicator in the future – The long-term goal is to revise the banking law to make the 75% ratio a supervision indicator rather than a compulsory limit. In the interim, the bank regulator is studying ways to revise the definitions of loans and deposits to ease the restriction.

China's shadow banking pose risks to the banks – One expert estimates the scale at Rmb18 trillion, about 30% of China's GDP. Shadow banking is made of mainly wealth management products of banks and trust loans. The bulk of bank's wealth management products have been channeled to property investment through trust funds and trust companies. Other forms of shadow banking include internet lending, such as P2P which has flourished in China.

Fiscal and tax policy

There will be no public debt crisis in the near term – According to estimates made by a leading government think tank, the net sovereign assets are about Rmb20-60tn. The key problem is the liquidity of these assets. To address the peaking of LGFV loan maturity, loans to projects under construction are mostly rolled over, but banks are cautious to extend loans to newly approved infrastructure projects.

The VAT tax reform will likely be expedited – Replacing business tax with VAT for selected service industries will benefit not only the service industries but also manufacturing industries purchasing relevant services. It is estimated if the current reform is expanded nationwide, tax reduction can reach about RMB400bn. This reform can also be expanded to construction, telecommunication and rail transportation. The tax expert expects the reform to be completed within ten years. Government revenue (esp. local revenue) will decline. To offset, local government may get a higher share of the VAT (currently local governments get 25% of the VAT).

Tax cut may continue for SMEs – As 90% of the enterprises contribute to 10% of the enterprise tax, the government is considering cutting SME tax further. This will benefit a wide range of enterprises while limiting tax losses.

There are oppositions to the expansion of property tax – The tax expert is against the introduction and expansion of property tax, due to the enforcement cost

and lack of interest from local governments. In his view the pilot program in Shanghai and Chongqing is not successful. He proposes instead to tax gains from housing transactions.

Property market

The property market is expected to be stable – According to the property expert, the property investment and floor space started are unlikely to fall further since: 1) negative growth in land sales is expected to be reversed on the back of stable funding sources and sufficient credit support; 2) The new policy by Ministry of Land and Resources states that vacant land will be forfeited if not developed within two years. Experience shows that new starts and land acquisition would pick up 5-6 months after the improvement of home sales. However, there is little chance for sharp price rebound next year due to high inventory.

No more tightening on property market in the near future – The government can accept mild home price increases. Curbing speculative property investment and supporting the basic housing demand remains the main task for the new government. Home purchase restrictions will not be relaxed while low-income and first home buyers will continue to benefit from social housing and credit support. The obstacles for expanding property tax are: (i) deficient information system; (ii) opposition by the local governments.

Social housing is well on the track – Until September, the total new starts has reached 93% of the annual target (7mn units) while the target to complete 5mn units is also expected to be met. The challenge for the next generation leaders is how to distribute these housing resources.

Housing demand will diverge as a result of population movements – It is critical to monitor the population flow to understand the balance of demand and supply. With the population inflows, some of the large cities may still have sufficient demand potential while some small- and medium-sized cities may suffer from over supply which is negative to the property price.

Job market

Resilient job market reflects changing balance between labor supply and demand – The current low unemployment statistics is consistent with the survey data and our observations. A chronic labor shortage with a continuous increase in wages is expected. Turning point in China's labor market occurred in 2004 when labor surplus turned to labor shortage. The labor shortage will continue, with a negative increase in labor supply. This labor shortage can hardly be offset by extending retirement age, as older workers tend to be less educated with less skills.

This implies there is no need to boost growth to ensure full employment – The demographics expert believe potential growth in the next decade is in the range of 6-7% mostly due to the decline of working age population. Attempts to raising growth above the potential will cause labor shortages and inflation.

But the overall balance disguises structural problems – The Hukou system impeded the flow of labor. Labor supply can be increased by abolishing the Hukou system. Currently, the urban unemployment rate of 4.1% is consistent with the natural unemployment rate in China. As the economy fluctuates above and below the potential level, urban employment remains stable while the migrant workers take the shocks.

Structural unemployment may arise in the future – Currently, unskilled labor is in great demand, which reduces the incentive to go to school in rural areas. However, in the longer run, industrial upgrading and a shift of employment to service industries would require more skilled workers.

The government can play a positive role – The government shall accept a lower growth rate. The Government can act to increase the potential growth rate by removing the Hukou system, by providing basic social services and improving income distribution. However, large stimulus packages, regional and industrial policies will lead to market distortions, inflation and loss in economic efficiency.

Industry-specific developments

Coal Price – Coal price is expected to rebound in 4Q as the seasonal factor will push up demand for coal while the traditional transport equipment maintenance season will weigh on the supply chain. Our expert also estimates a mild recovery in coal price in 2013 thanks to the infrastructure projects approved by NDRC and investment plans rolled out by the local government. In addition, coal quality problems may reduce coal imports. Hydro power production may slow down next year following a big year in 2012, increasing demand for thermal power and coal.

Coal investment – Fixed asset investment in coal mining industry is limited due to: 1) the resource scarcity; 2) restrictions on the capacity expansion by the government; 3) environment protection. Therefore, the coal production growth is hard to accelerate and the era of hyper FAI growth in this sector seems close to the end. The industry consolidation is the main theme going forward, which may help to increase the productivity and efficiency as small-scale coal mining companies are going bankrupt.

Health Care – New leaders are expected to: 1) strengthen universal health insurance and extend the coverage of insurance; 2) increase government contribution from Rmb230 per person per year to Rmb360 per person per year, which may increase the total health-care expenditure to 6-7% of GDP; 3) facilitate the health insurance portability across the cities and programs; 4) improve the service delivery; 5) encourage private capital to invest into this market to compete with public hospital, thus to increase the efficiency.

Railway investment – Near-term railway FAI is accelerating due to government intention to limit the downside of the economy. Planned investment in 4Q is around 40% of the annual target of Rmb510bn. Long-term railway investment plan or 12th five-year plan has been decreased to Rmb2.8tn total investment and within which rail infrastructure investment is Rmb2.3tn. Given the upward adjustment to 2012 and possible flat FAI for 2013, the investment is front-loaded for railway infrastructure. Railway equipment FAI is more stable, with no less than Rmb100bn per year in the next three years.

Airport investment – CAAC plans to build another 66 airports between now and 2020 and China will have 256 airports by 2020 (at the end of 2010 China has 190 airports). Meanwhile, industry will try to enhance the hub airports like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou to further expand their network coverage.

Appendix A-1

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