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CHINA'S RELIGIONS (RE)AWAKENING

AND THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON CHINESE SOCIETY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WILDER: Good afternoon. We're delighted to see you here at Brookings Institution. My name is Dennis Wilder. I'm a Visiting Fellow here at the John L. Thornton China Center. I was on the National Security Council for the last five years, but I'm delighted now to be in the academic world.

As you know, today's session is on the impact of religion in China. I must admit this is a subject that I was grateful to be able to moderate on because I think it's one of the more fascinating and understudied subjects in China today. Current state of religion in China is, of course, controversial. It is not even possible, I don't think, to get a real handle on how many believers there are in China. Chinese government holds that there are about 100 million believers, but there's a rather famous study that was done by a professor at Huadong Teachers University in 2005, where he did a study and believed that the number of believers may be 300 million in China, which, of course, would be triple the number that the Chinese government now suggests.

But whatever that figure may be, I think there's no question that there has been a religious reawakening in China and that faith-based organizations from all over the world are now actively engaged with Chinese believers in a variety of ways. I was particularly interested in the response of faith-based organizations to the Sichuan earthquake last year. There were many anecdotal stories of Christian groups and Buddhists groups going into the earthquake area and assisting the people. So there's no question that religion is having an impact in China. The

question is how great an impact, and we've tried to bring together today a group of eminent scholars, all of whom have studied different aspects of religion in China to share a few thoughts with us.

What I thought we'd do is give each of them about 10 or 15 minutes to give you a few opening remarks, and then we'll open the floor to discussion.

Let me first introduce to you Dr. Carol Hamrin, who is a Research Professor at George Mason University and a Senior Associate with the Global China Center in Charlottesville. Dr. Hamrin has extensive experience looking at culture and religion in China. In fact, she's just published a book that I recommend to all of you called *Salt and Light*. I had a chance to look at it this weekend, It's a book on Chinese Christians and the impact that these Christians had in the early 20th Century, and it is absolutely fascinating and some are really untold stories, and perhaps Dr. Hamrin will explain how she's doing some of this research.

She did so for I think 25 years in the State Department, doing some of the most innovative analysis there on these kinds of issues. And so let me hand it over to Carol to begin our discussion.

DR. HAMRIN: Thank you, Dennis. When Dennis contacted me and asked me to be here today, I said yes, immediately, and I was glad my calendar was free because once of the reasons why I left government in 2000 to do more research and writing was I thought that inside the beltway, we focus almost entirely on politics and economics in the U.S.-China relationship, and we really don't understand the depth and the creativity in unofficial U.S.-China ties of all kinds, social and cultural relations and the importance of that. So I've really learned a lot

in recent years and doing more research in that whole area. And so I was really glad that this seminar would open up the conversation of these topics.

I really have learned that the rebirth of civil society in China today includes religious organizations and their offshoots, various charitable, educational and medical institutions, and this shouldn't be surprising to anyone. These have always been a central part of American civil society since Tocqueville first looked at our civil society and discovered all these religious and faith-based organizations there. And they were a big part of the original development of China's early modern civil society 100 years ago, which I've been doing research on, and 10 Chinese that I've written about in this first book really were pioneers of the modern professions in China, started some of the first China-based offices for international NGOs as well as Chinese NGOs in China. So there is a legacy, there is a history, and that's why the title "Re-Awakening" is a good one to use here.

I thought I'd start by talking about the dynamics of this huge growth of religion in post-Mao China. You've all read different things about the numbers, but why is this happening is a big question on our minds. And what I've tried to do is view it as a broader, in a broader context. I see it as a result of social and cultural pluralization that has been an integral part of the economic reform and opening up of China.

In a sense, Chinese society has been outgrowing socialism in all fields despite the continued occupation of the high ground or the key points by the Party-state. And so just as there are private businesses in the economic market sector adding competitive pressures that help improve the state-owned sectors, so

there's a growing market for private and quasi-independent nonprofit associations again providing healthy competition for the large GONGOs, Government Organized NGOs, so that they're improving due to the competition with these other more independent groups.

Well, similarly, I think there is what you might call a religious market of private nongovernmental belief systems and independent spiritual communities which add healthy competition to the state authorized orthodoxy of socialist culture, and to the state-endorsed monopoly associations for the various religions. So in a sense, I would say that you could view these all as global markets. They're not just Chinese markets. There are international entities involved in all of these sectors, in the religious sector and social sector as well as in the economy.

So China, under globalization is going to continue to move in this direction of the recovery resurgence of civil society.

Dennis mentioned the debate about how many religious believers there are. This 100 million total that has been given out as the official number dates back to 1994, when the U.N. religious rapporteur visited China. That's one good argument for getting the religious rapporteur back to China. We'll get some more numbers that we can work with.

The Academy of Social Science Deputy Director of the Institute of Worlds Religion has now used these numbers from the survey in Shanghai that cites 300 million. So there's a growing officialdom for that number.

This would not include folk religion but rather the authorized five religions in China, and within this general number, probably the largest and fastest

growing group would be Buddhists and Protestant. And current guesstimates for the numbers of Protestants are 75-to-100 million with unregistered groups being three or four times the numbers in the official monopoly association for Protestants.

I'd say it's important to note that pluralism brings not only growth but competition, which can turn into conflicts, so this is not all a positive picture. There is conflict and competition within each religious group as there's a diversity of sects or denominations developing. There is conflicts or competition, healthy or not, between various groups. I think there's just one important reason for the state's attempt to continue to keep the numbers down and keep people in place, not allowing cross-provincial proselytize and so forth. They're very fearful of conflict between ethnic and religious groups. But for the most part, I think the trends we've seen in China so far have been healthy competition.

I mentioned some of the positive influences of Christians, Protestant Christians that I've studied, on society. Two decades ago the Chinese Protestant Church was made up of what people called "the women, the elderly, and the poor." They are the marginalized groups in society, but now there are Christians in every walk of life in every social stratum, and every profession. And what is now called the "emerging church" is made up of young, highly educated urban professionals, mostly Protestant and mostly Evangelical. They meet in small fellowship groups that are networked together for resources, including lay pastors.

They position themselves, though, not as underground but as open churches engaged with society. And, in fact, I think, with the increasing social and

geographic mobility in China, all the various wings of the Protestant Church are engaging more and more with society, and these religious organizations provide a sense of community belonging, mutual support for life's crises, and they also spur humanitarian efforts to fill major gaps in China's social services under capitalism such as schools and churches for migrant workers in the cities.

The most recent e-mail I got just before I came this morning was from a friend who recently met a blind man who was in bed for nearly two years with depression and physical ailments, but his Christian friends talked him into coming out of isolation, and he's now working on developing software to turn Chinese print into Braille.

She also visited a school run by Christians that provides therapy and education for autistic children and support for their parents. So these are kind of the gaps in society where people really are not getting state help and need help. And when I was advising on a project in China for training leaders of the NGOs, there were many of these kinds of small mom and pop mutual help associations springing up and getting training and getting foreign funding. So far these groups are not allowed to get domestic funding very easily.

Well, with this growing numbers and influence of religious organizations in China, there's been a major shift in society towards religion which I think explains a lot of the growth into the elites as well as marginal groups in society, and this starts with individuals and their families. I've heard of several people working in campus outreach groups here in the states who say that Chinese students arrive on campus having been told by their families to explore

religion while they're here and decide whether the family should become Buddhist or Christian. So there's an interest rather than an opposition to just kind of devolvement.

Retirees come from China to visit their families who are scholars or students here in the States and get baptized and go back to China within six months to join or start up new churches. The academic scholars who study religion are proliferating in number and sophistication and basically have exonerated the missionaries from the charge of cultural imperialism despite the official line which is still quite negative.

These are just examples of some of the influence on society. I've written a longer essay about this, which is on the AEI website under their Tocqueville in China Project, if you're interested.

Well, I would say that in turn, those kind of growth in numbers and influence by religious groups in China have prompted a gradual policy adaptation to reality. For most people it's too little too late or too slow, but there is change underway.

In the '80s, after failing to totally suppress religion during the Mao era, the Party returned to the 1950s Soviet model in policy and structure for dealing with religion. The goal remains to maintain state dominance over society and to bring about the eventual demise of religion, but there was a willingness to wait for what was thought to be the natural outcome of modernization that there would be no more religion once people were educated and scientific in their thinking, and had enough material resources.

The methods used for this opposed to religion were controlled by the United Front system at the top over key social groups to setting up monopoly associations in different functional systems, and so these groups which all belong to the People's -- Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference at various levels are the official monopoly associations for youth, Communist Youth League, for women, Women's Federation, for labor, the Trade Union Federation, the five patriotic religious associations, and then in many different kinds of professional associations for scientists and technology people, its China Association of Science and Technology. And then, of course, there are business and entrepreneur associations. And all of these were set up originally of kind of top-down command and control mechanisms under the residual Lenin system which still prevails in China.

I would say that this kind of approach, aesthetically in religion and labor affairs, is way behind the curve of opening up to foreign ties seen in other arenas. For example, missionaries are still liable to have cultural imperialists even as economic imperialists are welcome back to China, all the companies that used to do business in China for AIG to Standard Oil. There's a Standard Oil Museum now you can visit in China.

So control over the social sector is behind the curve in the economic sector in terms of revamping state-owned or state-organized institutions and welcoming private institutions and allowing more and more international exchange in these arenas. But still there has been a trend to open up society and culture as well.

In the '90s, for example, there was a major opening up of academic studies of religion. At first they were -- scholars were just supposed to study religion anywhere out there but China; they weren't allowed to talk about religion in China, but that's changing. There are internal surveys that have been done by Chinese scholars that I think will gradually be coming out so that we have more data to work with in understanding the situation in China.

There was also an opening up to both international and domestic faith-based organizations working in relief work, disaster relief and antipoverty work, especially in the southwest part of China under the Develop the West Program in the previous five-year plan where the focus was on poverty alleviation. So many, many international NGOs have the kind of work in China, and then spreads to other poverty areas of China, and these include faith-based organizations. One would be World Vision, for example, that has worked in China for decades, and also Christian organizations.

So when the earthquake happened, all these groups that showed up to help with the reconstruction and are still there helping with rebuilding, were local. I mean they were out there in the Southwest and had developed good relations with local authorities and were right on the ground. And they were also among the first responders.

Well, in the 2000s, there's been further adaptation by the state. First of all and most important in 2001, the new 10-year policy finally admitted religion is here to stay. It's part of any society, including Chinese society, including socialist society. And I think the policy since then has been developing toward what I would

call discrimination and competition with the civic and religious groups trying to make sure that the social sector serves state interests, so that people who are teaching atheism or spreading socialist culture have to compete with all these other groups with their own set of beliefs.

And there's been an opening up of social services because that's where the state can see religious groups can be most helpful to its own agenda, and I think, though, that this has been tempered by a focus on national security in a lot of sectors, but especially in the religious sector. Influence by September 11 which occurred -- 9/11 occurred right during the middle of this conference that was reviewing the previous 10 years in coming up with a new 10-year policy. So there's a special harsh treatment of ethnic minorities in the West, Northwest and Southwest who have religious culture -- Tibetans and Uyghurs most notably.

There is also a special repressive attention to anyone who tries to set up any sort of cross-provincial or national level association for religious groups that's outside the control of the state, and so some of the legal advocates who have been defending these groups, who set a national association of legal advocates, or the National House Church Alliance leader, the people who are setting up such organizations have come under tremendous abusive treatment as a result.

I would say that there's a possible rethinking of religious policy underway now. There are some signs of that. We can discuss it more later. It may be part of the natural 5-year/10-year planning process, which we're right in the middle of now, people putting together the next five-year and ten-year plans in

China for policies across the board.

Well, in the discussion area, I'd like to talk a little bit about the importance of paradigms in shaping policy of both the Chinese government and the U.S. government, but I don't have more time to go into that now. But I think there are some ways in which the U.S. media and academics and the government sort of reinforce a mindset in the Chinese government that thinks of religion as the exception to the rule, that the norm is kind of secular thinking. Religion is a left-over from a non-modern era, that modernity involves secularization rather than pluralization.

And I think sometimes we fit into that by asking about religious rites for ethnic minorities which the Chinese government sees as an exception to the rule which is most Chinese people are socialist and atheists, not religious believers. And recently I was encouraged by Secretary Clinton's statement before her trip to Asia calling for religious freedom for all Chinese, not just for, you know, certain groups in China.

I think another way we tend to reinforce the Chinese mindset is by politicizing religion so that the government, the media, academics in China tend to look at the political aspects of religion in China following an assumption that there's a contentious relationship, and that's the only relationship between state and propriety, or state and religion. And this provides evidence to the Chinese government that there is a hidden political agenda behind American support for religious groups in China.

I think it's very important to get a new paradigm that looks at religion

as a very natural and important part of civil society everywhere, in both countries and to come at it from a different angle.

I will stop there.

MR. WILDER: Great. Thank you, Carol. That was a tremendous overview to the subject. I'm sure you'll have questions for Carol, but if we can hold them and let our other speakers talk.

Our second speaker today is Dr. Tsering Shakya. He is a renowned Professor of Tibetan Studies at the University of British Columbia in Canada, so he's come a long way today to be with us, and we really appreciate that. He was born in Lhasa. He has his Ph.D. in Tibetan studies, and he's written numerous books on Tibet and Tibetan culture. In fact, his book *The Dragon in the Land of Snow* is regarded as a must read on the history of Modern Tibet.

Dr. Shakya?

DR. SHAKYA: Thank you. The previous speaker mentioned about the transition in China's policy towards religion and the status of religion in China. In China, there is what is called the orthodox consensus about religion. The phrase "orthodox consensus" was borrowed from Anthony Giddens, the British sociologist. In fact, both the Party and the Chinese intellectuals and among the educated Chinese -- their view about religion is to see religion as a negative influence left over from the past, something that has to be overcome if China is to become great or market economy. That obsession with modernity, makes them see religion as something of the past and something backwards, and something that has to be transcended.

So since the founding of PRC or since the May 4th movement, the Chinese people's struggle has been to overcome superstition, religion, and the past, and to create a modern China. So there's this orthodox consensus shared by many Chinese intellectuals like what is happening today. That sort of view is dominating Chinese public intellectual discussion and discourse. It places religion as something negative, something to be embarrassed about, something that has gone wrong in history that has to be overcome.

But nevertheless, religion is evidently still there. It hasn't been eradicated despite the attempts in the Cultural Revolution. And the religious propaganda still hasn't really worked. We don't know the exact numbers of religious followers in China, but there are a great many, and religion is resurfacing in the forefront of Chinese peoples' consciousness and thinking.

And if you look at China in the situation in Tibet, in Xinjiang, I think there's a different kind of reemergence of religion. When if you consider religion in Tibet or Xinjiang, I would say that the reemergence is related to the collective. It is part of the collective identity. It's not so much of an individual-based faith or private faith transition through finding private faith in religion. It is fundamentally with the collective identity.

When you look among the great majority of the Han community, the Chinese community, the revival of religion is actually very much a personal transition, both related to discovery of oneself, of

discovery of faith. That is a much more different experience than the ones in Tibet and Xinjiang..

When the religious reawakening is collective, it brings a different problem for the government, and it initiates a very different kind of government policy towards religion. So if you look at Tibet, this is also reflected in Xinjiang on a very broad level, since Deng Xiaoping, the reform period, there has been really a resurfacing religion to the forefront. It is inconceivable for Tibetans not to think themselves as Buddhists, and religion is such an important part of their identity and their total landscape. So what you see in Tibet, in the first decade of Deng Xiaoping's reform period, was what was called the Project of Resalvaging. That is to restore religion to where it was, because the destruction that suffered under the Cultural Revolution meant religion has to be archaeologically dug up and rebuilt.

So that meant the rebuilding of the monastery, and reprinting of religious texts. It's almost a collective will. So archaeologically, it's sort of bringing everything back to the surface and making it once more visible. And it is not just a question of Buddhism or religion, but it was seen as a very, very fundamental aspect of their identity and their land. So in this way religion was revived in Tibet. The whole religious revival was the revival of Tibet itself.

But you don't have that sort of similar trend, the sort of the

reemergence of Chinese Buddhism or reemergence of Christianity in China.

It wasn't seen as a same kind of collective or reassertion of Chinese or recreation of Chinese identity, Han identity, in China. The revival was much more over personal, groups and policies.

And in Tibet this collective identity basically became very problematic for the authority. Where the government's attitudes is to see, and to be willing to tolerate religion as something of a private experience. As long as individuals were willing to accept religion as a purely private and domesticated experience, the Party was willing to tolerate. And in Tibet, Tibetans no longer want to confine religion just to the private space or to the domestic sphere, they thought of religion as an expression of the collective.

And Tibetan Buddhism is not something that you pray privately, or something that can be done as individuals, purely based on private faith; it is a collective expression, as religion has to be collective. In the monastery, teaching and transmission of religious knowledge - it has to be collective; it's not just an individual faith.

Then another problem with the way the government saw religion -- as a private discovery -- is the fundamental issues of transmission of knowledge, authenticity and legitimacy. This was very problematic. How do you transmit religious knowledge? Who is authorized to teach religion? And who is sanctioned to bless and sanctify the religious teaching? So this was fundamentally a problem.

The Party sees itself as the legitimizing authority in terms of religion, religion is not legitimized by the followers. The followers do not legitimize the institutions organized by the Party.

So in Tibetan Buddhism, the transmission of knowledge is very important. It has to be legitimized through tradition. Yet who recognizes the Lama, you know? Who recognizes their teaching? It's not a matter of just learning by reading; it has to be transmitted correctly according to the rules of orthodoxy. So that was the kind of problem that the Party sees as something that has to be reformed, religion has to be transformed into something of private experience. And the legitimacy of transmission of knowledge should be something that can be taught in the universities, or it can be taught in Lama institutes set up by the government. But from the practitioner's point of view, these institutions do not have legitimacy.

So the fundamental problem is that the Party is willing to tolerate the emergence of religion as purely private experience, but it is not willing to see religion expressed as a sort of collective authority and a collective assertion, not only in terms of identity but also in terms of transmission of the knowledge and the legitimacy of the religion. Religious practice can be only legitimized by the Party, but that is not in the eyes of the practitioners something legitimate.

This made me sort of think that the fundamental problem that

is emerging in China in terms of religion is something that can be seen in the situation in Tibet. And if you'd look at the history of religion and state in Europe and America, and I sort of see a similarity between the situation in China and what happened in the United States and Europe.

For example, in Europe, if you look at the notion of secularization of religious freedom – it emerged out of the state needing protection from religious institutions. The state and the secular institutions have to be protected from the incursion of Catholic Church, the Pope, and the religious authority. While in the United States, the United States emerged out of need to protect religious groups from interference by the state. You know, of course, most religious Protestant groups in America emerged out of the dissenters, and therefore, they wanted secularism to protect the religious group from State.

Similarly today, what's happening in Tibet is much more the monasteries trying to stop the state from intrusions into monastery. They have very little interest in other policies, for example, Buddhists don't make a collective statement about the one-child policy. They don't say we oppose from moral grounds, we oppose this state policy. They do not make statements or argue about the fact of moralities, about what should be the correct laws, or what should be instituted. In fact, they are very reluctant to participate in that kind of debate.

What they care is what happens in the religious organizations

and in the monasteries, and the state stepping into religious territory. So this is the point where it's amounting, why should the Party interfere with the appointment of lamas. Now, why should the Party have a say? Why should the Party should be worried about how we teach our religion?

So the situation in Tibet, or the concept of protection of religion in China is that religious groups in China are trying to protect themselves from the state interfering in religious practices. In fact, many times I would say it is the state that often politicizes religion rather than religion trying to influence policy of the state. And the state, through by nature of the control and regulations, politicized religious organizations much more. And the state does this partly because it realizes that religion is an inevitable aspect of human society, it has to be tolerated. But there's another dimension in Chinese government policy that see religion as something that has to be contained. Religion has to be contained. It's going to be dangerous for society if some kind containment policy were not adopted towards religion.

And this brings us of the whole question of the limits of civil society, limits of the public sphere in China. The fundamental anxiety - the fear of Party stems from, of course, the very idea of Communist Party, itself, that religion could reemerge as an alternative to -- alternative to ideology, alternative to paradigm for Chinese people. This is no longer the Communist Party of Communist materialism; it's the main orthodox, but

there is a reemergence of religion in a sense.

And when religion emerges, it has presented three problems:

Religions tend to be organized; they tend to meet in groups; and secondly religions tend to have an ideology that is not communist.. and thirdly religious tend to have leaders, or lamas, or priests, or somebody who is not a Party Secretary. So these three aspects make religion very problematic to the Communist Party. And religion has a potential to become a genuine alternative to the Communist Party and its own structure of administration and rule in China.

The question about whether religion will reemerge as a central force in China, or still remains in the periphery -- If you said 300 million in China, that is not -- it's less than 50 percent. It is still not a great number in terms of overall China. And I think the orthodox consensus will remain for many years. I think in China there is still this assumption that religion is detrimental for China's modernization and the creation of a strong China. So that orthodox consensus hasn't been broken despite the reemergence of religion in China.

MR. WILDER: Thank you very much.

Our third expert today is Dr. Sophie Richardson, who is Asia Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch. She also has a new book coming out on Chinese foreign policy from Columbia University Press. I thought that Human Rights Watch was a very open organization, but she

refuses to tell me the title of this book yet, so you'll have to wait and see what it is.

Dr. Richardson is a graduate is a graduate of the University of Virginia and Oberlin College, and her writings and commentaries are often seen in U.S. and international media.

Dr. Richardson?

DR. RICHARDSON: You could maybe try having a case filed against me under the State Secrets Act in China to get the title out of me.

Thanks very much for having us here. It's a little bit hard to improve on what's been said. I think just to set the stage a little bit, it may help everyone to be reminded that the Chinese constitution does guarantee the right to believe. It does not guarantee the right to practice or to worship, and therein lies one of the main difficulties.

One of the others is that some religions are recognized and tolerated and others are not. And typically, the ones that are not are the ones that are thought to be Trojan horses or vehicles for separatism, or ones that betray a certain organizational capability. And for those religions, a particular form of hostility is reserved by the central government. And this includes, as Carol and Tsering have talked about:

restrictions on who can be a member of the clergy, what they're allowed to say, how children can be educated, what can be registered as a place of worship.

I want to try to end up with Carol's point about, you know, whether we can separate religion and politics in a place like China. And I think as the invitation this afternoon suggested, it's true that there is now greater latitude for some religions in China, and that we've obviously seen growing numbers of adherence -- more churches, things like that.

But I think that for some other groups, the great -- the gross that we see is actually in the hostility toward certain groups that will not be cowed, essentially, in trying to pursue their own religious traditions. And in that category I would put groups like house churches, the following GONGO, some Tibetan Buddhists, and Uyghurs, and I was actually asked to speak this afternoon specifically about Xinjiang, which hopefully I will do well. I know there are several people here with far more knowledge than I, so please do correct me if I get anything wrong.

For those of you who don't know, Xinjiang is a very large region in Western China. It is technically an autonomous region, meaning that it should have a high degree of autonomy over the affairs in that particular province. About half of the people in the province of 10 million are Uyghurs, a Turkic-speaking ethnic minority who following varying degrees of Sunni Islam, it's a derivative Sunni Islam. And there's a certain amount of variation even within the community in Xinjiang about how traditional essentially people are in their practices.

I wanted to read to you, or read back to you for those of you

who were here to hear the group of Chinese government officials who spoke last September here about religion in China. This is a comment from a representative from the China Islamic Association, which is an NGO that the Chinese government either organized or permitted to register in 2001.

According to this man, after the founding of the New China, "development in various fields of political issues, economy, and culture. In regions where Muslims are in great numbers, nationality and regional autonomy are given. The Chinese government persistently perceives a policy of ethnic equality and religious freedom. Muslims enjoy equal rights and share in the harmonious sunshine" -- I couldn't make that one up if I tried. As we all know that the reality is really quite different for large numbers of Uyghurs and that the central government persists in a belief that Xinjiang is a breeding ground for terrorists.

I think we're all equally aware that, you know, there's a large body of international law, and indeed their laws in China that deals with how you would actually address real security threats. I think the real core problem in Xinjiang is that the provincial authorities and the central government persist in conflating both the practice of Islam in any expression of Uighur nationalism, essentially the threat to national security. And therefore, both are treated fairly harshly. Some of the examples of, I think particularly intrusive religious policies -- and this is what I think it gets very difficult to separate out the politics and the religion.

If you work for the government in Xinjiang, either at the provincial level or even at the local level, you are not allowed to practice Islam, period, full stop. It is written in provincial regulations that this is forbidden. It is now extremely difficult to educate your children in Islamic traditions even if you're doing it in the confines of your own home, which even cuts against the idea that, you know, religion is a permissible thing as long as it's kept personal or within a family.

Most recently, we saw new prohibitions where regulations requiring that Uighur men shave, but that women be forbidden from wearing head scarves. These are practices that really fly in the face of traditional practices in the province. And it's hard to separate, I think, the growing impositions in the last couple of years from the War on Terror in 2001. I think, you know, for all of the efforts that the Bush administration may have made in defending the rights of some religions in China, the Uyghurs really got sold down the river, and that the Bush administration did very little to fight back against the Chinese government's cooptation of the rhetoric and the policies of the War on Terror in really cracking down pretty hard on Uyghurs in that region.

One of, I think, -- one of the steps we'd certainly like to see the Obama administration undo is the Bush administration's having agreed to put what's called the East Turkistan Independence Movement on the list of terrorist organizations. The very existence of ETIM continues to be hotly

debated. It's very difficult to ascertain whether it even exists. The Chinese government would have you believe that it is a small but lean and mean fighting machine that's out there and is going to get the central government. It has never offered up compelling evidence to suggest that that's really the case.

I think one of the other problems we've tracked over the last five or six years with the rise of the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations between China, Russia, and some of the other Central Asian Republics are really problematic extradition practices, and I mean there's effectively no due process, and particularly, when you're talking about being extradited to countries that have great enthusiasm, it should be used to the death penalty and a real political agenda against certain members of the Islamic clergy in that region. You know, these are particularly problematic phenomenon.

The presence of, I think there's 16? -- 16 Uygurs at Guantanamo Bay. It's also problematic. You know, the Chinese government has used those people's presence at Guantanamo as evidence that there is real organized terrorists threat that emanates from Xinjiang, and has also occasionally pointed to the United States' unwillingness to take these people and let them resettle here as evidence that they really are terrorists.

Obviously, one of the things that we'd like to see the Obama administration do is admit those people now that they've essentially been

deemed not a threat admit them into the United States. And last year, I think was particularly problematic in Xinjiang around -- particularly around the Olympics when Uighur separatism was designated -- it's a very strange policy, you're going to have to go on line and read it -- when Uighur separatism was actually designated as one of the greatest threats to the successful hosting of the Olympic games. And so we saw year-long crackdown that was geared towards eradicating the three evil forces -- that's the Chinese government's term -- of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism which in turn led to another round of very intrusive policies.

One of the most recent ones about a year ago were new regulations that were -- there's 23 types of illegal religious activities which prohibited praying in public or even praying at wedding ceremonies. And these are policies that really cut into very personal daily religious practices that you'd have a tough time making a case for how those are real threats to national security, right, and justify the need to regulate them. And it's hard to see how those kinds of policies don't further embolden some of I think the very small handful of people in Xinjiang who do occasionally engage in violent behavior.

We saw a couple of incidents last year, although it's still quite unclear who perpetrated these attacks -- some of them were on police facilities -- and for what purpose. The Chinese government again would have you believe that these are terrorists and separatists who were trying

somehow to make the government look bad in the run up to the Olympics or in the aftermath of the Olympics. That case has never really been very clearly proven. And it's very easy to see a real cycle here whereby the government says: This behavior is a national security threat therefore we're going to impose further restrictions.

Those restrictions, I think, have really gone a long way towards polarizing the relationship in general between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in the region who don't necessarily, or who wouldn't otherwise necessarily have a problem with one another. And I think we're now seeing both in Xinjiang, and actually to some extent in Lhasa as well, a kind of real tension between ethnic groups that wasn't there 10 years ago, and that is going to be much harder in the long run to undo.

Some of the steps that we, as an advocacy organization, would like to see taken are fairly straightforward, and obviously rolling back some of the constraints on religious practices, you know, let people go to the hajj as individuals; don't force them to go on state-sponsored tours. Give them some control over their religious lives.

But I think it's going to be very difficult to make any significant steps towards lessening that kind of hostility until we see the state take a big step back out of religion. As Carol was suggesting, you know, once -- and actually Tsering was saying, too -- you know, once the state gets involved in dictating who's allowed to do what and when, it's hard to -- it's hard to take

a step back, particularly, I think, in two regions where the Chinese government now has a significant sort of PR state with the rest of the Han population in producing a certain amount of compliance and stability. And I think it's going to be very difficult to get the government to change its ways, which is quite problematic in the long run.

I'll stop there.

MR. WILDER: Thanks very much. I do want to get to questions. Go ahead.

(Applause)

I do want to get to questions, but first I'm going to ask one question of the panel, which is getting to what Dr. Richardson talked about. We obviously have a very complex situation on religion in China, and the question I would have for you is as people who have thought this through very carefully, what should foreign governments do in relation to China's religious policy? What would your recommendations be?

Carol, do you want to --

DR. HAMRIN: I think if we could move beyond the policy of highlighting abuses and violent repression -- now when I say beyond that, I mean don't give up. It's very important that advocacy groups are getting the information out there and then governments speaking out about this because it does work to force implementation of policy to be more cautious at least to stay away from any opportunity for your repression to be

publicized.

So, but I'm saying if we could move beyond that to talk more with the Chinese about religious life as a right for everybody in China, not just certain groups, and let me give you an example of what I mean by that: I think if all the U.S. media and government talks about is house churches among Protestants in China, it fuels the sense that there must be a hidden political agenda that the U.S. is supporting antigovernment groups for political reasons.

If instead we would also talk about the discrimination which the majority of Chinese Christians face which includes intrusion into theology, you know, reconstruction of theology so that the theology better suits state purposes and refusal to allow any Chinese Protestant group to register who doesn't have a pastor trained in a Chinese seminary, so even if you have a seminary degree from anywhere else in the world, you're not a legitimate church pastor. I mean this kind of intrusion and forcing religion to wear tight shoes -- you know, there's one website allowed for Chinese Protestants, and there's one publishing house. There's one journal. You know, this is the kind of, you know, quotas on training schools and training materials and so forth that constrains freedom of all Chinese people.

If we focused on the broader picture and used international norms, not American norms to what religion should look like, the international regimes that China has signed onto and should be implementing as a member of the U.N. are very good. I mean those norms

would protect religious freedom, and I think if we could reform international instruments so that they're much more effective in promoting religious rites everywhere in China. I think there's a lot that could be done.

MR. WILDER: Tsering?

MR. SHAKYA: Agreed, but sometimes actually we also need to have a better understanding of what exactly happens in China. For example, we think that the Chinese government attempted to ban beards with Uyghurs and wearing of headscarves hijabs in schools.

Then France faced the same problem, you know? And we don't say French government abuses freedom of religion, and France is horrible, you know? Of course, we do say France is horrible, but That's for other reasons. We think Turkish government is good, but they're trying to stop university students coming to universities with religious symbols or wearing the hijab, and that is -- so religion, of course, when dealing with religion, there's always a problem about.

We think of Gandhi and Martin Luther as wonderful. They interfered in politics and social reform. Yet, then, the other Christian groups were trying to interfere in the politics and now religion is terrible. You know, they interfere with the state. They wants to ban stem cell research, and so on.

So there is a fundamental problem everywhere in the universal problems of religion and politics. So in some ways actually, we need to appreciate that sort of problem, and that the Chinese government faced the same problem.

One of the things we can do is to say to China that these are the problems we face everywhere. It's how you deal with these problems.

Of course, there are some problems with religious institutions. How do you monitor them? How do you get them registered? How do you have charitable organizations which you register as a charity? How do you monitor their finances?

So the immediate reaction should not be to ban, but there may be something through legislative means of control and it can be tolerated.

So I think that to some extent, our presentation of the problem of religion in China has to be also very clear and precise, and explain why there are problem . It's not to just look at it in a very centralized way and say that this is a problem.

So in Tibet also -- of course, all Communist Party members cannot be religious. You cannot -- even the Party says if you are member of the Party, you cannot be going to the Buddhist temple. You cannot.

I mean, when people complain that to me, I say: leave Communist Party. You can't be both -- be Communist Party member, work in the communist institution, and then you want also to be religious.

So a certain problem is there, and this is a problem about Chinese history, institutional history of how China has adapted since the founding of the PRC. China hasn't been able to negotiate these things very well, you know.

In the U.S., the Republican Party doesn't say that if you are

religious, you can't be Republican. The same is true of the Democratic Party. You know, but the Communist Party does say that -- you can't be religious.

So it's a -- somehow we need to have a better appreciation and presentation. That's why the Chinese get so upset. When you have the problem, you say that you are dealing with it. But we have the same problem, you actually say that it is denial of freedom of religion.

MS. RICHARDSON: Again, it's hard to improve on that.

Anecdotally, it may be worth mentioning that I think the only response we've ever actually gotten to anything we've ever written about Xinjiang from provincial authorities was late last year when we sent some short commentary on the headscarf issue and included in it work that my colleagues in our Eastern and Central Europe division had done on the headscarf issue in Turkey -- wasn't France or Germany --

MR. SHAKYA: France.

MS. RICHARDSON: -- thank you. You know, the response wasn't a great one, but it was at least an acknowledgment, you know, that hadn't been there before, and, you know, it said something like, you know, we appreciate your sharing your views on how these issues are dealt with elsewhere.

So I do think there's, you know, there's certainly something to be said for trying to speak about these issues from a bit more of a global perspective.

Of course, for a government that's harder to do. You know, I'm certainly a big fan of Carol's point about trying to be consistent across

religions and not just, you know, placing disproportionate emphasis on one or two to the near total exclusion of the others.

But, I mean, if -- I mean, if you line up, you know, if you assemble all of the U.S. government rhetoric from the last eight or 10 years about religion in China, boy, it is hard work to find much supportive language there about Uyghurs and Islam as there are about Christians and house churches.

And it's a kind of inconsistency I think that the Chinese government really notices. I think one of the other real challenges -- well, two other quick challenges. One is that, you know, the EU countries have a very different approach to the issue of religion and promoting it internationally, and so I think there's always quite a gulf between what the U.S. is saying and what European countries are saying.

And last but not least, I think the U.S. government sort of, you know, changes its mind every three days about whether it's going to talk about religion and the political dimensions of it, you know, that religion carries with it. It's about organizing.

It's about providing alternative leadership. It's about another mobilizing, motivating ideology, and, you know, my experience has been that U.S. officials sort of want to talk about religion as a force that sits in this little box and has no potentially problematic consequences for the Chinese government, which, of course, in a way is a real non-starter, because, to them, it's all about the organizing capability and alternative leadership; and to have the conversation in those very sort of restrained ways I think sort of

ends the conversation before it even begins.

And so I think governments need to get smarter about how they're going to talk to the Chinese government, but why they shouldn't worry so much or be so fearful of that, and maybe the problem is that they are fearful of that; and there's not a whole lot we can do. But talking about it in a very desiccated way I think doesn't do much.

MR. WILDER: Great. Okay. If I can ask you to wait until the microphone comes to ask your questions, and if you would identify yourself and perhaps your affiliation, that would be helpful to us. The gentleman right here?

QUESTIONER: Thanks for bringing Dr. Shakya, because it's rare to have native Tibetans speaking about all the things going wrong in China, and, by extension, in Tibet.

We know that of all the ills and the PR damage that China has suffered for long, it has much to do with the fall of Tibet.

And the revival of spiritualism or religion, without mentioning Buddhism, which, of course, is a major factor -- everyone in this town knows -- I'm tempted to ask Dr. Shakya the impact of the personal charismatic ideas of the peace-loving Dalai Lama, who we are taught to believe is a major thorn in Chinese society.

We do know different faiths are there in China, but perhaps maybe because I'm a Tibetan -- sorry for that -- but our belief is the Dalai Lama is doing the damage to the Chinese people. This is what's -- at least in terms of religion.

So in this so-called religious revival in China, what do you think is the impact of the Dalai Lama, and is the Dalai Lama still possibly a key to solving China's problems, Dr. Shakya. Thank you.

DR. SHAKYA: The situation and the image of the Dalai Lama have completely changed since March 10, March 14th last year

If you look in China what are the most popular books for sale, what are the best seller books in China, at present the best seller books in English translation called "Tibet Code." It's based on the Da Vinci Code, but now in China it's called the Tibet Code. It is the best seller.

The next bestseller is another book, the best seller is Sogyal Rinpoche's book on Living and Dying. Tibetan religious book constantly -- or mystical elements, these appear predominantly in Chinese best seller lists, very popular.

This indicates to me there is some sort of mystical Shangri-La interest in -- in fact, many Chinese who live in Lhasa. There is a very mystical interest in Tibet.

In that sense, the Dalai Lama as a person is something that is beginning to be introduced in China as a whole.

But since last year, the situation has completely changed. And I think this has almost, so you can say the government has engineered this very successfully, well done, and there is a very sort of strong resentment of the Tibetans in Chinese popular perception.

Almost it has become impossible for Chinese writers or artists who used to work with the Tibetans to be successful in China.

So it's very different. There is a complete -- the Dalai Lama now has no sort of much standing among the Chinese populace or public.

Of course, there may be one or few percentage of Buddhists who do not share the popular perception of Tibet and the Dalai Lama. But it's not only affected Chinese in PRC, but the Chinese speaking world -- Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, anywhere you have there has been a detriment, a detriment that the Chinese government successfully managed to essentially call Tibetans traitors -- with a propensity for violence, who are anti-Chinese, who are actually sort of bent on destroying China.

So this image has really resonated with the Chinese people as a whole. So this is the situation.

MR. WILDER: I think the gentleman way in the back. We won't penalize you for sitting all the way back there.

QUESTIONER: Yeah. Richard Finney also with Radio Free Asia.

Tsering Shakya, a number -- well, actually a growing number of Han Chinese are practicing Tibetan Buddhism beyond the superficial level of just being attracted to mystical things. Do you have any sense of the numbers involved and how does this fit into that paradigm of collective identity versus individual expression of faith that you were talking about?

DR. SHAKYA: Well, Tibetan Buddhism has never been foreign to Chinese. Tibetan Buddhism has always been very important for the Chinese life. If you look from the Ming Period, from the Yuan to the

Qing-- any dynasty -- actually Tibetan Buddhism has played a very, very significant role in Chinese cultural life and tradition. You just have to go to Wu Tai Shan. Look at the symbols that are there. It's about Tibet and Chinese symbols mixed completely in a harmonious way. It is that thing.

But one of the things that I find quite sad is the attack on religion, and particularly on Tibetan religion. In the Chinese popular imagination and in the intellectual history, they have erased that connection -- the link between Tibet and Buddhism as being an aspect of Chinese cultural life, and it is now made into a totally alien aspect of Chinese life. That is, in fact, the severing of historical ties that existed in the past. And also the politicization of those ties has been negative.

When you look at throughout the Ming period to now, in Tibet, hundreds and hundreds of Han Chinese have gone to Tibetan monasteries for learning and study.

It was a normal practice both in all of the imperial courts to have a Tibetan language library. Imperial princes and princesses learned the Tibetan language. You know, in the Qing court the princes and princesses -- it's compulsory for them to learn Tibetan.

So certain aspects of this have been lost. So this is -- the Han Chinese interest in Tibet is not something recent. It historically has been.

In fact, it's a very interesting thing. If you go to North America, you go from Vancouver down to San Francisco, You look at all the old Chinese temples, the first thing you notice on all the gates and inside the decoration are Tibetan writings. And you will only now find this in North

America or Europe. You will not find that in China, you know, and this is sort of like a surprise.

And when I took my Chinese students there, I said what writing are these? They said Sanskrit, Indian, and so forth.

I said it's Tibetan. And then they were shocked. I said look at when the building was built -- 1905.

So there are Chinese and Tibetans who know about each other. It's not -- we are not alien to each other.

MR. WILDER: The young lady here.

QUESTIONER: Oh, thanks. Kailyn Ford. I'm an editor with the Falun Gong Information Center.

I had a question for Sophie. You mentioned some of the religious groups that have not sort of been given increased leeway and instead face varying degrees of persecution.

My question is about the possibilities for reconciliation, specifically with the Falun Gong, which I represent. For those who don't know, it's a Qigong discipline that self identifies as belonging to the Buddhist school, enjoyed meteoric rise to popularity in the 1990s, and then was banned in 1999 and subject to sort of a *douzheng* campaign by the Chinese government to eradicate it; to this day, continues to represent a very, very large portion of reeducation through labor camp population, of Chinese torture cases, and yet continues to sort of survive and even thrive in China.

So given that there's sort of this -- how would you describe it

-- sort of a deadlock that Falun Gong refuses to go away and yet the Chinese government refuses to sort of back down, what are the possibilities for the future of that relationship? It's directed to Sophie, but anyone who has insights would be welcomed.

DR. RICHARDSON: Wow. I wish I could be more optimistic, you know, I mean, if you, I mean, think about what Tsering was just talking about and, you know, where a relationship between a government and religion or Tibetans and Han Chinese that had once been, you know, consistent and positive and nobody had a problem with it, but now, for very political purposes, has been literally written out of the history books, you know, I don't think it bodes well.

And I think especially to the extent that, you know, I think the central government's issue with the Falun Gong primarily has been its organizational capacity. You know, having 10,000 people show up on your doorstep unannounced is a little bit frightening for anybody, but particularly when you're a moderately paranoid government that likes to keep control on things. It's deeply unnerving.

I don't think there's necessarily an ideological complaint there, but mostly an organizational one.

So it's really hard to imagine, particularly, you know, with communities like Uyghurs and Tibetans and the Falun Gong where the central government has now invested such energy I think in so much of its just -- and spent so much time justifying its own policies on the basis of demonizing these communities or finding problems with them or suggesting

why they are bad for the country were opposed to the Han or ungrateful awfully hard to back down from that, awfully hard.

I wish I could give you a more optimistic answer. It may be -- maybe you can.

DR. HAMRIN: I was just going to repeat my sense that the Chinese government has shifted from equal suppression, sort of like Deng Xiaoping said, Socialism is not shared pauperism, you know, let some get rich sooner. Well, I think the policy has shifted to favoring certain groups and in order to help continue suppressing groups. An evidence of this would be state sponsorship of international convocations of religious leaders and Buddhism, non-Tibetan Chinese Buddhism, which, you know, reinforces the post-'49 effort to give leadership and Buddhism in the official association to non-Tibetan Buddhists, and the same thing for Taoism, you know, an international conference on Taoism to for the first time to kind of, you know, promote that as an indigenous Chinese religion -- probably these are part and parcel of an effort to minimize the influence of Qigong, various Qigong groups.

And so I think if advocacy groups and the media paid more attention to discrimination that can be more subtle than suppression, you know, to identify these kinds of trends and make it public that there is no equal playing field here for guaranteed religious freedoms that China has signed on to.

MR. WILDER: Cheng Li.

DR. LI: Yeah. My name is Cheng Li, and I'm a Senior Fellow

here at the China Center.

And first, thank you all for very thoughtful remarks.

I think my question is related to the generational distribution of religious believers, and I think it's directed to all of you. Could you comment whether the younger generation is more religious or less religious among Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Han Chinese or different religious groups, like Islamic and Tibetan and the Taoism or Buddhism or Christianity and et cetera. Thank you.

DR. SHAKYA: Yes. Thanks.

DR. HAMRIN: Start down there.

DR. RICHARDSON: You first. Obviously, I'm a little out of my depth on this.

DR. SHAKYA: I mean, one thing we also need to know from Tibet is that its sort of a unified Buddhism and it's essential. Actually, within Tibet, there's a great deal of diversities of debate and views emerging. In fact, there's a very strong -- apart from the sort of hard-line Communist Party members, there is a very strong presence in publication and in writing that many younger intellectual Tibetans are very opposed to religion. They imbibe the sort of the May 4th movement sort of ideology that religion is bad. For Tibet to recover, we have to eradicate religious influences. It's too bad that Tibet has too many monks. You know, we need more people out of the monasteries.

So there is a strong trend among young intellectuals -- and they write books; they publish articles -- there's a very strong intellectual

tradition which is critical of Buddhism in Tibet.

A second group that are emerging within younger generation is that Christianity is making inroads into Tibetan areas for the first time in history. In fact, when I travel there I meet many young Tibetans who say they are Christians. Their study in Chinese universities and they met missionaries.

So there are small pockets, not big, but there are pockets of this diversity of markets, as Carol mentioned. It's emerging within Tibet. And in Tibet also there's Islam. There's a tiny minority of Muslims in Lhasa. They also have different views.

So, fundamentally in Tibet, there is say, as I said the Buddhism is a collective thing. It has to do with identity. So almost it's becoming an issue of the collective, that you have to be Buddhists to be a Tibetan.

The debate among those who support Buddhism and those who are advocates against Buddhism goes like this: One groups says we have to modernize. The other group says we have to defend religion, because if you discard Buddhism and we become modern, then what makes us Tibetans? What is different between us from Han or anything? Therefore, without Buddhism, we have no Tibet. So Buddhism has to be practiced and it has to be perfected.

And those intellectuals who write against religion say: "No, Buddhism is the very thing which is destroying Tibet." And they say that Buddhism is as alien as communism, for the Buddhism came from India.

So there's a -- there is quite a vibrant debate within Tibet on this issue.

MR. WILDER: Carol, do you want to talk about?

DR. HAMRIN: I think this would be a great topic for research, if you can promote some. But I think it's very hard to quantify, though my sense from just reading and talking to people is that the group of Chinese that at first were more open to Christianity were those who maybe are 40 to 60 now who had been disillusioned first by the Cultural Revolution experience they had and then by the collapse of world communism and Tiananmen 20 years ago.

And these were people who were raised to have in their minds a kind of coming out, universal worldview that explained everything. And so that was missing. And so, they see in Christianity a sort of complementary to that. And people thought for a while that the younger generation who have been raised in the reform period, who have become part of the middle class, who have cars and cell phones, and, you know, or into materialism would no longer have interest in religion.

But I think that that's not proven to be the case really that, for example, during the SARS crisis in 2003, this younger, urban group was really endangered and affected. It wasn't out there somewhere. It was really something they had to fear, and it's sort of reminded them of their mortality; that material things aren't going to solve all problems.

And so there was a kind of a surge of interest around that time. And as young people become -- get married, get out into the job market

and start to raise families, there's a lot of younger, you know, young professional couples who are really struggling with how to raise their children, how to keep your marriage together against the odds of increasing divorce and juvenile delinquency in China, who have, you know, turned to religion and Protestantism in particular perhaps for answers to some of these problems.

Protestantism is a little bit different in that it -- when people leave their home ties and the village or the ethnic group and develop a more international identity, it seems to be something that's easier to fit into a something modern and global.

MR. WILDER: Sir?

SPEAKER: Thank you. Thank you for a very insightful panel. I have a question that's near and dear to me here. I think in looking at all the panelists here at one time or another each of you have written about the consistent, but often arbitrary repression that often leads to a sense of self-censorship on the part of Chinese citizens, academics, as well as institutions.

And I'd like to direct this question particularly to Carol, but anybody can answer. To what extent does your impression of self-censorship impact the objectivity and accuracy in terms of gathering research on a subject, such as religion? Thank you.

DR. RICHARDSON: So I did pass on the last one, so I've got to answer this one.

DR. SHAKYA: Yes.

DR. RICHARDSON: That's a hard question to answer, Jim. I mean, you know, the way we do research entails a lot of time either trying to speak directly to people who themselves have been the victims of abuses. I mean, this is sort of the hallmark of Human Rights Watch reports, that it contains the actual voices of people who've been abused.

You know, but then -- and obviously they can be hard to get at for all of the reasons that you've just suggested, and so often rebuilding those networks and those kinds of relationships takes a very long time.

But then trying to be very careful about crosschecking what we've been told with a lot of other sources to make sure is that it's accurate, mostly because, you know, we may not get a response out of the Chinese government when we put out a report, but, boy, if we're caught out being wrong on something, we hear about it very quickly.

You know, we -- I mean, as an institutional matter, as a methodological one, we tend to err on the side of caution, you know, particularly in written documents. I think we often assume that problems are likely to be bigger or more serious party because we know, you know, it's not an open environment in which people can speak about what happened to them. I don't know if that quite answers your -- if that quite answer your question.

DR. SHAKYA: I think again it's about what we about self-censorship. I mean, we all practice self-censorship, you know. I mean, I don't write everything I know or things I would like to say because just in case I offend somebody. You know, so we do practice. So then how do we

know we are not self-censoring our views? Is it just only the bad Chinese who self-censor or then we don't? You know, it's this self-censorship is everything in any kind of work so then what value judgment -- that's what we teach our students to analyze a look at the work in the same rigorous sort of analysis we carry on work written by State Department officials about their life and their -- you know, I would say, okay, we have to analyze everything. You cannot take for full face value. What level of self-censorship is there?

I would use all the rigors of my sort of intellectual training and academic training to analyze the State Department official as I would analyze a Chinese official. This is not something unique.

In a way, I found that analyzing a Chinese document much easier. And the Tibetan official will write, in 1945, I was deluded by the imperialist propaganda, and I secretly colluded with the American imperialists and I became a CIA agent, you know.

So that is easy to read. You don't need to know whether he was deluded in 45. I would just read, okay, in 45 he was working for the CIA. So I took that information I took that information. I don't judge that whether he was deluded or misguided, and this doesn't matter.

But when you read Western source, they wouldn't say that they were deluded. You know, it's hard to find ways to self-censorship. That is more tricky to analyze than from one that are coming from Communist China.

DS. HAMRIN: I would say the issue of censorship and

self-censorship affects the whole field of what we know about religion in China, starting with the ban, internal secrets ban on any academics in China writing about religion, Communist Party history, where the military. These are like the three most sensitive issues somehow.

And so even though there are internal surveys done among academics in China now for the first time in recent years, they can easily publish the results or their interpretation of the results and so forth.

So much of what we know in this whole field becomes anecdotal. We don't have good research done on this.

I think probably scholars of Chinese society tend to avoid writing about religion, because it's so sensitive. I know for a fact that one scholar who was trying to get funding from a major U.S. foundation, from their office in Beijing, for a project to educate Chinese academics and how to do social science research on religion was told flatly, we don't find anything to do with religion.

It's probably because they figure they couldn't stay in Beijing and their office would be out, you know. So and I find myself worrying about what I say and how it's going to be interpreted. And I don't want to name names of people I know involved in China for fear of getting people in trouble that know me, you know.

So this is a big problem as long as it's such a sensitive issue.

MR. WILDER: Right here. You.

QUESTIONER: Hi. I'm Aurora Carlson. I'm a grad student at SAIS.

We all know that the Dalai Lama is getting on his age, and I guess my question has to do with his passing on, especially if he does pass on outside of the Tibetan Plateau area.

How likely do you think it is the Chinese government will continue the Dalai leadership? And if so, how they will prevent unrest in the Tibet and or religious community?

DR. SHAKYA: Actually, if you look at any sort of policy indication from China and the statements they have made, it is quite evident that even in the event of Dalai Lama passing, the Chinese government will appoint its own Dalai Lama; and are willing to risk the wrath of the Tibetan people or the protests.

But if China -- what is very important to China is not so much of -- the question about Tibet and China is that power and authority are the main concern. China must demonstrate its authority over Tibet and power over Tibet. And that is key to China. If you have Tibetan people protesting are doing things, it's not really a big problem for China, because they can always -- can manage to control.

But China's problem of Tibet has always been about legitimacy and authority, and this is what China must demonstrate. That's why China resorts to, I mean, in a way in China the government initiates a policy by resorting to law developed during Qing Period, saying, you know, Ching emperor did this; therefore, we will have this policy.

In Tibet, they say that Qing emperor did this and so this is the policy. So they always resort to history to legitimize things. So China

always reverts to history and to demonstrate its continuity.

And another thing they try to do is show continuity of China's ruling Tibet. So that is very important.

And what the rest of the world thinks of that as negative, it really doesn't matter as long as this is demonstrated to the Chinese populace to show the Chinese government's presence in Tibet as continuous, legitimate, and the government has power to do that.

So that is the most important. So this is a -- the Chinese are addressing the Chinese populace, not the world, not America or the Tibetans.

DR. HAMRIN: I would like to just add that the Party state authorities in China are still very much claiming to be the ultimate moral authority in China and cultural authority in China, not just political authority in China.

And so I notice this even in new controls for online videos that were published on April 2nd. A few things crept in that, you know, they're trying to diminish the harmful political or religious online videos, as well as pornographic videos and such.

And they want to enhance the building and management of an Internet culture so as to disseminate the advanced culture of socialism. See that has to be the majority culture in China -- socialism. And they want to make sure evil cults and superstitions are not spread through Internet videos.

And it's interesting that they talk about videos that distort

Chinese culture, Chinese history and historical facts. The state is the ultimate arbiter of how history is determined and defined in China.

So to them, it doesn't seem strange for them to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Tibet in quote marks by having their choice of the Panchen Lama preside. I mean, it's an example of their effort to play favorites among the different sects in Buddhism -- in Tibetan Buddhism so that it's the Panchen Lama or some other -- the Karmapa Lama?

DR. RICHARDSON: Karmapa.

DR. SHAKYA: Karmapa.

DR. HAMRIN: -- Karmapa Lama as opposed to the Dalai Lama who they're trying to lift up as a competing authority. And this is a problem for Catholic Christians in China, because there is another ultimate authority over Catholics worldwide, and the Chinese don't have control over the Pope, so this creates a special political problem for Chinese Catholics.

MR. WILDER: Let's see. I want to get somebody sort of toward the middle here.

QUESTIONER: Here we go. Two quick questions. We're talking about deep strains in identity, and we're talking about how one aligns identity with allegiance; in other words, what a community says about itself as what it is as opposed to some larger construct over which it has less control that is usually a national entity like China.

So, in this context of religion, and particularly appropriate when discussing Tibet, is -- do you think that there's really any prospect --

I'm asking all three panelists -- do you think there's any prospect that May 4th-style thinking will actually have some currency and there will be some sort of pragmatic dialogue developing over the next 10 years, let's say, that addresses historical traditional concerns within mainstream Chinese society about separatism and so on -- identities that is in the immortal non-English word "splitism" introduces to the current dialogue in Beijing?

And my second question is, and speaking specifically of the Catholic religion, about which precious little has been said today, the early Jesuits for those who've read the Sextants of Beijing the huge impact that the early Jesuits on the late Ming and early Qing Periods and the heirs of that still exist, for example, some of the large Chinese weaving families from Shanghai that now live primarily in Taiwan, what is the Taiwan Catholic Christian connection in modern China?

DR. SHAKYA: Do you?

DR. HAMRIN: You can start and talk about Tibet.

DR. SHAKYA: I mean, it's very hard to say what sort of a discourse will emerge in China about religion, because, when you look at the Charter '08 and all this intellectual discourse, they're still dominated by the legacy of May 4th. It is about modernization. And actually, religion plays a very insignificant role on Chinese intellectual discourse. It's always about modernity and the West.

And so religion is really -- has no sort of -- I haven't seen a major sort of intellectual production from China writing which talks about religion -- the place of religion. We need religion, you know. There hasn't

been that.

Whereas, Buddhism has been talked about in Taiwan or Catholicism -- it's always to do with the family history or tradition rather than of providing a sort of really fundamental paradigm for discussion of morality or social change.

So really, the Chinese discourse, intellectual discourse is still dominated by May 4th movement, I think.

DR. RICHARDSON: I can take a little bit of a stab at the first question, which is I think that more philosophical debates aside, the most optimistic discussions I can imagine would go a little something like this: There would be a greater recognition on the part of the central government that relatively few people in different religious communities that are thought of as having separatist tendencies is actually really advocated for being separatists, with a -- that when it comes down to it, I think the most common articulation is either for real respect of formal autonomy, as it's spelled out in some of the autonomy laws, or simply for, you know, the latitude to practice religion in daily life as people want to; and that from the perspective I think of probably quite a few ordinary Uyghurs or Tibetans, you know, to simply leave that realm of people's lives alone so the state cannot intrude on that.

And that's in the central government's perspective a discussion like that is at least that it buys its way out of coming up, a couple of serious headaches without having to really be supportive of religion, without having to appear to back off on some of the criticisms of different groups.

But even that I think is pretty -- is a pretty optimistic maybe two sunshiny hope.

DR. HAMRIN: I think the dynamics of globalization has been the strengthening of identities and loyalties that are both global or universal like world religions and the local, you know, ethnic group and local community identities, and the weakening of loyalty and identity, you know, applied to the nation state. This is a worldwide trend.

And that's really what's happening in China. The nation state, the party state, has lost its ability to enforce that, you know, monolithic national identity for everybody -- loyalty to the party -- that should take precedence over all your other loyalties and relationships.

And the effort to try to prevent that from spinning off into serious, you know, political problems for the current system is behind their fears and their worries.

I would agree that there are not many groups in China promoting political separatism, but trying to press directly and indirectly for a tiny, for more freedom, for managing their own affairs as local communities. And that's true of local governments as much as anybody.

So I think personally that there's an easy solution to the Taiwan reunification issue and Hong Kong issue and Tibet if there is, you know, a consideration of sorts down the line in the future, I think a lot of these problems, including economic problems, could be mitigated. But we're very far from there in the current situation.

MR. WILDER: Yeah. I think we have time for a couple more

questions. Sir?

QUESTIONER: Thank you. My name is Peter Gluck. I'm not affiliated.

I have a two-part question, but both parts center around the efforts of our government to promote substantively beyond rhetoric freedom of religious belief and practice in China.

First of all, how would you assess let's say Clinton and Bush 43 in what they did? And secondly, do you have any concern that the priorities of dealing with the Chinese government for the Obama administration on matters like currency and debt and North Korea might push any interest they have to a relatively low priority?

MR. WILDER: Sophie, I know you're dying to talk. So go ahead.

DR. RICHARDSON: Well, I think for starters although the Clinton and Bush administrations I think had very different -- they were sort of different rhythms and different strategies at least in their minds about promoting religious freedom in China.

I wouldn't say that one was necessarily more successful than the other. I think that that's partly because the calculations are not necessarily made a long lines where they're going to land the greatest punch in Beijing or get the best audience, to put it in a slightly more positive way.

I think there's a lot of -- I mean, I generally very critical of U.S. administrations on human rights in China, but, you know, there's a lot of

inconsistency, and that gives the Chinese government room to, you know, maneuver their way out of talking about certain issues.

I think, you know, that nine times out of 10, religious freedom gets discussed in very specific particular settings and it is really not discussed in any other venues, particularly ones that are of more interest to the Chinese government, effectively like a ghettoizing the issue.

You know, and then you have -- I mean, just look at Tibet over the last, say, 18 months or so, where, you know, the Dalai Lama comes to Washington and is given, you know, a big deal award as a religious leader, not as a political one; right. And the administration goes way out of its way to make sure it's making that distinction.

And, you know, the payback to Chinese demands is that the president or it's what the administration offers up in parts so that the Chinese are not so mad about this is that President Bush will go to the Olympics where he goes yet again to the same house church and almost completely yours a very sort of I would say thorough-going effort on the part of the government to take the opportunity to the Olympics as a pretext to crack down on quite a few different religious groups about which the administration has virtually nothing to say.

You know, you could excuse the Chinese government for being able to say, you know, even if they wanted to seriously talk about the issue to say, what? You know, you do this thing but not that thing. You're critical of those -- in those circumstances, but not these. It's a very inconsistent position.

And I think that's why it's important to talk about all religions to try to talk about it in a number of different settings. And, you know, in my perfect world, U.S. administrations and other governments that claim to care about human rights shouldn't just confine these discussions, for example, the bilateral human rights dialogues.

They should be talking about -- you know, I will be a happy, happy woman when, you know, the strategic economic dialogue includes a discussion where they're talking, you know, about issues like government transparency or product safety.

And there they have a discussion about censorship of the domestic press in China, because it's just as relevant in those discussions as it is as a sort of pure human rights abuse, but it only gets discussed in the human rights dialogues.

And I think that's a problem. Until the U.S. government and others talk about human rights in a much more sort of thorough-going way and in different venues, it's very easy for the Chinese government essentially to just duck the issue.

DR. HAMRIN: I've worked in the State Department under for five different administrations and my observation is that they all kind of come down to the same China policy.

I mean, there are certain ways you have to deal with China on more and more important issues in the world. The relationship has increasingly become more and more complex with lots of issues on the table at any given time that have to be balanced. You know, this year what

is the most important among these all equally important issues.

And frankly, I would have been as an American taxpayer and an American citizen, I would've been very upset with Secretary Clinton if she wasn't talking to the Chinese about the economic problem we face in the world or about North Korea.

The federal government has a certain role to play in our society. It isn't in charge of everything. And if the Chinese hear about religious freedom from top diplomats and American officials, which they do whenever there are summits at that level, but don't hear about religious freedom issues from religious leaders from America and go to China and deal and work with China or economic leaders or other kinds of civic leaders that go to China, I think, you know, they should take it with a grain of salt.

It seems to me that American religious leaders should be out in front on this issue themselves, directly, with the Chinese. And I just feel like people forget that the federal government wasn't given by the Constitution control over every issue that concerns Americans.

MR. WILDER: Okay. One final question. How about the young lady in red there? Is there a microphone for her?

QUESTIONER: Thank you. I'm a student from Fudan University in China. And I have a follow-up question for Falun Gong.

My view about why our government is so tough about it is that the group leader, Li Hongzhi portrays himself as God. In this way, he can easily manipulate and control many people's minds, even to go against the government.

This is partly why our government is claiming that this group is a terrorist or evil group instead of a religious group. Do you agree with this and do you think that government has the right to define whether it is a religious group or not. If it doesn't, who does have the right to define?

Thank you.

DR. RICHARDSON: Sorry. I didn't quite get the last part of the question.

DR. SHAKYA: Who has the right to define what is a religious group, if the government doesn't.

DR. HAMRIN: I mentioned that the Chinese government still does hold on to its authority as the moral arbiter, and so, up until now, they have define certain world religions as authorized to exist and operate in China -- Protestant and Catholic dealt with as two separate religions and Muslims and Buddhists and Taoists.

Increasingly, that doesn't fit reality, even in China, where there are new religious movements rising up. There are other religious movements coming from outside that don't fit, such as orthodoxy in the Northeast or, you know, Christian Science or Mormons.

People who are studying and traveling overseas from China may come back as one of -- an adherent of one of those religions not authorized in China. And so this is what the government is trying to wrestle with. Should it change the definition? Should it add folks' faiths to the authorized legends or not?

And the problem is that in, according to international

standards, a group of people who define themselves as a religious group are a religious group.

I mean, it's up to people to decide if they are a religion or not a religion and the main point being that the state should protect the rights of all individuals to freedom of religion and belief, whatever that belief, and allow them to practice their beliefs, whether they're religious beliefs or even other beliefs, non-religious, anti-religious beliefs.

And so the current Chinese mindset and structure is quite far from the international norms on this issue.

MR. WILDER: Okay. Well, I think really we don't have any time left. I'm sorry that we don't. You've been a terrific audience. You've asked extremely incisive questions, but I think we ought to give our panelists a round of applause.

(Applause)

MR. WILDER: Thank you for coming.

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