

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

CHINA'S YOUTH:
INCREASING DIVERSITY AMID PERSISTENT INEQUALITY

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Opening Remarks:

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Presentation:

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Panel Discussion:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. LI: Good morning, or good afternoon to viewers in Europe, and good evening to watchers in Asia and elsewhere. My name is Cheng Li. I'm a director and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's John L. Thornton China Center. It may seem odd to an old man to kick off a public event on China's youth, but I promise that I'm younger than I look. Seriously though, we have assembled a group of leading experts on the subject, from various generations.

Our speakers also happen to be joining us from around the world: in Beijing, Professor Li Chunling, the featured speaker, and also of the book that we are launching today, in Toronto, Professor Diana Fu, who will moderate the discussion panel, in Southern France, Ms. Stephanie Studer, in Lebanon, I believe he just arrived there, Mr. Matthew Chitwood, and in the United States, Professor Martin Whyte and Professor Yang Guobin. This book channels the youth, increasing diversity, and the -- amid persistent inequality by Professor Li Chunling. It is the latest volume in the Thornton Center Chinese Think Series, published by the Brookings Institution Press.

The series aims to introduce some of the most influential works by prominent Chinese scholars into English language readers. Each volume translates from the original Chinese, contains writings by a leading scholar in a particular academic field. For example, political scientist Yu Keping, economist Fulan Gong, law professor and political dissident He Weifang, and philosopher He Weifang, these Chinese thinkers represented by most world views and the political perspectives on topics that are particularly relevant at the time of publication.

The publication of this volume on China's youth by sociologist Li Chunling could not be better timed. This is not only because of China's millennials, who have witnessed greater social economic and demographic changes than any other generation, are now coming to the fall, but also because their intergenerational diversity and inequality both reflect profound changes in Chinese society and will reshape it in the future.

For the outside world, developing a better understanding of Chinese youth is an urgent path, given that China, now, has more influence on the global economy and regional security than at any other point in modern history. No one has been more articulate and more well-positioned with a track record of both qualitative and a quantitative analysis in addressing the distinct characteristics of China's

youth today than Professor Li Chunling. She has written 11 books and numerous academic articles, as well as many public policy reports on the subject and related issues.

While the primary focus of her research has been the millennial generation, she also examines a younger age of cohorts, including both migrant workers in their late teens and early 20s and also current college students. In her role as the Head of the Department of Youth Studies at the Institute of Sociology in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Professor Li has owned considerable influence in academic circles, the policy establishment, and the public discourse on youth issues in China.

Though primarily at the Chinese institutions like Peking University and CASS, Dr. Li has been actively engaged in foreign economic exchanges. She has spent much time as a visiting scholar at the University of Michigan, Princeton, Oxford, Sciences Po, and other research institutions. She has spoken at the Brookings twice, in 2009 and 2014. Now, please, allow me to highlight an extraordinary contribution of Professor Li's work, before we hear her presentation directly.

Over the past decade, Dr. Li has led a dozen large-scale quantitative national surveys, including some longitudinal projects on youth issues, social mobility, social suffocation, and gender, with each project yielding a considerable amount of data. Let me quickly mention five simple statistics derived from these data.

Number one, the social economic status of the middle-class, or what the Chinese called middle income groups, have increased on eight percent of the total Chinese urban population, in the year 2000, to 48 percent in 2014. Number two, as a result of the rapid expansion of college education, the gross enrollment rate in Chinese universities of the college age population increased from six percent, in the year 2000, to 48 percent in 2016, just within a generation. Number three, the so-called floating population of migrants and their families grew from seven million, in 1982, to 247 million in 2013, and the majority of those migrant workers were young people. Number four, only children of one child families disproportionately lived in urban areas, constituting half of the 1980s age cohort and nearly three-quarters of the children in the 1990s cohort. And finally, number five, virtually 100 percent of urban professionals in their 20s and early 30s are active users of WeChat. The social circles are for urban professionals, are now 10 times, according to Professor Li, 10 times larger than they were in the days before social media.

Now, this important data is just the tip of iceberg. I highly suggest you purchase this

data-rich and fascinating book, if you want to understand the characteristics and the views of this unique Chinese generation. I now turn the floor over to Dr. Li, who will provide a 20-minute-long overview of the book, after which we will engage in Q and A, before the panel discussion, featuring other distinguished speakers. For audience questions, if you have not submitted one yet, please email events@brookings.edu, again, events@brookings.edu. Over to you, Professor Li.

MS. CHUNLING: Hello, it's -- hear me?

MR. LI: Yes.

MS. CHUNLING: Yes. No. Thank you, Dr. Cheng Li, excellent introduction of my book, and thank Brookings China Thornton Center, publish my book and organizing this event. Also, thank you all speakers and participants joining my event. I'll give discussion about China youth. Next slide, please. Yeah.

China's new generation, born during 1980s and the 1990s, is a social cohort that has grown up in era of reform and opening up. They have been influenced by a series of significant historical events in the aftermath of reform and opening up. The lifespan of this generation has been intertwined with significant social changes, such as vast economic growth, the one child policy, education expansion, the rise of Internet, marketization, industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. These changes have greatly affected their living circumstances and opportunities, shaping generational characteristics, while widening the international gap between them and the previous generation. Next, please.

China's new generation has experienced a series of significant historic events. The first is one child policy. The most commonly labor for China new generation is single child. This figure shows generational disparities in proportions of unwed children and second born children. Most of new generation from the one child or second born children families, they have grown up in economical prosperity, joining the much higher living standards, compared to when their parents grown up. Next, please.

The second historical event they have experienced is educational expansion. New generation grown up when the country went through an endless perspective expansion of education system, which has raised the higher education attainment of young people. Twenty years ago, only 10 percent of young people could go to college, but now more than half of them may receive higher

education. Rapid education expansion have made young people have a much higher education than the previous generations. In a highly competitive labor market, younger generation have more competent than older generations, which has significantly weakened the traditional hierarchy, based on seniority. Next, please.

The third historical event is the fast urbanization, which has triggered larger scale population migration. Many young people migrated with their parents or migrated for school and job opportunities. The table shows that the proportion of migrants in the younger generations is significantly higher than the older generations. About 45 percent of young people in urban areas are not natives. In megacities, like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, about half of the young people are not natives. The destinations of migration are no longer limited to another city or a province but can't be another country. In 2016, more than a half million Chinese students were studying abroad. And in the same year, more than 400,000 had to return to China after completing their study abroad. Migrating has become a normal part of their life. Next, please.

The fourth is the Internet and smartphone. The rise of new generation coincided with the patronization, penetration of the Internet. More importantly, the popularizing -- popularization of smartphones has made Internet even more accessible and cheaper. This has significantly reduced the existing inequality within new generations in access to information, based on social class, education attainment, or region.

Meanwhile, the patronization -- the penetration of Internet has reinforced generational identity among younger people, and to a certain extent homogenized their values and their behavior patterns. The Internet has enabled the new generation to make their voice heard, as a group, and to exert growing influencers in various social realms. Next, please, yeah.

The fifth is in the rise -- consumer society. In the past, Chinese families were known for their inclination to sacrifice current spending for precautionary savings and the deficit spending inaccessible. However, new generation favors the pattern of spending first, making money, and then repaying debt. Purchasing a residential property with a mortgage is popular among millennials. Later, it also became common to buy durable consumer groups, such as the automobiles, with installment loans. Generation Z now use mortgages and installment loans for their daily expenses. According to -- in a

panel survey of Chinese university students, in 2020, about 88 percent of college students use ecommerce loans, about 23 percent use mortgages or installment loans for daily expenses, and about four percent use online usurious loans. So, now, the new generation has become the new favorite in the consumer market.

And the last one is in the rise of China in the world, in the four decades of reform and opening up, converted China from a poor and a backward nation to a radically developing country with the second largest economy in the world. The young generation in China have witnessed this historical process, which has shifted their views of the world and their country. Their world view is oriented towards openminded and self-confidence. They're proud for the nation and the culture of self-confidence, mostly with young people, to pursue on the mission of rejuvenation of Chinese nation. Next.

The major historical events not only impact on the life chances of a new generation, but also shape their generation of characters and form a generational identity that distinguish them from the previous generations. However, new generation is unable to break the constrains of the social structure. The shared generational identity fails to eliminate the social and the quality disparities within the generation. In contrast, marketization has strengthened Chinese class structure through intergenerational transformation. New generation is not a homogenous one. The inequalities based on rural urban division and social class have led to diversity and the inequality among the new generation. Next.

The rural urban gap has long been a major source of socioeconomical inequality in China. The persisting rural urban inequality has deep impact on new generation, leading to disparities between the youth from urban areas and those from rural areas, regarding the circumstances in which they've grown up and that there are opportunities for education and employment. (Inaudible 0:19:39), the disparities between social classes have widened rapidly in recent decades. The nominal of class reproduction has become increasingly prominent. Only children from urban middle-class families are likely to be admitted to top universities or study abroad and later become successful professionals or business elites. In contrast, children from poor rural families may fail to compete in education system and become migrant workers at an early age. Next.

Rural urban inequalities are particularly reflected in education. More than three-quarters

of new generation came from rural families, but the proportion of these young people with high education is much lower than the average proportion. They have a very proportion in low -- lower education groups. Even if the children from rural families go to colleges, most of them only go to the vocational colleges, and less can go to the top universities. Next.

Class differences is another important factor leading to the socioeconomical differentiation of young generation. Class solidification and involution competition are common words on the Internet to describe the dilemma of young generation. Class solidification means class status is a difficulty to change. It is transmitted from generation to generation. The people from low-class have few opportunity for up -- toward social mobility. Young people are classified as the rich second generation and the poor second generation or official second generation.

Involution competition means that the competition in education and the labor market is so fierce that it requires more and more efforts, but often leads to no results because family background determines one's future. As a result, young people from the low classes have to lie down at the bottom of the society. Next.

So, those losers in educational competition and the labor market try to look for new pursuits and new opportunities in new fields. Many young people from low classes are devoted to creating subculture and alternative culture on the Internet. Increasing numbers of young people have joined the ranks of webcasters, We Media, internet writers, and other cultural influencers online or offline. Flexible employment and self-employment have become popular among young people. The culture industry is thriving with teenagers and youth as the target group, in which young people find new opportunities and feel freedom, autonomy, creativity, entertainment, and fun. Next. Next, please, yeah.

So, my conclusion is the title of my book, "China's Youth: Increasing Diversity Amid the Persistent Inequality". Differences between the young generation and their parents are distinct, but diversity among the young generation is more prominent. Urban rural gap and class disparity have led to persistent inequality in education, employment, and living conditions. Rising youth culture, as well as internet platforms, have created opportunities for young people from disadvantaged family backgrounds. That has brought enough diversity but cannot reduce inequality among young generation. Thank you very much.

MR. LI: Well, thank you, Professor Li, for sharing the overview thesis and some of the demographical trend and the educational outlook on your book, which are all interesting and important. We have already received over two dozen questions by email, both in advance and also during your presentation.

Now, I would like to first raise two or three questions for myself and then choose a few questions from the audience. Now, my first question, as we know, there's a table actually related with that, in your book, listing 14 large-scale national quantitative studies, over the past couple of decades, from 2003 to, actually, this year, 2021, for which you served as a principal investigator, including some longitudinal surveys and also attitudinal views. You and your colleagues must have experienced many surprises that challenged some conventional wisdoms. So, would you please share with us one or two big surprises, based on this large-scale quantitative survey (overtalking 0:26:46)?

MS. CHUNLING: Sure, sure. Yes. Yeah. In recent decades, many aspects of Chinese society have changed very rapidly, and young people have taken the lead in these changed trends. Some rapid changes among young people really surprised us. For example, consumption behavior, just like I talked in my presentation. Ten years ago, the government policymakers and economists were still complaining that Chinese people like saving and were unwilling to consume. Economists suggested the government should adopt various ways to encourage people to consume. But now, the new generation is very different in consumer behavior.

So, I remembered, after breakout of the financial crisis in 2008, I met European scholars who are asking me if there was any family debt risk in China. At that time, I answer -- my answer was no, no. However, nowadays, the household debt ratio is rising rapidly. Consumer debt is very common among the young people. Some young people, consumers, buy online and loans, but are unable to repay them. College campus loans, now, has become a social problem. Now, government policymakers are worried about the risk of the household debt and excessive consumption of young people. So, we just show their consumer behavior change very quickly. I'm surprised at that, yeah.

MR. LI: Well, thank you. I mean, I think that your answer certainly will be interesting for business and community in China and probably overseas, as well. My second question, diversity and equality are two themes of your book, and also, I believe, values that you uphold. I'm interested in your

perspective on the interconnection between these two values. I have a two-part question here. First, do you agree with what Melinda Gates has said? Actually, I quote her in my introductory chapter. I quote here, "Diversity is the best way to defend equality. If you are not brought in, you get thrown out."

Second, any value may not be seen as absolute. Diversity could cause, as some may argue, contentious divisions and even conflict. Equality, if excessive, could come at the expense of liberty. Now, are you worried about this in the Chinese context or maybe it's severely -- we should not worry about that. So, if yes, why so, if not, why not?

MR. LI: Yeah, it is important question, diversity and equality. I agree with Melinda Gates, that diversity is a better way to defend equality. In fact, there is another saying, in Chinese context, efficiency and fairness. Before the reform and opening up, too much emphasis on the fairness, equalitarianism, and in differences in Chinese society, that has led to the lack of the driving force of economical growth. During the economic reform, economical growth has been put in the first place, with more emphasis on the efficiency. So, the economy has grown rapidly, but the problem of inequality is prominent. Now, Chinese governments have began to pay more attention to the common prosperity and try to find a balance between the efficiency and the fairness. For young generation, the diversity is more reflected in the diversified pursuit. Previous generation, mainly, sought to get rich, gain power, and become successful people, which led to the intensification of the competition and exacerbated inequality.

Today's young people feel that they don't have to -- success for -- in a traditional sense, and they can pursue diversified value goals. They say, oh, it's a -- it is a success to be recognized in the culture and the life fields they are interested, just like in the Internet, as some do, We Media, and internet writers. They can be very successful. And so, they say you don't have to make big money and a bigger - - to be higher officials. That is a success, you know. So, such diversity helps to reduce inequality among the young generation. So, that is my answer.

MR. LI: Thank you. That's a very comprehensive answer. And, also, that it occurred to me that, at the moment, it's like I think that the wind is going to -- that the need for equality and try to reduce all kind of disparities, so, I think the distribution of justice is probably the overall concern in China.

Now, my third question, chapter 15 of your book presents the finding from your 2018, this is three years ago, survey research on the so-called National Identity Scale, with which you measured the

strengths of national identity of over 10,000 Chinese college students. Actually, you also do that for a few years. Now, the survey data showed that the younger the intergenerational group, the weaker their national identity. Both the '90s respondents have the lowest national identity scores. The better the university attended by a student, the lower their perspective -- respective national identity score.

Now, do you think that these findings from three or four years ago remain the same now, as we know that the tremendous efforts have been made by the Chinese leadership, in recent years, to promote (inaudible 0:34:53) and recruit college students, especially at the top universities, such as Beida, and Ching Hwa, and et cetera, to join the Chinese Communist Party, at this time of rapid deterioration of U.S.-China relations. Now, we have lots of numbers to show that. Now, my question is, do you remain the -- do they remain? Is this kind of your analysis about National Identity Scale related with their age, their university, their level of education, et cetera? Do they remain the same, or have they changed significantly?

MS. CHUNLING: Yes, there are some changes. Our survey, that is a longitudinal survey of Chinese college students, conducted by -- every year. We include some questions to observe the change of national identity of the college students. We found there is an increase of national identity in recent -- three years, especially for top university students because of the Trade War with U.S. in 2019 and COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. Before that, the top university students had more opportunities to join international exchanges to visit abroad, compared to students from other colleges. They learned more about the Western culture. Many of them wanted to study abroad after graduation.

However, since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, many of them worry that U.S. and the youth are hostile to Chinese people or hate Asia. Their willingness to study abroad has declined, which may also be a reason for their rise of their national identity. So, that is a very important change of this young group. Yeah.

MR. LI: (overtalking 0:37:21). Yeah, well, thank you, that, you know, this -- for this question and also the earlier question. These all reflect, you know, really, the Chinese youth or Chinese society is not stagnant. It's subject to change, subject to environment, both domestic and internationally. So, thank you for bringing this up.

Now, a number of questions from our audience about Chinese young people's attitudes

toward the U.S. and the American people, it just is a really good -- to follow that, your answer just now. In one of your recent surveys, you found that the post-1990s age cohort differs greatly from the post-1960s and the post-1970s, who grew up in a period, what you called the falling over the West, a Chinese saying is chong yang mei wai. This is (inaudible 0:38:15). Now, there's a new popular Chinese term, I think, that you referred in your presentation about Tang Ping, but, also, there's another one, equally popular, called Pings, it's seeing the world on an equal level. I'm sure the next panel -- you have so many experts who will talk about Tang Ping laying flat. But the question is about the seeing the world on an equal level. Now, here is the specific question from -- for you, from Stephen Berwick, the President of NGO True Tai Chi. Here is the question, are China's youth growing warmer or colder toward Americans?

MS. CHUNLING: Yeah, that is a complicated question. Our survey of Chinese college students investigates how where the college students like countries, other countries. We asked them, in our questionnaires, what do you feel about the following countries? We list some countries and provide some answers, is I like it very much, I like it average, I don't like it, I don't like it very much. So, the respondents often say they find a difficulty to choose the answers. For example, for Japan, you know, they say, oh, when talking about territory disputes with Japan, they don't like this country. But a lot of the students, they really like Japanese culture very much, especially Japanese, and Asian, and the TV drama. So, you -- how to choose an answer? We cannot do. So, as for the U.S., they say, if they talk about the Trade War with the U.S., they don't like America. But they also like American science technology, and the high-tech products, and American culture, for example, Apple, the cell phone, very popular by the young people, and also the American coffee in Starbucks, very popular, and American pop music, and NBA stars. A lot of young people like that. So, it is very complicated, so.

However, since the Trade War began, the goodwill of Chinese young people towards America has declined rapidly. However, they just say that is not to country, American country, but they're for Americans. You know, they like it. They like to exchange ideas, make new friends, and, yes, that is on the young people, Chinese young people, basing. Yeah.

MR. LI: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you for -- also, it reminds us that the Chinese population is so huge there's a lot of different views. It's, sometimes, so difficult to make a generalization, and so, there's another dimension that you really add. Now, this may be the last question. It's from

Clayton Duke, Dube, I'm sorry, Director of the U.S.-China Institute at the University of Southern California. Now, here is the question. HUCO, the household -- the urban household registration system, which while not as decisive a factor in the lives of the young Chinese as it was, still affects access to education, healthcare, and et cetera. Are young Chinese, in any way, sensitive to how it is aligned for division within the urban hierarchy and then between them and their rural fellow citizens? Dr. Li?

MS. CHUNLING: Yeah. Inequality of opportunity between urban and the rural areas has persisted in education, employment, and social welfare. However, for young people, they don't feel a strong division between from urban or from rural areas in their daily life, or social contact, or workplace, no such discrimination or something like that. For example, in the young people's, say, culture, entertainment activities, they pay more attention to the -- their interests that they all like, the abilities, rather than with whether they are from rural or urban areas.

MR. LI: But, Dr. Li, that -- I have to interrupt. The question is particularly on HUCO. Do we think the whole HUCO is still a huge barrier or not? Yeah.

MS. CHUNLING: Yeah, HUCO system now is relaxed, and the influence is reduced, especially for young people. They can change or move everywhere, you know, even though HUCO is relaxed. But the difference between the urban-rural family background also has an impact. For example, I -- in, I say, for young people in more intimate relationships or their private life, such as marriage, or dating, or from life, so, the young people from rural areas are often discriminated by the urban residents. Many young people from rural families have different lifestyles or behavior patterns from urban families, due to their poor circumstances in which they grow up.

So, some girls from big cities are reluctant to marry young men from rural families, even if this young man graduated from the top universities, or they have a promising career. These young men are called Phoenix Men, (speaking Chinese), referring to young people, you know, young men with a promising future but from rural areas. In addition, some young men in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou are also reluctant to marry young women from rural areas. They are worried about a wife from a rural family, and they ask for a lot of financial support to her family. So, HUCO relaxed. It's a less and less influence, but other influence, you know, remain, but, yeah, that was the question.

MR. LI: Okay, well, thank you. This is the first time I heard the definition for a Phoenix

Man. Thank you. Unfortunately, the time has come to bring this important discussion with Professor Li to a close. Thank you, again, Professor Li, for so candidly and thoughtfully sharing your analysis and perspective with us today.

Now, for the audience, I apologize for not being able to answer many of your excellent questions. The good thing is that we have Dr. Li's very comprehensive book, in which I believe you may find the answers and more. Also, fortunately, now we will have a panel discussion featuring international well-known experts on China's youth. The moderator of the panel, Professor Diana Fu, will introduce each of the speakers.

I'm pleased to introduce Diana Fu, a Rhodes Scholar, a Public Intellectuals Fellow at the National Committee on U.S.-China relations, elected member of the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists, and Scientists, a recipient of the Best Book Award from American Political Science Association, the American Sociological Association, the International Studies Association. Diana Fu is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. Her affiliations and the titles can go on and on, but here is what I believe the most important one. She is a Nonresident Fellow at the Brookings John L. Thornton China Center. Thank you, Diana, for being a Brookings Colleague and for moderating this exciting panel we are going to hear. Over to you, Diana.

MS. FU: Thank you so much for that gracious introduction, Cheng. Today, we are joined by four very, very distinguished panelists that I have the honor to introduce very briefly. First, we are joined by Matthew Chitwood, a Rural China Fellow at the Institute of Current World Affairs. We are also joined by Stephanie Studer, a China Correspondent at *The Economist*. We are joined, also, by Martin Whyte, a Professor Emeritus of International Studies and Sociology at Harvard University. And last, but certainly not least, we are joined by Guobin Yang, a Professor and Director of the Center of Digital Culture and Society at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

So, without further ado, I want to start with some questions for our panelists. So, let me start with you, Matthew. You once lived and researched in a fairly remote village in Yunnan. Would you please begin by telling us a little bit about what you observed firsthand, in terms of rural-urban inequality that we've heard so much about in Dr. Li's presentation? And, you know, this rural-urban divide has really plagued China for decades. So, what have you observed firsthand during your time of research in

Yunnan?

MR. CHITWOOD: Yes. Thank you. Thank you, also, to the Brookings Institution for the invitation to join, to Dr. Li, as well, for her excellent research, making that accessible in English and available to us so generously. Quick context on my research. So, yeah, I lived, researched in a remote village in Yunnan for two years. It was still officially impoverished when I moved there, and I became the 341st resident, a very small village. I traveled widely, also, around the province, for those two years, by motorcycle, visited some exotic places that Yunnan is known for but also many less exotic place, so, places -- subsistence farming villages, where they're still farming their three mu, or half an acre, of land on the tops of mountains, so, China's hinterland, the hinterland of the hinterland, really. So, going so many places, talking to so many people, I witnessed a great diversity of experience, of opinion, with regard to this, their experiences and this rural-urban divide. So, to pretend like we talked about, that there are -- there's a homogenous perspective is not fair but rather a great diversity of opinion.

So, three common themes that emerged in my research and talking to young people in rural areas. First was a deep sense of poverty. This is both in absolute terms and comparative terms. So, though, over the last eight years, 100 million people roughly have been lifted out of poverty, they still feel that rural-urban divide acutely. They're living, you know, lifted above the poverty line. They're living just above 4,000 renminbi per year, roughly 600 USD per year. So, it's still a very low bar. Even if they're double that, they are still living in destitute condition, very, very difficult conditions, very low bar, in terms of poverty, and in absolute terms. In comparative terms, rural people are still more connected than ever because of travel, because of tech. They're able to go to the big cities. They're able to be on their phones and see what's going on. So, they're very aware of Chinese economic growth, and this sense of comparison runs deep in our human nature. Rural people are no exception to that.

So, the idea, what I call keeping up with the Jung's, this comparison with your neighbor, is very, very deep. I remember speaking with a man in my village, that, during the course of the two years when I was living there, was lifted out of poverty. And so, sitting there with this man, and he looks around at the cinderblock bathroom, that the government has just built for him, and his subsidies to send his young child to school for free, and he looks around and he says, the government tells me that I'm not poor anymore, but I still feel poor.

So, there's a deep sense of poverty, still, in these rural areas that is a deep contrast between the rural and the urban areas, and, as Dr. Li's research suggests, has been calcified in these different tracks of urban and rural. You know, the one child policy exacerbated that, whereas all the resources are going to the one child in urban areas, and rural areas that tended to have many more children, resources that are meager to begin with are split up between many children, much weaker education infrastructure, much weaker employment opportunities.

The second thing would be a deep sense of vulnerability in life. This is a function of their lifestyle, a function of the jobs that they have. Safety, essentially, is a luxury that they can't afford. So, for example, in the village, I followed a guy to work one day, he's on a welding project, and he just cobbles together some women's sunglasses and a cardboard from a beer carton as a face shield protection for his welding project. A road they -- a single road, dirt road, that goes through the village, they paved it while I was there. Unfortunately, they didn't do a great job, and one of my friends is -- he was driving his diesel cargo truck around that road. The road collapsed. His truck tumbled down the mountainside. Thankfully, he was thrown from it early on and survived. But these types of situations, very, very common in these areas. So, there's a luxury of safety that's not available there, a deep sense of vulnerability, little, in terms of safety net, as well, in terms of healthcare or, for migrant laborers, job security, labor rights, even the D Bow, the minimum livelihood guarantee is fairly minimal.

And quickly and lastly, in general, with all of the changes that Dr. Li was talking about, with the infrastructure development, with the poverty eradication efforts, in general, a positivity towards the party and towards Xi, specifically. Of course, there's grumbling, not enough money, it's (speaking Chinese) is what one guy told me, but it's basically a drop in the bucket, right, nine cows and one hare, what they're getting, in terms of financial support. But, in general, the rhetoric that you hear is we're living our best lives now. So, I think, one gentleman termed it, when they were talking about the changes in the constitution, that would allow Xi to be, essentially, Emperor for life, as they say. One man told me, hey, better 20 years of Xi than 10 years of Xi. So, essentially, this idea that they are living their best lives now, I think the attitude between rural and urban, for rural young people, that the crux of their attitude depends on who they're comparing their self to, whether they're comparing themselves to the urbanites or whether they're comparing themselves to where they've come from, and the village, and their family's history.

MS. FU: Thanks, Matthew, and just for context, when were you in Yunnan doing this work?

MR. CHITWOOD: 2018 through the end of 2019.

MS. FU: Right, so that was fairly recent. And I like the phrase "Keeping up with the Jung's" because I think it really illustrates the difference between lifting people out of absolute poverty versus what sociologists call relative deprivation. And some of the earlier work in social movement studies shows that relative deprivation is what makes people unhappy and sometimes drives them to participate in social movements.

MR. CHITWOOD: (overtalking 0:56:51).

MS. FU: So, let's stick with the rural-urban divide, but turn it around a little bit to talk about the rising sense of social injustice, or, excuse me, a social justice, actually, and social tolerance among Chinese youth in the cities and in the countryside. So, I want to turn this question to Stephanie. As a journalist, have you, indeed, observed the emerging silent revolution that Dr. Li talks about, in terms of this changing of values among the younger generation?

MS. STUDER: Thank you, yes, I found that, that particular chapter of Dr. Li's book really quite fascinating. So, for those unfamiliar with the time of Silent Revolution, as I wasn't either, this is in chapter three, or the third essay, in the book. The term is used in sociology and first referred to how new values came to the fore among a generation in Western Europe, post-1945, and that, basically, there was a shift towards post-materialist pursuits away from more basic economic needs, so, towards self-expression, quality of life, political participation, and all that comes along with greater social tolerance as well, and this term of Social Justice. And so, one of the questions that Dr. Li asks, is to what extent might this Silent Revolution be happening now in China? And I'm very interested in this concept. I recently wrote a -- one of our special reports on Youth, and wanted to spend time, both in the cities and in the countryside, and there is so much separating those two types of youth, as Matthew has laid out. But if we're thinking about them in generational terms, as a cohort, I think there are some striking commonalities that were perhaps less obvious in their parents' generation. And one of them is this sense of social inequality, and social responsibility.

When we think about today's young people in China, I think many observers unfavorably

compare this generation with the Tiananmen Generation, who championed, among other things, Democratic rights. And often, you know, when we think about a revolution, we think about it in political terms. But what if it was more social? I think it would be a real mistake to write off this current generation, as a political, simply because it doesn't seem all that interested in a different mode of government.

After all, young people, in many parts of the world now, and very much so in the West, say that they are disillusioned with democracy and politically liberal ideas. But, in China, I was really struck by the gusto with which young people have taken up many of the very same social causes that are embraced by their peers in the West. I'm thinking, in particular, of feminism, LGBT rights, worries about the environment, starting to come to the fore over economic growth, and, of course, the internet has been totally crucial for this exchange of ideas between Western youth and Chinese youth.

So, I've sat in on a workshop, called Go Zero Waste, in the city of Suzhou, with young people learning to sew their own cloth face masks because they realized how wasteful the throw away surgical ones are or how harmful to the environment they might be, and, you know, this in a country which has -- which is still very much wearing face masks on a regular basis, certainly, in the bigger cities. Lots of young people in the city like to use a program, called Ant Forest, by Alipay, which tracks their green spending and rewards them with credits that can go towards planting trees.

But then, on the other side, I've also spent time in rural China, on the coffee farm of a young woman, in Yunnan, who -- you can see many of us are fond of a -- fond of the Province of Yunnan, who went to study in the city, like many rural youth now have an opportunity to do, and that may well be a vocational college, but they -- many of them now do get time away, in an urban area, even if it's a well-developed county seat, and she then joined this small new stream of young people, who were choosing to return to the countryside to work.

And what struck me was that she wasn't returning just to make a quick buck or because she seen an opportunity. Her family owned this coffee plantation. But she told me that she was stunned, in the city, to realize that her father earned less for one kilo of coffee beans, than the cost of a single cup of coffee, where she had been studying. And last year, she set up a trade association to help give young farmers, like her, more clout in the market, in rural areas.

And, finally, I wanted to talk a little bit about another set of rural youth, who are sort of stuck between the countryside and the city, and they are the factory youth, those who leave behind their rural hometowns, really have no intention of returning, as their parents once did. And I recently spend some time with some young factory workers in Guangzhou, and it was striking to me, the extent to which some of them using, you know, some older forms, like Workers' Poetry, or Literature, or blogs, and some newer forms, like short videos on Billion, to express their own disillusionment with their working lives.

And moving to the city hasn't been all it's cracked up to be, and this generation of young factory workers is much more likely to join strikes, as we've seen most recently in the food delivery industry, in big cities. And there is Chinese Factory Slang, now, among the young, that refers to lifting the bucket, which is where you hop from factory job to another one with a just bucket of personal belongings because you feel that you are being overworked or that your pay is too low. They're simply not willing to spend, you know, grueling hours toiling at machines, perhaps like their parents' generation was. So, I think, that there is a growing sense of injustice, and particularly as social media allows these young workers to see the life that is just out of reach to them, in the big city.

MS. FU: Thank you, Stephanie, for sharing those fascinating stories, and thank you, also, for highlighting the fact that sometimes political participation isn't everything. And I have to remind myself that, as a Political Scientist, that civic participation of the ones that you describe is a form of very important social change in China.

And just on the note about factory workers, I recently showed a documentary to my students, called the Shamatta, or Smart Culture. It's a subculture, and I would encourage the audience members to also watch that documentary of, basically, factory workers in China. This was a number of years ago about expressing their disillusionment through these funky hairstyles, these punk hairstyles.

So, let us turn to, now, Martin. As a world-renowned scholar of social inequality, could you share with us your reflections on whether or not this call today, under Xi Jinping for common prosperity, is actually achievable? And more broadly, what are the implications of Dr. Li, and other Chinese sociologists' research for policymaking?

MR. WHYTE: Thank you very much. I want to, again, recommend Dr. Li's book. She done this extraordinary research, over most of two decades, documenting the changing roles of Chinese

Youth, and particularly the second part of her subtitle, persistent inequality.

Now, we know Xi Jinping is talking about this new campaign to promote common prosperity, and the question is, how seriously should we take this, and how successful is it likely to be? And so far, at least, I have to say, I'm one of the skeptics. And the reason is that it seems to me that most if the things we're seeing so far, like trying to pressure millionaires and billionaires to give more charity, closing down businesses for tutoring after school, and so forth.

They don't seem to me, to be having an important potential for reducing inequality in China. It's worth noting that, in 2013, soon after Xi Jinping took effect, the State Council announced a 35-point program for reducing inequality in China, that included things like promoting a system of property taxation, combating the perniciousness of the HUCO system, and so forth. And, basically, it disappeared from view. So, now, he's revived this apparent claim, but I don't see much evidence, so far, that systematic efforts to redistribute incomes from the rich to the poor, to implement a better system of taxation, so that the people at the bottom can be benefited more from government to redistribution, and so forth, to work.

And the particular thing that relates to Professor Li's book has to do with the HUCO System and rural-urban inequality. And basically, in today's China, as in most societies, the key to getting ahead is education. So, the question is, what has happened to the educational opportunities of China's rural youths, compared to urban youths, over time. And I would agree with Professor Li that the barriers have decreased. But partly, that's because the barriers were so extraordinary. At the end of the Mao Period, it's worth remembering that rural people, essentially, were bound to the soil, as their parents had been in the commune system. So, they couldn't migrate to work in the cities, a very small number, that might be able to get in the colleges and escape the rural areas, but it was very difficult.

Now, the Reform Era produced the freedom to migrate into the city, and to work in construction, and work in manufacturing, and so forth, but, at the same time, early in the Reform Era, there was a huge drop in upper-middle school enrollments, and so, it became very difficult for rural youths to go any further in school, than lower-middle school graduation. So, whether consciously or not, a system developed over several decades, early in the reform period, that was very beneficial to China, in terms of its economic boom having sort of relatively low modest skilled, modestly educated migrant

workers from the countryside flooding in to build the cities, to work in the factories, and so forth, but not able to go further in education than lower-middle school. And for the initial decades, we have to remember that urban public schools did not admit migrant children to attend, even if they lived in the locality, unless they paid very special high fees. And even when they began, only recently in the new millennium, really, about 2005, 2006, even in large cities, beginning to allow migrant children to enroll in urban public schools, they could only enroll to little lower-middle school graduation.

We had a study done a couple of years ago, that -- looking at Shanghai, and by a Sociologist who did field work, Ming Wah Ling, she's published a book, called "The Inconvenient Generation". She did field work in Shanghai lower-middle schools, and the -- you had migrant youths, and urban HUCO youths, sitting side by side, in the same classroom, and having the much same, the kind of shared urban culture, clothing, music, and so forth. But when it came time to approach graduation, the local urban youths could sit for the Juncao and get into upper-middle school. The migrant youths were forbidden to do so.

So, what is the justification -- this -- so, the HUCO System, even though it's been relaxed somewhat, it's still a pernicious and very institutionalized barrier to advanced education for people of rural origin. And we have to remember that even though China is now majority urban, 60 percent or more live in the urban area, but that includes urban migrants, that something close to 70 percent of all young people are still -- have rural origins.

So, there's institutionalized discrimination that makes it very difficult. It's -- now, there are increasing numbers, who are managing to overcome that, to getting into -- but mostly in urban areas and in rural areas, if they go beyond lower-middle school, they're shunted into vocational high schools, not academic high schools. So, their chances of getting into college are much lower than urban youths. And even if they get into college, as Professor Li's book shows very much, they tend to go to the lowest tier colleges, and you get poorer jobs, and even some of them end up being consigned to what's called the Ant Drive, in other words being able to -- having to compete with migrant youths, that didn't go to college, for very low and urban jobs.

To really promote common prosperity, Xi Jinping and the Party need to do much more to fundamentally dismantle the HUCO System systematic discrimination, particularly in regards to the

education of young people in China today, from rural origins, because, as Scott Roselle and other people showed in their publications, China faces a Human Capital Crisis, that they're -- despite the fact that urban kids are doing so well, and most of them are going to college, and even working in foreign companies, going abroad, and so forth, that the average level of education of the Chinese population is still affected by this legacy of systematic discrimination and assumption, you know, even for migrants. You know, you can go to a small town or city, and have more opportunities, but if you want to go to the larger cities, you're not qualified. You have to accumulate complicated points that it's very difficult for many migrant families to do.

So, I see the HUCO System as still extraordinarily persistent, even though it's not as rigid, and it doesn't confine young people to what I would call socialist serfdom of the commune system in the Late Now Era. Thanks.

MS. FU: Thank you, Martin, for explaining why you think that common prosperity is not achievable, at least in the short term, and that you don't see much evidence for it. And I find it particularly interesting that you talk about how common prosperity or equality is not just achieved by taking money from one person's pocket and putting it in another person or even just equal salary.

But it runs much deeper, and you talk so much about, and I think very rightly so, about the equality of opportunity, or rather the inequality of opportunity, in terms of persistent educational opportunities, that run for decades, and can have an accumulative impact on the disadvantages that rural HUCO youths still continue to have. And as you mentioned, Scott Roselle's book certainly talks about how that kind of inequality and deficit in human capital can actually have a negative impact on China's continued economic growth, which we'll talk about.

MR. WHYTE: If I could just say one more point, that what's -- one thing that is discouraging to me is that, in Dr. Li's Book, we have the evidence of the extraordinary pervasive and negative impact of the HUCO System, still, today. Why isn't the Chinese Leadership paying more attention to research results, such as this? Why don't we see -- I don't see in the common prosperity anything except sort of empty pledges that have been made for decades, that the HUCO System was going to be phased out, but it's still extraordinarily important.

MS. FU: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Right.

MR. WHYTE: Okay, sorry.

MS. FU: No, we'll get -- we'll come right back to this in the Q and A, but I want to turn it around a little bit. We talked so much about inequality and about the HUCO System. I want to turn us back to the youth culture in China today. And so, I want to direct this question to Guobin Yang, who is a world-class scholar of cyberspace and digital China.

So, Guobin, what do you think of this curious phenomenon that we're witnessing in China today of, on the one hand, these very actively engaged Chinese youth, were known to be little pinks. They are very nationalistic. They are very engaged, very active on social media. And then, on this other hand, we also have another group of disenfranchised, disillusioned youth in China, who are called, the Lying Flat Crowd, the Tang Ping Crowd, who just say, you know what, I give up. I can't compete in this environment. I can't compete in the 996 work hours, and I just -- I'm just going to be completely disengaged. So, how do you make sense of this kind of paradoxical juxtaposition of these two groups of youths in China?

MR. YANG. Thank you, Diana. I think, you know, there is also the same theme of diversity, also characterizes youth culture, there is a lot of diversity. So, I'd like to think of these two phenomena that you just described as two types of discourses about youth, and I think they represent two extremes.

So, if we focus too much on these internet buzzwords, memes, you know, we may ignore more complex pictures. On the little pink label conveys the idea that China's millennials are the latter-day versions of red gods, just a bit fainter in color. Like the red gods, they are often described as fervent xenophobic patriots. It is true that they have launched online nationalist campaigns and have cancelled celebrities or brands which they claim are anti-China or are discriminatory toward China.

But nationalism is not their only or even the dominant identity. Their everyday identity on social media is primarily fans, fans of various commercial products, celebrities in the entertainment industries. They are active on social media, first and foremost, I think, as members of online fan clubs. There is a Chinese term for this, (speaking Chinese), and, basically, these clubs exist to support their idols.

So, this being said, their identity is shaped in very powerful ways by contemporary

consumer and entertainment culture. And this is a culture about the consumption of global brands. So, in this sense, little pinks may not be a unique Chinese phenomenon. They may have counterparts in other countries because consumer culture, everywhere, I think, is entangled with political culture to shape the identities of these young consumers.

I think there is also a tendency to use little pinks as a label for all kinds of nationalist discourse on Chinese social media. You know, in recent years, vast amounts of such nationalist discourse are not produced by these random individuals, but by commercial social media accounts, you know, especially Weibo public accounts. These commercial accounts manufacture and spread all kinds of conspiracy theories about international relations, in the name of patriotism.

They're really click baits. Savvy readers, I don't think, take them seriously. Even state media, very recently I think, have won against this kind of, you know, patriotism as business. So, this is about the little pink phenomenon. I think we want to try to see whether there is a more complicated picture behind it. The lying down discourse, the so-called Tang Ping, sometimes also called lying downism, Tang Ping belief, is more recent than the little pink discourse. I totally agree with you that it's partly discourse of resistance. It is also a discourse about burnout, about resignation, and the basic idea is that many young people realize now that it's because of this really strict social hierarchy and inequality. It's impossible for them to try to move up the social ladder, through personal striving.

Therefore, this discourse about lying down appeared, which urges people to stop striving, stop working, no more hard work. Lie down and rest, you know, forget about competition. This is something really, you know, if you think about, in the '80s and '90s, when the cultural competition really became so important. Now, it's resistance against competition, and this discourse resonates with many people. I think it really reflects the sense of burnout in cantankerous society.

And I suspect, also, this feeling of burnout is not unique to Chinese youths. We have a global phenomenon of burnout, that we should all be worried about. I'd like to add, very quickly, that this discourse about lying down is only the latest of iteration of a whole set of discourses about disempowered youth. It's been around for quite some time. Marty just mentioned about the end tribes, that's about 10 years ago. About the same time, you know, 10 years ago there was another label, a kind of internet meme, called Desu, sometimes translated as loser, right, it's an ugly word. But Desu is one of the most

popular internet memes at that time, ten years ago.

Another recent virial discourse is called Hyun Man, you know, poor humble families, and this appeared in the title of viral posting 2019. And the posting for Chinese -- for English -- my poor Chinese -- the English translation is something like the death of a top authentic achiever, from a poor family, but the Chinese captures this better. It's called (speaking Chinese).

It tells the story of a talented, a poor college graduate student, who struggled in life, at work, unsuccessfully, and eventually died of cancer at a young age. The story was circulated widely, won a lot of clicks online. Well, it turned out, it was a fake story, not a true story. The WeChat public account, which posted it, had made it up, as a click bait because these kinds of stories really gain a lot of, you know, tears, sighs, clicks.

But what it shows, I think, is the problematic aspects of all these online discourses about Chinese youth, and other things, as well, I would say. So, this, you know, whether these youth are nationalistic or they are poor, their patriotism and poverty sort of turn into objects of consumption to win clicks into those attention economies. And, you know, it just seems that patriotism and poverty seem to sell well, very well, in cyberspace. I think, this is the tendency we should be wary of when we talk Chinese youths.

And, finally, just to add quickly, when there is all this discourse about, you know, these youths, we really don't hear a lot, directly, the voices of the young people, themselves. Thank you, Diana.

MS. FU: Thank you, Guobin. That was really fascinating, all these memes that I'm sort of taking notes because Chinese memes, you know, they happen so -- there are so many of them, and if you want to understand youth culture, I think, you follow those memes. And it was also interesting that you mentioned that this kind of cross between the little pinks and the fan culture because I think it's easy to sort of dismiss this, fan clubs in China, as, you know, just teenagers everywhere sort of young people following celebrities.

But they are actually a very potent social and political force, and I think we saw them being mobilized by the government, well, not by the government, but be mobilized in general, during COVID, and we've certainly heard a lot about them recently, with the downfall of some of the celebrities in China and the crackdown on fan groups, which I think is a very interesting phenomenon to look at.

So, let us now turn to the Q and A. So, we've already received a number of questions, and I wanted to start with one that we haven't talked so much about, which is more about, you know, how to build bridges. So, we have a question from Martiza -- Marisa Adonis, who is from MTA Visions Global Corporate Social Responsibility Firm, and how can we build coalitions between U.S. and Chinese youth, without frustrating diplomacy and national security? So, I want to pitch this question to Matthew, if you would like to weigh in on this one, as Rural China Fellow.

MR. CHITWOOD: Sure. I actually spent a number of years in China, working in study abroad. So, I am a firm believer in the sort of exchange of understanding coalitions in -- outside of diplomatic or national security ties. I think this is critical. It's very evident we see things very differently on -- you know, we've talked about the diversity of views within China. Certainly, if you add an ocean to the equation, the views diverge even more.

I remember being in the village, looking out at the mountains, with a friend of mine there, and saying, man, these mountains are beautiful, so green, so lush, this is incredible. And I asked him, do you still appreciate the beauty of where you live? And we were in the middle of nowhere, and my friend, Yudoga (phonetic), turns to me and he says, (speaking Chinese), it's because of these mountains that we are poor.

And so, the divergent viewpoints that we bring to the table, are very, very different, such that we see even mountains differently, nonetheless, China's rising position in the global order or the Chinese Communist Party. So, exchange, understanding about these issues is critically important to long-term improvement of the relationship. How to do this, I'm a firm believer in education exchange, at young ages, I think, is really critical.

But what's important is that these shape deep understanding. So, you can have superficial exchanges, superficial conversation, but those don't necessarily lead to actual understanding. Seeing one another, one, first and foremost, as humans, but, two, understanding the situation on the ground. And that includes historical cultural context, on the Chinese side. That also includes Chinese students coming to the U.S., understanding historical cultural context. So, I would also just say I think Guobin is right and saying hearing from the voices themselves, so, young people with young people, hearing from their voices, themselves, is really critical in building up that understanding.

MS. FU: Thank you, Matthew. I certainly agree with you there, and hope that there's going to be continued people to people exchange, in terms of, especially, the young people because that is where the future lies. So, we have, next, a question from Professor Deborah Davis, from Yale University. To what extent is massive migration from the villages a primary driver of change? And, secondly, is one driver of consumer debt, the lack of confidence and future, as we have seen earlier in Japan? So, Stephanie, would please give us your insights from the field, as a journalist?

MS. STUDER: Yes, sure. I mean, in terms of migration being a primary driver of change, I mean, we're talking about the largest wave of internal migration in history, which has involved about 300 million people, who have moved to cities, since the late 1970's. And that's, you know, excluding -- those are only the people who are who have done the move, but that has had a direct impact on those who didn't do the move, those left behind, millions of young people, children left behind in villages by parents who migrated, and, of course, also the children who went with their parents.

And now you effectively got two generations of migrants, and, I mean, you can see clear - - because of the age, in the space of four decades, you have generational differences now, within that migrant cohort. And I think it's, yeah, it's hard to overestimate the impact of that. This new trend that we see, now, that I touched on earlier, of the (speaking Chinese), the returning youth, it's even got its own name now. This is partly because there is growing interest in returning to the countryside, which was just unheard of, even a decade ago, among young people who were, perhaps, you know, seeing that life in the city is not all it's cracked up to be, or it's simply just too hard to get there, particularly the most desirable cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Chengjiang Guandao.

So, by the same token, provincial China has become a lot more inviting. Quality of life there is much better than it was, a couple of decades ago, when their parents were having to make this decision. And then, of course, you've got the high-speed rail network, which has facilitated migration, as well as new roads, and so on, but it's also able to bring people back, as well. So, I think, there are many more interconnections now, in China, then in the past.

And I'm struck, also, to see how, you know, there's urban interest in rural life. And this may just be a kind of a passing fad, but there is this notion of kind of nostalgia for rural China. And so, you have this situation, where rural youth, may feel like what, you know, Matt just mentioned, with the

mountains being the reason they're poor, but then they see urban youth coming, you know, from far more privileged backgrounds, and enjoying, you know, a long weekend in their countryside. But I think, you know, there's some benefits to that, as well. They see that, you know, there is value there in that sort of life, too. So, I think all that is shifting.

And then to the second point about the consumer debt, you know, is that driven by a sense of insecurity in the future, was that it? Yeah, I think, partly, there's -- you know, with all these different kind of youth terms that we're hearing about, whether it's the Dugong of like, I feel like I'm just working a nine till five, but not getting anything out of it, the kind of disillusionment with the burnout, 996 culture. A few years ago, young people were referring to -- before Tang Ping, it was the foresee the Buddhist youths, who were just kind of chilling, didn't want to kind of engage.

And I suspect that, you know, all of that might explain why people are like, let's just spend it, spend it now. I think, yeah, there is -- it's funny because they're -- you know, every generation hopes that the next will have an easier ride, and that's why their parents saved up so much for them. But, now, there is deep insecurity because of really fierce competition for jobs and the returns on education are falling because so many people are getting a university degree now. So, I think, all of that, encourages young people to just sort of enjoy life now, live whatever life they want now.

MS. FU: Yeah, I certainly observed that, Stephanie, even a number of years ago, when I was in China, doing research on migrant workers, and some of our friends, who were migrant workers, they didn't have a lot of money, but they owned some of the fanciest bikes I've seen, you know, because they would work in one factory, and then they would get bored, or they would burn out, and then they would quit. And then they would go on a road trip, a bike trip, and then they would circle back, and earn more money. So, it's really this kind of carpe diem type of mentality that, I think, is driving some of this consumer behavior.

So, let us the turn to -- go back to social inequality. So, we have a question from Johannes Allenfelt (phonetic), who is a Political Advisor from a German Consulting Firm. So, do rising expectations of young people and growing social inequality cause great social conflict, undermining the growth and rise of China, in the long run? It's a tough question. So, I'm going turn that to you, Martin. If you please give us your analysis and prediction of whether or not this kind of social inequality, that Dr. Li

wrote about, that many people have observed, will undermine China's economic growth?

MR. WHYTE: Well, as it happens, some of the audience may know that I did three national surveys on people's popular attitudes in China, toward rising social inequality, carried out in 2004, 2009, and 2014. And I published a book based on just that first national survey, in 2004, called "Myth of the Social Volcano". And, basically, the main finding was that even in 2014, I haven't done a survey since then, so, obviously, this is at the very beginning of Xi Jinping's reign, but the -- even though people were upset about some features about inequality, and, particularly, we did ask systemic questions about, was it fair or unfair, various kinds of HUCO based discrimination, preventing migrant kids from enrolling in public schools, not getting -- migrant families not getting urban welfare benefits, and so forth.

Those were very widely condemned, even by urban respondents to the survey. But, in general, people still were so optimistic, even though the economy was already beginning to slow, by 2014. They were -- they still, in their own families lives that experienced so much improvement, compared to five years earlier, ten years earlier, and most of them still predicted that in the future, we asked the question, about five years from now, about how well you think your family will be doing?

And, if anything, the 2014 respondents were more optimistic than those in the earlier surveys. So, the -- so, I think, it's really complicated. It's -- if there's a growing pie, then people are not so upset about some people getting more of their share of the pie than they should. But if the sense is that our -- that the pie is actually shrinking, then people might get more upset. And so far, at least, I mean China -- obviously, there's the pandemic intervene, so, there's a temporary and severe downturn in China, as well as in other countries.

But so far, at least, the primary commitment to keep economic growth and improvements in income, and in education, and consumption levels going has, I think, made people not as upset about inequality, in general, as they should. There was very little sign in our surveys of anger against the entrepreneurs, the new millionaires, and so forth. There was much more anger about some local officials who don't treat people fairly, than there was about, you know, people getting very rich, so. So, but I don't have any survey data, since 2014, to be sure, but so far as I know, China is still being protected by the fact that most people's lives have continued to improve.

MS. FU: That's interesting. So, we -- let's hope that the economic pie continues to grow,

or -- and so far, as it grows, you don't see a sort of we are the 99 percent and you are the one percent type of phenomenon happening in China, at least not for now. Very interesting.

Let's turn to Simon Golinski, who is the Principal of the Golinski Group. He asks what access do Chinese youth have to world media and narratives of history, different from those promoted by the control media? Is there any direct measurement of youth knowledge or attitude towards the rest of the world? So, I'm going to turn this one to Guobin, as an expert of cyberspace. Could you tell us a bit about how, you know, how, first of all, how Chinese youth have access to global media, and also what do they know?

MR. YANG: Thank you, Diana. That's a tough question. But I'm going to just start with a number that Professor Li mentioned in her presentation. She said that about half a million Chinese students study overseas, in various parts of the world. So, if we ask, you know, what kind of global media do Chinese, through their peers, in the Chinese youth, have access to?

This half a million Chinese students, overseas, are the best global media for their peers, and the reason is because they directly experience what's happening outside of China. They know the news from the places where they live, and they constantly, as well -- now, they're always on social media, right? They're closely networked with their families and peers back home. So, they're constantly sharing all this information back home.

So, in that sense, you know, they really are the biggest at global media for their peers in China. So last year, I think, last year, right, when the Trump administration was going to ban WeChat, you know, I worried I'm going to be cut off from my friends and families back in China, but also worried that it would also ban these vast amounts of information flows back to China, the global media, right? So, that's, you know, if I would just make a very brief response, I would end there.

But, of course, I would also -- this is just a couple more words. And, also, I think it's a matter of not just what the kind of global media they can access, but also what kind of global media they - - what kind of media they want to access, right? If you asked them, do you want to read *New York Times*, do you want to read *The Washington Post*. Well, ask our, you know, millennials in the U.S., how many of them read the that, right?

They have -- they know what kind of information they want. They want consumer

products information, you know, entertainment media, like, I think, this came out in our earlier discussions, brand shoes, the most, you know, fashionable brands, not necessarily news media. Of course, there's another fact that we all know, that some of these major outlets, media outlets, like, I think, *New York Times*, too, right, is blocked in China. But the question I -- this has been raised before in a lot of discussions, even if you open up how many young people are going to access these is another matter because they have their own information channels.

So, you know, when -- the more difficult question about measure, you know, what would be a good measure of their attitudes towards the outside world, I think that's a tough question, but, again, I'm going to go back to my half a million Chinese students' global media. I think that could be a reasonable measure of how the kind of access they may have, the kind of exposure they may have, and the kind of -- and the information flows are also not one way, right? The overseas students also interact with students back home. Can I stop there?

MS. FU: Sure. Thank you for sharing that. So, speaking, and we've been talking so much about young people. Let's actually get a question from a young person in the audience. So, we have a Political Scientist, a Danish Political Scientist, who is interning at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Askar Knudson asks, based on my travels in China and conversations with Chinese students, most seem to either support the CCP or offer tacit criticism of them. Do you think that this could change if economic growth were to slow? And do you think that the social credit system -- or do you think that the social credit system can sort of effectively get people to behave and to sort of take stock in the system and -- because they have a stake in the system to not challenge the CCP? So, I think I'm going to direct this question to put Stephanie on the spot because, you know, as a journalist, you cover everything from the social credit system to students, and so I think you'll have an answer for us.

MS. STUDER: It's a great question, and it's one that we ask ourselves a lot and to which I don't think we have a clear answer. But certainly, economic growth has been at the center of the regime's credibility for so long now. It has, I think, it has been the core of, you know, being able to ensure that it can provide a better future, that quality of life is improving. That is central to, I think, the support that it receives in China, and that is very real, and I think that's right, that, you know, most people that you ask will say, yes, they are happy, and certainly now, after -- in the past few years, with what they've been

able to compare with how the Chinese government has handled COVID-19, compared to, you know, their understanding of how the West has handled it. You know, it's clear to them that something's working in China.

So, that has really reinforced it, and there have been some -- we touched on this a little earlier, but there have been some fascinating surveys done of how that, simply going through COVID-19, has impacted young people's sentiment towards the CCP and how support for the CCP has grown as a result. So, for sure, you know, if we -- I think everybody expects that if the economy really, really stumbles or, you know, if there isn't a kind of a redistribution done of wealth, I mean, everything that we're hearing now about the common prosperity, you know, as Professor Martin Whyte was saying, you know, that it seems like empty words for now, but if something on that front can be achieved, then maybe that would take the sting off an economic slowdown.

And the -- to the second point about the social credit system, I mean, in some ways, I don't know if people feel like that gives them a stake, I mean, possibly, if aspects of it are about civic responsibility because I think that that will resonate, actually, with young people in China. There is a sense that, you know, you want to kind of -- you want to follow the sort of -- the basic rules of civic society and be polite, and cue, and, you know, clean up after your dog, or whatever. But if -- I think that the more repressive aspects of it, that won't go down as well, and I think that, you know, the CCP, at the moment, is -- I think it's having to work out how to make up for the potential lack of economic growth, and we've seen that one of the ways it's done that is to turn to this mixture of repression and, you know, very well placed kind of propaganda, and the big question is, you know, how far can you push that, before people get upset, and, you know, whatever that means in practice. So, it's a delicate balance for the government to strike, that's for sure.

MS. FU: Right. Thank you very much. So, we have actually come to the end of our program, and I just wanted to, once again, thank our distinguished and wonderful panelists for not only their questions but also sticking to time and for giving us a lot of food for thought, in terms of the -- China's young generation and what kind of a social political force they will likely emerge to become. And we also hope that you purchase Dr. Li's book, which is fascinating, and I want to thank the audience for your questions, and I'm sorry that we didn't get to all of the questions, and the program is also available

on the YouTube Channel. So, thank you very much for joining us today.

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