



RSIS WORKSHOP ON “POLITICAL REFORM AND SOCIAL STABILITY IN CHINA”

Event Report
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Institute of Defence and
Strategic Studies

Event Report

RSIS Workshop on “Political Reform and Social Stability in China”

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Workshop Administrator

Sandy Leong

Rapporteurs

Alan Jeffery and Ben Ho Wan Beng

This report summarises the proceedings of the seminar as interpreted by the assigned rapporteurs and editors appointed by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this report.

This workshop adheres to a variation of the Chatham House Rule. Accordingly, beyond the paper presenters cited, no other attributions have been included in this workshop report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three years into the regime led by President Xi Jinping, China faces new challenges from both within the state apparatus and the society. As economic and some degree of political reforms continue, the state needs to manage resentment and criticism from both the winners and losers of the processes, ranging from the urban rich to the rural poor, from the social elites to the marginalised. New empirical research needs to examine and identify what remains unchanged (i.e. continuity) and what has significantly changed (i.e. innovation and disruption) in both the state's social control and societal autonomy. The state has changed the ways in social control such as inviting leading businessmen and women to join local People's Consultative Conference or even local Communist Party organs have proved to be effective in easing social contention. However, new types of mass based social resistance facilitated by new communication technologies and activism networks and other forms of social instability pose potentially fundamental challenges to Xi's rule. Against this backdrop, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) organised a workshop on "Political Reform and Social Stability in China" on 8–9 January 2016 at the Nanyang Executive Centre, Singapore. The workshop discussed fresh data from the field and whether they might point at new directions of research in China studies. The substantive focus was on the dynamic interface between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) state and the increasingly diversifying Chinese society. The papers each addressed the highly dynamic nature of state-society contention, cooptation and cooperation in respective fields, and identified the emerging and innovative mechanisms that are employed by either the state, or society, or both to introduce changes, and influence others.

Key messages of this workshop:

- i. The incentives for local innovations arise more from local pressure; innovation serves to promote greater stability in governance and unlike in the U.S., geographic contagion effects little in terms of the spread of local policy innovation in China.
- ii. While the CCP tolerates policy (or even political) critique at times, the fact that China was approaching a fundamental ideological crisis in the late-Hu era has meant that it was crucial for Xi to clamp down on the critics. There are evidence that Xi has renovated some traditional methods of top-down social mobilization often used during revolutionary and Maoist periods to both deliver new policy messages and re-establish CCP popularity in the society. The "mass line" is a case in point.
- iii. Chinese private entrepreneurs dispose of considerable network power, before gradually developing a collective identity and exhibiting strategic agency via their individual networks on the one hand, and uncoordinated or partly-coordinated collective action to secure their group-specific interests on the other.
- iv. While party building has facilitated the CCP's presence in private businesses, its gains has been in quantity and not in quality. Additionally, some of the party's branches also show signs of morphing into 'family clubs' for owners, with the former not playing any substantial roles in the operations of private enterprises.
- v. There is a growing but diversifying civil society in China, in terms of origins, background, working experiences, organisational scope, social networks, and linkages with the state and public intellectuals. And there appears to be a nascent collective social identity emerging — with a value neutral collective label — that reflects activist pragmatism.
- vi. The promotion of faith-based charities in China has augmented the public profile of religion, and legitimised religion as a social force. Significantly, it may have also served as a platform to facilitate its infusion into the practices of the atheist authoritarian party-state.
- vii. In ethnic minority regions (particularly Xinjiang), tension is rising both between state and society, but also within the society across fault lines. The transformation of Bintuan is meant by Beijing to strengthen its control of stability, but the implementation process will be shaped by its own institutional history.
- viii. Private wealth is accumulating in rural China as a result of continuous economic growth and reform. However, whether such wealth will bring in social autonomy to small villages and create socially rooted public goods remains to be seen. Complex power negotiations, as well as socio-cultural innovations, take place during the process of building up private welfare funds in rural areas.

SESSION 1: STATE NARRATIVES AND MEGA REFORMS

1.1 INNOVATION AGAINST REVOLUTION: THE MAP OF LOCAL POLICY INNOVATIONS IN CHINA



Associate Professor Chen Xuelian provided a preliminary study into how local innovation works, and sought the following answers to locating the sources of authoritarian resilience; determining if actors are central or local; and whether the logic of reform was bottom-up or top-down. Regarding responsiveness to the public, the central authorities are perceived by the local polity as “friendly”, while local officials are seen as “hostile” and equated with corruption, lack of capability and inefficient. Assoc Prof Chen also noted that local reforms do exist and will have an impact on the legitimacy of local authorities as well as the overall legitimacy of the CCP regime.

Based on her research of 1,024 cases pertaining to local government innovations across the whole of China from the 1990s to 2013, Assoc Prof Chen makes 4 hypotheses:

(i) the provision of incentives for local innovations by the central authorities has become significant since 2004; (ii) developed regions such as China’s coastal regions and Sichuan exhibit a greater preference for more innovation; (iii) there has been greater innovation for better performance in terms of innovation types including social participation in policymaking; and (iv) under the category of geographical distribution, there are no signs of “contagion effects” and are done in their own interests. Assoc Prof Chen concluded that the incentives for local innovations arise more from local pressure; that the developed coastal provinces in China’s east as well as Sichuan prefer further innovation. Innovation serves to promote greater stability in governance and unlike in the U.S., contagion effects do not exist in China.

SESSION 1: STATE NARRATIVES AND MEGA REFORMS

1.2 THE NEW “MASS LINE” AND REGIME RESPONSIVENESS



Dr Alexander Korolev adopted a non-ideological approach towards studying the new “mass line” used by the new CCP leadership, focusing on regime responsiveness, technical and non-ideological forms of the mass line, and “public participation”. His research examined two case studies pertaining to China’s “New Healthcare Reform” and the underpinnings of the 12th Five-year Plan. He sought to answer how mass line tactics work in the modern context, whether they enhance the CCP’s regime responsiveness and their potential in making China more democratic. With state responsiveness being the main characteristic of a substantive democracy, Dr Korolev’s paper looked into the regime’s responsiveness to societal concerns in the area of rising healthcare costs in China starting from 2002 — when the share of government expenditure first increased — up to 2009, when the country began its Comprehensive Healthcare Reform [*quanmin yibao* 全民医保]. Then pointing to the stages in China’s healthcare reform that culminated in the New Healthcare Reform [*xin yiliao gaige* 新医疗改革], Dr Korolev also illustrated the mass line tactics at work in engaging the masses. In particular, he noted that the mobilised participation of different social groups was the key characteristic of the policymaking process, alongside discussions at the ministerial, inter-ministerial and elite levels of the Chinese government. Referring to an officially-approved website [*qunzhong luxian wang* 群众路线网] that determines whether the various expressions of the mass line are permissible, Dr Korolev argued that the mass line movement has reappeared under Xi Jinping as a means of public policymaking. Sharing Hu Jintao’s view

at the 4th Conference of the 16th Party Congress, Xi has voiced his support for “building systems and mechanisms to encourage CCP members to interact with the public and guarantee the Party’s mass line principle”. Ideally, this would entail a strong emphasis on strengthening links with the masses and promoting consensus building, as well as providing a platform for an iterative process of interest articulation and interest aggregation.

Nonetheless, Dr Korolev observed there are inherent flaws in this type of political participation. He mentioned that it remains the prerogative of the government to influence the attempts of the citizenry, despite the fact that these methods emphasise citizens’ rights in shaping public affairs. Due to problems in terms of both resources and incentives, participation is therefore unequal. While agreeing that “mobilised participation” in China has essentially been initiated by policymakers, Dr Korolev also noted that officials — who have been compelled to interact with the poor and the vulnerable — would in effect also provide the people with more opportunities to participate in policymaking. Dr Korolev concluded that theoretically, the new mass line and traditional participation complement each other and could generate a stronger cause for regime change than either of them individually. Most crucially, perhaps, the development could also have spillover effects beyond the health sector. In Dr Korolev’s opinion, should the authorities be able to stave off out-of-control costs, they would then be more willing to attempt the same in other areas of social policymaking.

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1.3 THE SOCIAL STABILITY DEBATE: PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF PARTY RHETORIC



In his paper, **Assistant Professor Christoph Steinhardt** studied how the nature of protests has changed over time in China. With reference to Migdal's (2001) master narrative of the state and della Porta's (1999) "protest discourse", his research also looked into how proliferating protests have affected the "master narrative" of the state; and how intellectual criticisms of the regime have intensified under the reign of Hu Jintao. Asst Prof Steinhardt proffers that the study provides an avenue to understanding the changes in contemporary Chinese political discourse.

Using the example of how authoritative texts form "discursive walls", he noted how the CCP has engaged in increased discursive accommodation since the 1990s, with some protests having turned from non-issues to matters that could be publicly debated. Additionally, the Communist regime has appeared to co-opt mass incidents

by describing these as promoting social stability. Apart from the CCP's stability narrative, it has also elicited its repertoire of contention. In light of an expanding circle of intellectuals growing more critical of state policy, Steinhardt noted that there has been a concomitant intensification of the repression on intellectuals, as well as media workers, since 2013. Moreover, the criticism directed at the authorities has possibly also affected or inspired the regime's policy and institutional adjustments, its methods of legitimization and the masses' protest repertoire.

Pointing out that his research is drawn from evidence of the CCP leadership's authoritative pronouncements, media coverage of the major protests, intellectual commentary in Chinese print media; interviews and the Internet, Asst Prof Steinhardt noted that his paper is an effort in understanding change in political discourse. Noting that discourse

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participants would seek opportunities to advance their favoured positions, despite the fact that the public sphere provides better conditions for certain arguments, Steinhardt nonetheless sought to identify the critical elements of “discursive opportunity” and their transformation.

In conclusion, Asst Prof Steinhardt affirmed that intellectuals had played a critical role in transforming unorganised popular pressure into critical policy debates. While the CCP tolerates or facilitates critique at times, the fact that China was approaching a fundamental ideological crisis in the late-Hu era has meant that it was crucial for Xi to clamp down on the party’s critics. Questioning whether the environment of criticism in China was still tolerant, and how so, Asst Prof Steinhardt nevertheless acknowledged that as long as the CCP leadership sympathises with protesters on the one hand, while outlawing their behaviour on the other, points of contention will remain.

DISCUSSION

With reference to the commonly-used framework to study civil society in China, Dr Zheng Yongnian listed three models: (i) central versus local; (ii) organised versus spontaneous; and (iii) state versus society. He pointed out that the concepts have to be handled with care and indicated that the state and society have to be disaggregated. On the question of defining the Chinese system where governance innovation is concerned, he noted that across the different periods in Chinese history, space for local innovation is always available within both the central and local (gentry) settings, as well as in the spaces in the central-local dichotomy. Dr Zheng also reminded the audience that that innovation can both be useful but repressive and that mass movements in China have been unsustainable.

On how to view Chinese politics, Professor Jing Yuejin noted that it is constantly evolving, with the implication that scholars’ assessments and understanding will have to be reshaped along with it. To date, that evaluation has been of a responsive nature [*huiyingxing* 回应性]. This is further complicated by the differences between the Western and Chinese assessments of Chinese politics being at

different levels (e.g. difference in moral judgments). While Prof Jing also expressed doubts with Xi Jinping’s idea of the Three Confidences [*sange zixin* 三个自信], she nevertheless noted that “Chinese political involvement” can have applications in the West. In some way, Mao’s mass line was liberating, and has evolved and adapted over time and sustained itself, due to the input of the masses. In other words, the mass line — along with other CCP policies — has been conceptualised and implemented with the people’s interests in mind. Prof Jing did agree with the structural flaw of the mass line that it is always effected from the top-down. He added that the leaders are active whereas the masses are passive recipients, with the result being leaders decide where and how mass lines are carried out. These actions reflect the CCP’s claims that it is the only entity that understands the nation’s interest and societal concerns.

On the question why authorities empathise with the people, Prof Jing emphasised that statistics have shown that 80 per cent of the social redresses put forward to the authorities [*shangfang* 上访] have proven legitimate. In the 1990s, central and local authorities began to split as the central authorities continued to monopolise resources. This led to an increase in the cases of redress at the local levels. In short, this demonstrated that problems at the local level have their roots in the policies of the central government. Therefore, the central authorities empathise with the local authorities.

On the subject of structural changes, when the CCP allows and disallows criticisms will depend on the changes in the domestic and international political environments. It remains a social paradox, though, that China has been slow (usually 3 to 5 years) in responding to new developments, with the increase in the new social media, for example, leading to heightened public criticisms of the CCP.

Another participant queried the use of the term “innovation”. Suggesting that it was a confusing term that officials use to legitimise their own interests, he wondered if there was a definition for it. Further, he wanted to find out how local authorities have responded to central policies and whether innovation leads to positive results, and who it favours.

SESSION 2: THE STATE, THE (NEW) RICH AND THE POOR IN RURAL CHINA

2.1 THE EVOLVING STATE-BUSINESS NEXUS IN CHINA'S LOCAL STATE: APPROACHING A NEW ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK



Professor Gunter Schubert noted in his joint paper with Thomas Heberer that private entrepreneurs are becoming more important for China's policy implementation. Prof Schubert believes that private entrepreneurs' role and political agency must be revisited. It is important to replace the current portrayal of private entrepreneurs as "domesticated" and "atomised" regime supporters who are on the trajectory of becoming, and partly acting as a "strategic group" in China's political system. Prof Schubert noted that his objective to investigate how private entrepreneurs secure their group-specific interests, and by implication, how they partake of the on-going process of policy reform and institutional change. Prof Schubert also added that private entrepreneurs have developed a collective identity and act strategically. In his analysis, he substantiates the hypothesis that private entrepreneurs constitute a separate group in contemporary China, although they do not gain political influence at the expense of Chinese party state elites.

Citing observations from his recent fieldwork, he noted that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have remained highly dependent on local authorities to access much needed resources. Local governments also know that they are dependent on the success of their private entrepreneurs, who form part of their "regime coalition". The complexity and scope of such networks increase proportionately with higher stakes involved. A recent development within these networks has been the establishment of private clubs and alumni networks in

which members of former MBA classes gather on a regular basis to socialise, and to exchange business information. Such collective action has increased the significance of political lobbying, with some of these networks formed between business entities and local CCP party congresses and political consultative committees jointly pushing for policy reform. As such, the sum of informal, non-organised and non-coordinated actions across space and time protects and expands entrepreneurial group interests and strengthens the collective identity of private entrepreneurs. On their collective identity, Prof Schubert noted that these private businessmen are status-conscious since status equates to social capital and political capital. However, he added that they do not yet display unity in their assessment of being, or feeling, inter-connected among themselves. In other words, these entrepreneurs emphasise their lack of common identity and *esprit d'corps* [*tuanjiegan* 团结感]. Still, social heterogeneity and social constituency decrease and coordinated actions gain in significance, and form an entrepreneurial elite '*an sich*'.

Concluding his presentation, Prof Schubert pointed out that the findings suggest that private entrepreneurs dispose of considerable network power, before gradually developing a collective identity and exhibiting strategic agency via their individual networks on the one hand, and uncoordinated or partly-coordinated collective action to secure their group-specific interests on the other. He added that they are also continuously strengthening their relative power position vis-à-vis the party state bureaucracy in the existing

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regime coalition without intending to challenge the latter. Pointing out the inadequacy of “organisational clientelism” as a concept to explain the government-business nexus

in China, Prof Schubert proposed that the phenomena of entrepreneurs gaining influence in policymaking of the state is akin to a realignment within the current regime coalition.

2.2 NAVIGATING THE UNKNOWN WATERS: THE CCP'S NEW PRESENCE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR



In his joint paper with Huang Jie, **Associate Professor Yan Xiaojun** cited the example of the U.S. Congress investigation into the two wholly private enterprises, Huawei and ZTE, in 2012 regarding the possible involvement of the CCP within these companies. Assoc Prof Yan noted that in reality, the CCP has been struggling to extend its organisational presence in the private enterprises in China in “a comprehensive manner [*quanmian fugai* 全面覆盖]” despite the fact that the private businesses with party branches have become more common. His analysis of the party building campaign in Anhui province aims to address the intellectual gap regarding the overlooking of the CCP’s attempt to gain more systematic and organisational control over the private sector.

Assoc Prof Yan then shared that the proportion of private sector businesses with party branches had risen from 0.9 per cent in 1998 to 35 per cent in 2012. From the late 1980s when China began its economic opening-up, the CCP has also built its presence starting with foreign enterprises, before moving into the entire private economic sector, before developing its comprehensive coverage scheme with its “Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Party Building in Non-publicly-owned Enterprises” since 2012. Towards that end, the CCP has set up special agencies and dispatched a team of more than 10,000 party building instructors reminiscent

of the CCP’s traditional “working team”. Alongside these developments, the party-state has also continued its recruitment of private entrepreneurs into the CCP and de-politicised its branches by refashioning them as strong, business-oriented entities that seek to protect workers’ legal rights and look after their welfare.

Nevertheless, while such business-oriented party building has facilitated the CCP’s presence in private businesses, Assoc Prof Yan highlighted that its gains have been in quantity and not in quality. Further, some of the party’s branches also show signs of morphing into “family clubs” for owners, with the former not playing any substantial roles in the operations of private enterprises. Eliciting the theories of “clientelism”, the “corporatist” theory in which the officially endorsed business associations serve as “bridges” between the CCP and the private sector. Besides, the “cooptive” theory that CCP’s inclusive strategies have resulted in the integration of China’s economic wealth and political power, Assoc Prof Yan concluded that the CCP has resorted to tried and tested approaches of party building to create institutional links in order to strengthen its grip over the new economic sector and associated social groups. Still, he noted that the CCP’s business-oriented party building efforts have been more beneficial to private entrepreneurs than to itself.

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2.3 FACE FUNDS: THE POLITICS OF PHILANTHROPY IN RURAL CHINA



Dr Tom Cliff's research looked into the study of “face” as a resource, and shared that under CCP rule, formal registration of philanthropic funds is important. He also highlighted the significance of whether these funds are donation-based or loan-based. He added that most of the philanthropic funds in China are not legal under the country’s constitution, despite the fact that these are registered with the relevant government bureaus.

Dr Cliff pointed out that in his research conducted in Botian Village, the amount of welfare payments for the elderly ranges from 100 RMB to 400 RMB monthly per person. Meanwhile, scholarships for students attending tertiary schools start from 1,000 RMB for entry into a third-level university, and increases to 10,000 RMB for admission into a top-level university. In Fangdi Village, on the other hand, Dr Cliff shared that the president of another fund had informed him that contributors to the

local fund could either withdraw their money, or continue to commit it if they choose to. However, due to concerns over losing face, there is little inclination to withdraw financial support. However, Dr Cliff noted that under the conditions established by the government and local communities, that there was competition between them. Nevertheless, the authorities are restricted to merely receiving donations, and not lending the sum to earn interest.

Dr Cliff concluded his speech by noting that the phenomena demonstrated a reorientation of the CCP’s legitimacy. Observing that it was secondary that funds flouted regulations, he reminded the audience that this was a significant development in view of the fact that such an act forms an implicit contestation towards the CCP party-state. In addition, such self-help movements also undermine the legitimacy of the CCP.

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DISCUSSION

Associate Professor Forrest Zhang shared Schubert's assertion that a reevaluation of the nexus of state-business phenomena is in order. He inquired about the possibility and extent of internal cohesion within the entrepreneurial class as a strategic group. Pointing to the differences in quotas between big businesses, which are likely to be more strategic, and small enterprises, Assoc Prof Zhang drew attention to how Chinese authorities' relationships with big and small businesses would differ. At the same time, the term "strategic" also requires clarification along the dimensions of whether they are considered long-term, classified as political action, and if they serve collective interests. Alignment between these three aspects, in Assoc Prof Zhang's opinion, can qualify the collective motives of the entrepreneurs as strategic. In response to the discussant's questions and comments, a speaker reasoned that on the issue of conceptualising big and small businesses, when collective groups of businessmen of "big" enterprises fight for their own interests, they are to some extent fighting for the owners of "small" businesses under them. To some extent, there have been some instances of uncoordinated collective action. Schubert also pointed out that despite the fact that lobbying cannot be measured, a major point would still be to identify the reasons that bring these strategic actors together to act. On the other hand, the entry of CCP representatives into businesses could also be a compromise by businessmen and an exchange of business-state interests as this gives them status and shows deference. To be sure, party representatives do nothing within enterprises.

Professor Margaret Pearson noted that it was important to spell out the legal basis with regard to the positioning of the CCP's representatives in private businesses, as such behaviour might lead to legal and moral hazards. She added that it would also be crucial to spell out the nature of the party's influence in the latter, and especially with regard to their roles in main business decision-making pertaining to the degree and nature of influence they exercise. In particular, she was keen to know whether these representatives could decide the management of business funds, or were simply serving as placeholders within the organisation. A speaker responded by admitting that the effect of party-building is difficult to measure. On the forced presence of the CCP cells in his study of Anhui, he opined that these cells are not doing anything. After 2013, some private entrepreneurs have also become opportunistic and the CCP had to deal with them. Prof Pearson added that that local guild-based philanthropy had been in existence during the late-Qing and Republican eras. She also asked whether it was feasible through "experimental altruism" to determine if philanthropy is altruistic, or prompted by self-interests.

Another participant pointed out that those businessmen who have recently established operations did not exhibit any interest in joining the CCP or the government. It was only when their operations grew to a considerable size that they began to express curiosity, probably to secure their business interests. In recent years, the establishment of foundation funds has emerged, which she sees as an upshot of businessmen wanting to resist the advances of local parties to request for financial resources. In particular, the identification of personnel responsible for the different roles in business entities, is crucial.

SESSION 3: THE DISSIDENT — ON THE MARGIN, OR IN THE CENTRE OF THE STORM?

3.1 RELIGIOUS CHARITIES AND GOVERNANCE



In **Professor Susan McCarthy's** analysis of the CCP's increasing interest to tap on religious resources, she noted that the CCP's promotion of faith-based charity has been effected to model, public-minded behaviour as well as "govern" and guide religious behaviour. At the same time, it also attempts to encourage "secularised" religiosity, while lightening the level of public welfare burden.

Revealing policy variability as well as local interests and identities, Prof McCarthy shared that official actors are only partly agents of the party-state's "principal". In the interest of the faith-based charities, the practice of their religions is also encouraged, although secular sites and activities are "repurposed". Still, Prof McCarthy pointed out that there is variability in the utilisation of religion across China's regions.

Prof McCarthy cited the example of the Gansu Ethnic Minority Cultural Enhancement Plan (GAMCEP, *Shaocuhui* 少促会) in Gansu that is headed by the province's former party secretary. She emphasised that despite the lack of clarity over its status — whether it is a Government-organised non-governmental organisation (GONGO), Party-organised non-governmental organisation (PONGO), or faith-based charity — it is clear that GAMCEP has clear government backing over its ceremonial proceedings and leadership. Regarding its focus on Islam and the local Muslim *Minzu* population, Prof McCarthy noted its

leadership in leading Islamic observances in the area such as the provision of social practices during Eid with aid from donors including the Kuwait Foundation and Zakat House. Importantly, GAMCEP tries to promote the positive aspects of Islam in China, as a counterweight to the negative effects of other forms of Islamic religiosity in the region.

On the other hand, Prof McCarthy also referred to the ad-hoc grassroots-based Gospel Rehab [*fuyin jiedu* 福音戒毒] in Yunnan which is run by six Christians. Despite its illicit methods of promoting Bible studies and evangelism, as well as the fact that it is an unregistered body, Prof McCarthy observed that the organisation has been tacitly tolerated by the local authorities — with the provincial Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) having provided a 200,000 RMB grant. Moreover, since 2006, its founders have also consulted with governments in Guangxi and Guangdong — thereby exhibiting a contagion effect. Still, a dilemma exists in the relationship between the charity and the authorities since one less addict equates to one more Christian, which is contrary to the CCP's Marxist ideals and goals. So far, however, local officials in Yunnan have appeared to put aside such ideological concerns.

In conclusion, Prof McCarthy discussed the issue of improvisational governance and its relationship to authoritarian resilience, which appears to have been

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weakened as a result of the latter's weakened capacity to act on local interests. Also, the pursuit of some regime goals (such as the containment of religion) is also at odds with the need to address social crises. Nevertheless, the promotion of faith-based charities has augmented the

public profile of religion, and legitimised religion as a social force. Significantly, it may have also served as a platform to facilitate its infusion into the practices of the atheist authoritarian party-state.

3.2. STATE BUILDING AND POLITICAL CONTENTION IN XINJIANG



On behalf of **Assistant Professor Wei Yingjie**, Associate Professor Wu Fengshi began the presentation by noting the new Chinese leadership's governance on Xinjiang. Referring to Xi Jinping's 2014 speech on the new dynamics in the restive region, Assoc Prof Wu informed the audience that the Bintuan - Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps [新疆生产建设兵团] — or XPCC for short — is not in it for the short term.

Regarding the XPCC's relationship to the central government, there exists direct linkages between the XPCC and Beijing, with the latter providing resources to the former. While the relationship suffered a downturn between 1975 and 1981, ties have improved since 1981. In particular, Asst Prof Wei's study focuses on

how the XPCC has transformed itself before and after the Xi Jinping era, particularly in light of the events in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 2009. At the same time, the study also focuses on reviewing how the XPCC can re-socialise itself with the local communities. During the initial Reform and Opening-up period, it was highlighted to the audience that during Hu Yaobang's reign of reform, many constituents of the XPCC had left, only to be replaced by new members.

Moving on from the preliminary findings, two questions arose. First, what is the impact of the XPCC's evolution on normal functioning cities in the region? Second, what is the effect on local Xinjiang communities?

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3.3 BECOMING ONE? EMERGING GROUP IDENTITY AND COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN CHINA



Associate Professor Wu Fengshi provided the research background with the introduction of the ideas of Gramsci, the ideational power of civil society, and the East-Central European experiences during the Cold War. She then related this concept to the study of the political relevance of civil society development in China. In particular, her research — conducted in 21 provinces over 24 months — aims to examine the inner collectivity of China's activist and non-governmental organisation (NGO) community and to examine whether there is some level of a shared sense of social belonging, an emergence of group identity, and converging socio-political consciousness. Largely drawn from surveys of activists and grassroots NGO staff in the developed regions of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, but also covering Yunnan, Guangxi, Zhejiang, Heilongjiang, Qinghai and Gansu, Assoc Prof Wu's fieldwork and qualitative research is largely based on interviews with civil society actors.

In terms of the demonstration of group identity and collection consciousness at the inter-personal level, her paper assessed the relationship with co-workers of their organisations; perception of others working in any NGO; the level of development of this common "social group" and whether there exists a collective identity among them. In summary, it was noted that there was weak consensus on what Assoc Prof Assoc Prof Wu referred to as "an identifiable and unified social force", with most of the

interviewees not entirely certain about the implications of their work. Although the interviewees considered themselves neither as "civil society" nor "an identifiable social force", there is an emerging group identity among all of them with their self-identity as individuals who provide a public interest good [*gongyi* 公益] whenever they introduced their work to those who may not be familiar with their profession. Assoc Prof Wu added that three main variables — the length of work, whether or not they were connected with other NGOs, and the belief that they were working in the public's interest — were all significant in how the interviewees articulated their identities.

Assoc Prof Wu concluded his presentation by pointing out there has been a growing but diversifying civil society in China, in terms of origins, background, working experiences, organisational scope, social networks, and linkages with the state and public intellectuals. Also, there appears to be a nascent collective social identity emerging — with a value neutral collective label — that reflects activist pragmatism. In particular, while a majority of the research participants agreed on the importance of political stability, they also displayed conscious desire for civil-political rights, democratic ideals, and the need to hold fair public elections. With more working experience, peer partnerships and participation in advocacy for the general public good, Assoc Prof Wu inferred that NGO staff could be expected to be less value neutral.

SESSION 3: THE DISSIDENT – ON THE MARGIN, OR IN THE CENTRE OF THE STORM?

DISCUSSION

Professor Zhang Jin explained that at the core of the study of the dynamics between Xinjiang and religion in the predominantly Muslim region is that of the *modus operandi* behind the Chinese government's management of those borderlands and the communities that reside in them. Reminding the audience of the military and economic functions of the XPCC, Prof Zhang pointed out that the organisation enjoys a high hierarchy within the Chinese political system, with its leaders ranked at the same level as the CCP's provincial officials. Within the political structure of Xinjiang, there are two provincial level units: the Xinjiang provincial government and the XPCC. While noting that the administration of Xinjiang has been important for the country's leaders since Qing imperial rule, Prof Zhang also shared with the audience that since the early days of the CCP's establishment, the Yan'an tradition of alleviating pressure on the local population regarding access to economic resources was carried over into Xinjiang by Wang Zhen. Wang had previously opened up more areas outside of Yan'an to alleviate the pressure caused by the Red Army. Such a practice was similarly used in Xinjiang. Paradoxically, at present, the current Han members of the XPCC population in Xinjiang are unhappy with their social status and financial situation.

On issues related to religion, Prof Zhang pointed out there has been an increase in the population of Chinese in both city and rural areas which are increasingly religious as seen by the growing number of family and underground churches. With respect to this phenomena, she noted that it could be due to the effects of growing affluence and people growing disillusioned with their lives; as well as economic migrants without hukou status turning to religion for support.

As to the development of faith-based charities in the local villages, Prof Zhang inquired about the NGOs that have been financed by the local authorities. This is an important question as faith-based organisations have gained prominence during national disasters such as the Wenchuan Earthquake, and resulted in the party-state becoming concerned that they could challenge their political leadership. To be sure, while the CCP does not mind these charities being involved in charitable activities, any political function will mean crossing the red line. Also, the CCP is concerned about the identities of those organising family churches as church administrators may play multiple roles other than running a faith-based society. In response, a speaker concurred that the CCP government is indeed concerned about the activities of faith-based organisations. Even if the state reorganises these bodies, how the latter frames religious needs could still be different from those of the government and distinctions between family churches and underground churches are not clear-cut.

A participant suggested the exploration of ideational similarities, and asked about the similarity of the NGOs in terms of their outlook and preferences, in short, whether they were *zhitong daohe* [志同道合]. Referring to the Chinese meaning of the word "public" [*gongyi* 公益], another participant added that civil society is private rather than public, with the implication that civil society works against the state. He also inquired if there were individuals in the survey group who work for the interest of the public, but do not identify their work as such. In response, a speaker noted that all organisational values would increase. At present though, the fact that Chinese civil societies appear disjointed has more to do with their lack of unified thinking, and less about not delivering social goods.

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Day 1
Friday, 8 January 2016

0815–0840hrs Registration

0840–0845hrs Welcome Remarks

Associate Professor Wu Fengshi
China Programme, IDSS, RSIS

0845–1045hrs Session I: State Narratives and Mega Reforms

Moderator:
Associate Professor Wu Fengshi
China Programme, IDSS, RSIS

Paper 1: Mapping Policy Innovation

Presenter:
Associate Professor Chen Xuelian
*Associate Researcher, Vice Director,
Center for Comparative Politics and
Economics, China Central Compilation and
Translation Bureau*

Discussant:
Professor Zheng Yongnian
Director, EAI, National University of Singapore

**Paper 2: New “Mass Line”,
Participation and Regime
Responsiveness**

Presenter:
Dr Alexander Korolev
*Research Fellow, Centre on Asia and
Globalization, National University
of Singapore*

Discussant:
Professor Jing Yuejin
*Vice Chair, Department of Politics,
Tsinghua University, China*

**Paper 3: Pushing the Boundaries of
Party Rhetoric**

Presenter:
**Assistant Professor
Christoph Steinhardt**
*Assistant Professor, Centre for China Studies,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

Discussant:
Professor Jing Yuejin
*Vice Chair, Department of Politics,
Tsinghua University, China*

1045–1115hrs Coffee Break

**1115–1315hrs Session II: The State,
the (New) Rich and the Poor
in Rural China**

Moderator:
Associate Professor Li Mingjiang
Coordinator of China Programme, IDSS, RSIS

**Paper 1: The Evolving State-Business
Nexus in China’s Local State**

Presenter:
Professor Gunter Schubert
Tuebingen University

Discussant:
Associate Professor Forrest Zhang
Singapore Management University

**Paper 2: The Party-state and
Private Entrepreneurs**

Presenter:
Associate Professor Yan Xiaojun
The University of Hong Kong

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Discussant:

Professor Margaret Pearson

Department of Government & Politics,

University of Maryland

Paper 3: “Face Funds”: Politics of Non-State Social Welfare and Philanthropy

Presenter:

Dr Tom Cliff

Research Fellow, The Australian

National University

Discussant:

Professor Margaret Pearson

Department of Government & Politics,

University of Maryland

1330–1500hrs Lunch

1500–1700hrs **Session III: The Dissident — on the Margin, or in the Centre of the Storm?**

Moderator:

Associate Professor Chen Xuelian

Associate Researcher, Vice Director,

Center for Comparative Politics and Economics, China Central Compilation and Translation Bureau

Paper 1: Religious Charities and Governance

Presenter:

Professor Susan McCarthy

Department of Political Science,

Providence College

Discussant:

Professor Zhang Jing

Department of Sociology, Beijing University

Paper 2: State Building and Political Contention in Xinjiang

Presenter:

Assistant Professor Wei Yingjie

School of Public and International Affairs,

Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Discussant:

Professor Zhang Jing

Department of Sociology, Beijing University

Paper 3: Group Identity and Collective Consciousness among Civil Society Actors

Presenter:

Associate Professor Wu Fengshi

China Programme, IDSS, RSIS

Discussant:

Professor Zhao Suisheng

University of Denver

1830hrs Welcome Dinner

Day 2 Saturday, 9 January 2016

1000–1200hrs Roundtable: Review of the Workshop and Publication Plans

1800hrs Farewell Dinner

BIOGRAPHIES

(In alphabetical order according to given names)

Associate Professor Chen Xuelian
Director, Department of Comparative Centre for
Comparative Politics and Economics
China Central Compilation and Translation Bureau

Xuelian Chen is Associate Professor and Director of the Political Development Research Institute of Central Compilation & Translation Bureau (Beijing). She specialised in policy innovation and China local politics. Her most recent publications include “E-participation and Opinion Politics”, *Expanding Horizons* [Xin Shiye, 2015 (5). “Political Trust and Political Efficacy of Local Officials in China”, *Social Science*, 2013 (11). *Government Governance*, Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2015, and *Efficient Government*, Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2014.

Dr Tom Cliff
Research Fellow
Australian National University

Tom is an anthropologist and Laureate Fellowship Postdoctoral Research Associate working on “Informal Life Politics” in Northeast Asia. The project is based at the Australian National University. Informal Life Politics involves people organising themselves to protect their health and livelihood from threats that may emanate from state action or the lack of state action. Specifically, Tom is looking at the role of the informal institutions of family and enterprise in creating and contesting welfare categories, largely in response to economic uncertainty, social anomie, and the perception of corruption in China. Tom’s book, *Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang*, will be published by The University of Chicago Press in Spring 2016.

Professor Jing Yuejin
Vice Chair, Department of Political Science
Tsinghua University

Jing Yuejin graduated from Hangzhou University (it later merged into Zhejiang University in 1998) in spring 1982 with Bachelor Degree in Philosophy. He moved to Nankai University in 1984 to study Sociology at Tianjin. From 1986 to 2008, he taught at Renmin University from an Assistant Professor to Full Professor, while his research interests shifted from Sociology to Public Administration and Political Science. In 2004, he got his PhD degree in Political Science, and in the following year he participated in the Fulbright visiting scholar program at Columbia University. In 2009, he moved to Tsinghua University, and currently holds the position of Professor in Political Science Department. In recent years, Mr. Jing’s research has focused on contemporary Chinese politics. His research interests cover state-society relations, bureaucratic politics, and evolution of the Party-State since 1978, etc. He has published a number of books, including *Contemporary Chinese Government and Politics* (2015 Chief Editor), *Introduction to Political Science* (2010, Chief Editor), *On the Relations between Village Committees and Party Branches in Rural China* (2004), *The Transformation of Political Space in Contemporary China* (2004), *Introduction to Comparative Politics* (2001, co-author).

BIOGRAPHIES

(In alphabetical order according to given names)

Dr Alexander Korolev

**Research Fellow, Centre on Asia and Globalization
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National
University Of Singapore**

Dr. Alexander Korolev is a Research Fellow at the Centre on Asia and Globalization, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. His research interests include international relations theory and comparative politics with special reference to China and Russia. He received MA in International Relations from Nankai University, Zhou Enlai School of Government (2009), and PhD in Political Science from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2012). He was a visiting researcher at the Political Science Department of Brown University (2011-2012). He has recently published an edited volume *International Cooperation in the Development of Russia's Far East and Siberia* (Palgrave, 2015), and several journal articles in *International Studies Review*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Critical Review*, *Studies in Comparative International Development*.

Professor Susan McCarthy

**Professor of Political Science
Providence College**

Susan McCarthy is Professor of Political Science at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley in 2001. Her research addresses the politics of ethnicity and religion in contemporary China, and the intersections of ethnic and religious revival with Chinese economic development. Publications include *Communist Multiculturalism: Ethnic Revival in Southwest China* (University of Washington, 2009). Her current research focuses on contemporary Chinese religious charity, and the ways in which faith-based charity and social service facilitate religious identity and expression despite limits to these imposed by the Chinese party-state.

Professor Margaret Pearson

**Professor of Government and Politics
University of Maryland, College Park**

Margaret M. Pearson is Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her research focuses on China's domestic political economy and Chinese foreign economic policy. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Yale University and was tenured at Dartmouth College before moving to UMCP in 1996. Her publications include the books *Joint Ventures in the People's Republic of China* (Princeton Press, 1991) and *China's New Business Elite: The Political Results of Economic Reform* (University of California Press, 1997), as well as articles in *World Politics*, *The China Journal*, *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, and *Review of International Political Economy*. Her on-going research on China's domestic economy includes state control of the economy, central-local relations, innovation in Chinese firms, Chinese regulatory institutions and, most recently, Chinese bureaucratic behaviour. On Chinese foreign policy, Pearson's on-going projects include determinants of the PRC's behaviour in global institutions. She teaches courses on Chinese domestic politics and foreign policy, and on comparative politics. She has held a Fulbright Research Fellowship at Beijing University.

BIOGRAPHIES

(In alphabetical order according to given names)

Professor Gunter Schubert

**Chair Professor of Greater China Studies, Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies
University of Tübingen**

Gunter Schubert, PhD, is Professor of Greater China Studies at the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies (AOI), University of Tübingen. He is also the founder and director of the European Research Center on Contemporary Taiwan (ERCCT) at this university. His current research focuses on China's local political economy and local policy implementation, the evolution of state-business relations, Taiwan's domestic politics, cross-strait relations, Taiwanese entrepreneurs operating on the Chinese mainland and the theoretical implications of research on regime legitimacy. Recent publications include *Taiwan and the 'China Impact': Challenges and Opportunities* (edited), London-New York: Routledge, 2015; *Participation and Empowerment at the Grassroots — Chinese Village Elections in Perspective*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013 (co-authored by Anna L. Ahlers); *Taiwanese Identity in the 21st Century. Domestic, regional and global perspectives*, London-New York: Routledge, 2011 (co-edited by Jens Damm).

He holds the Chair of Greater China Studies at Tübingen University's Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies. He is an internationally renowned expert on the political systems of the PRC and Taiwan. He has published extensively on PRC local governance and policy implementation, Taiwanese domestic politics, Taiwanese entrepreneurs in mainland China. One of his current research projects investigates the changing relationship between local Chinese governments and domestic private entrepreneurs.

Assistant Professor Christoph Steinhardt

**Centre for China Studies
Chinese University of Hong Kong**

H. Christoph Steinhardt is a Political Scientist and Assistant Professor at the Centre for China Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research focuses on contentious politics, political communication, as well as social and political trust in China. His writing has appeared or will appear in journals such as *The China Journal*, *Asian Studies Review*, *Modern China* and *Political Studies*.

Assistant Professor Wei Yingjie

**School of Public and International Affairs
Shanghai Jiao Tong University**

Wei Yingjie is Assistant Professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. He received BA and MA from Lanzhou University and PhD from Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research focuses on state building and ethnic politics in China, especially in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. His current research is mainly about political violence, including strategies of terrorism and endogenous dynamics in civil war.

BIOGRAPHIES

(In alphabetical order according to given names)

Associate Professor Wu Fengshi
China Programme, Institute of Defence
and Strategic Studies
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Fengshi Wu (BA from Peking University, PhD from University of Maryland), Associate Professor, is specialised in social forces in global politics and governance, environmental politics, and political transition in China. She is a leading expert on China's environmental politics, social activism and civil society. Before joining RSIS, she taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and was visiting fellow at Harvard-Yenching Institute (2008-09). She was among the inaugural class of graduate fellows of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences (2004). She has published in *International Studies Quarterly*, *The China Journal*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Issues and Studies*, *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, *VOLUNTAS*, *China Perspectives*, *Journal of Chinese Political Science* and other academic journals. She is on the Editorial Boards of *Global Environmental Politics* and *China Review*. Dr Wu has recently completed a Routledge edited volume *China's Global Quest for Resource: Energy, Food and Water*.

Associate Professor Yan Xiaojun
Department of Political Science
University of Hong Kong

Yan Xiaojun is Associate Professor of Politics and Public Administration at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). He obtained his Bachelor of Law (International Politics) and Master of Law (International Politics) degrees from Peking University and an A.M. and Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University. He is a comparative political scientist with special expertise in the politics of China. His research interests evolve around political development, authoritarianism, democratisation, local government, contentious politics, comparative historical study of revolution, and the Chinese reforms. In 2012, he received an Early Career Scheme Grant from the Research Grants Council of HKSAR to support his research on local government reforms in the People's Republic of China. He is awarded the 2012 Gordon White Prize by the China Quarterly for his article entitled "‘To Get Rich Is Not Only Glorious’: Economic Reform and the New Entrepreneurial Party Secretaries" (*The China Quarterly*, June 2012, No. 210). Recipient of a Harvard University Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (2007), he is a member of HKU's Common Core Curriculum Committee and an Area of Inquiry Leader from 2013 to 2015. He is a recipient of HKU's Outstanding Teaching Award (2013).

BIOGRAPHIES

(In alphabetical order according to given names)

Associate Professor Forrest Zhang Qian
School of Social Sciences
Singapore Management University

Associate Professor Qian Forrest Zhang has served on the faculty of School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University since 2005. He completed his undergraduate training at Fudan University in Shanghai in 1995 and obtained a PhD in sociology from Yale University in 2004. His research focuses on China's agrarian political economy but extends to a wide range of other issues in contemporary China, including self-employment, stratification and inequality, social mobility, and family relations. His works have been published in scholarly journals such as *The China Quarterly*, *The China Journal*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *World Development*, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, *Sociology*, *Geoforum*, and *Politics & Society*. He is on the editorial board of *Journal of Agrarian Change* and guest-edited a special issue on Agrarian Change in Contemporary China for that journal in July 2015.

Professor Zhang Jing
Department of Sociology
Beijing University

Zhang Jing is a Professor at Department of Sociology and a Researcher in the Center for Civil Society Studies at Beijing University. Her research fields include Political Sociology, Transition of Chinese Society. Her published books: *The Unit of Organized Interests* (2001), *Problems of Rural Governance in China* (2000, 2006 editions), *Corporatism* (2001, 2005, 2015 editions), *The Public rule in Rural China* (2006), *The State and Society in China* (editor, 1999), *Citizen Status Identity: Idea, Attitude, Certification* (editor, 2006), *Civic Justice in Transitional China* (editor, 2008), *Structural Source of Social Conflict* (2012).

Professor Zhao Suisheng
Director, Center for China-US Cooperation
Josef Korbel School of International Studies,
University of Denver

Zhao Suisheng is Professor and Director of the Center for China-US Cooperation at Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver and founder and editor of the *Journal of Contemporary China*. Formerly Associate Professor of Political Science and International Studies at Washington College in Maryland, a Campbell National Fellow at Hoover Institution of Stanford University, Associate Professor of Government and East Asian Politics at Colby College in Maine and visiting assistant professor at the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies (IR/PS) at University of California-San Diego, He received his PhD degree in political science from the University of California-San Diego, MA degree in Sociology from the University of Missouri and BA and M.A. degrees in economics from Peking University.

Professor Zheng Yongnian
Director
East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore

Zheng Yongnian is Professor and Director of East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. He is Editor of Series on Contemporary China (World Scientific Publishing) and Editor of China Policy Series (Routledge). He is also a co-editor of *China: An International Journal*. He has studied both China's transformation and its external relations. His papers have appeared in journals such as *Comparative Political Studies*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Third World Quarterly* and *China Quarterly*. He is the author of 13 books, including *Technological Empowerment*, *De Facto Federalism in China*, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China and Globalization and State Transformation in China*, and co-editor of 11 books on China's politics and society including the latest volume on *China and the New International Order* (2008).

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S. RAJARATNAM
SCHOOL OF
INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES

Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

Tel: +65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg