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## **START OF TRANSCRIPT**

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Hello. I'm Clement Paligaru. Welcome to Ear to Asia where we talk with researchers who focus on the region with its diverse peoples, societies, and histories. Ear to Asia is a podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.

Much has been written about the reasons for the success of the Brexit movement and the rise of Donald Trump. The common denominator in the rise of nationalist populism in developed western economies seems to be the disillusionment, anger and resentment in large swathes of people who have been left behind by the onslaught of neoliberalist policies in almost all aspects of life. In short, the trickle in the trickle-down effect theory never reached these people and their lives have been harder and more uncertain than those of their parents. In 1978 Deng Xiaoping of China did the unthinkable and introduced [Unclear] words are denoted in square brackets and time stamps may be used to indicate their location within the audio.

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market-oriented economic reforms to the Communist nation. In other words, he had China dipping its proverbial toes into the waters of capitalism.

In the space of 39 years, China has achieved what appears to be an economic miracle to become the world's second-largest economy. That miracle has lifted about 800 million of its 1.3 plus billion people out of poverty. However, this miracle has created increasing income and wealth inequality, with those at the pinnacle of the economic apex often ostentatiously flaunting their newfound riches, while others, particularly in the rural regions, struggle to eke out a living. This increasing gap in prosperity has not gone unnoticed by China's central government. It's concerned that the growing disparity in wealth could result in social unrest and possibly lead to the downfall of the Chinese Communist Party, just as it did the Communist Party of the former Soviet Union.

So China's leaders have created and implemented several key programs, along with the attendant propaganda, to blunt the edge of wealth disparity. But our guest on this episode of Ear to Asia, Professor Martin K Whyte, believes that the Chinese Government is barking up the wrong tree and has empirical evidence to support his view. He postulates that there is another group of social injustices that is a greater threat to China's stability, but which the central government seems reluctant to tackle. Martin is a sociologist who has been studying contemporary Chinese society since the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. Martin Whyte is Faculty of Arts Asia Scholar at the University of Melbourne and is based at Asia Institute. He is also the John Zwaanstra Professor of International Studies and Sociology Emeritus and Faculty Associate of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University.

Martin, welcome to Ear to Asia.

MARTIN WHYTE:

Thank you very much, Clement.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Now, firstly can you give us a very brief history of China's embrace of globalisation, capitalism, and the free market?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Just very briefly, at the time that Mao died, which was in 1976, China was still pursuing what in most respects was a very conventional, centrally planned, socialist economy, and

it was not doing very well. It also had some features that made it a rather bizarre, different form of socialism, even compared to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which is relevant to our theme. It was designed by Mao to be more egalitarian, but it also made it less efficient, productive, and so forth. When Deng Xiaoping took over a couple of years after Mao's death, he as vice premier actually - he was not president, but vice premier - he spearheaded the remaining leadership in instituting an open door policy and market reforms.

And there are various ways to characterise what he did, but basically I would say Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues were saying, the Soviet model is not a viable way anymore to develop the Chinese economy. But in East Asia other economies have followed the Japanese model and we can make it applicable to China. So essentially he wanted to shift from a highly self-sufficient, centrally planned, state socialist, rigid economy to an export-promoting, manufacturing platform to try to grow Chinese economy by integration with the outside world. And as you mentioned in your introduction, they've been extraordinarily successful in doing that. Even though the economic growth rate is a little lower now, they're still growing at a much more rapid pace than almost any other country on the planet.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Well, it's been said that the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 marked China's coming of age as a global power. How have the lives of Chinese citizens been transformed since then?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Since 2008 - I don't see a dramatic change in 2008. 2001 is more important. That's when China joined the World Trade Organisation, and that made it even more possible for China to integrate itself to the outside economy. And basically China has continued to grow at very rapid rates, for some periods more than 10 per cent a year. More recently the Chinese Government claims it's between six and seven per cent. In general it has led to very rapid income growth and income growth that does trickle down to the Chinese economy. The distinctive thing about the Japanese style of economic development compared to the Soviet version is it automatically translates into improved standards of living for ordinary people. But the catch, as you also mentioned, is that income inequality has also increased very dramatically during the course of the reforms.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:



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Now, just going back to 2008, which was a significant year globally, it was the year when the developed economies of the West were savaged by the unfolding global financial crisis. How did China weather that storm?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Basically the Chinese Government, not having to answer to sort of parliamentary majorities and critics, instituted a very dramatic state investment campaign to try to keep the economy pumping along. So, even if the export markets were falling down, relatively speaking they ploughed a lot of money into new railways, new airports, new construction of all kinds, and made easier credit available to Chinese firms. So basically China weathered the global financial crisis quite well, although it did increase the Chinese Government debt quite a bit.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Let's move to the response of China's peoples to the changes. When assessing response and national sentiment, for example, the Gini coefficient is referred to by analysts. What is this Gini coefficient and how did China track on this measure between 2004 and 2014?

MARTIN WHYTE:

The Gini coefficient is a statistic that's used internationally to measure the degree of inequality of incomes in a population. And a Gini of zero means everybody has the same income and a Gini of one means one family or one person has all the income and everybody else has none. So the higher the Gini is, the more income inequality. And China started out in its reforms with a Gini under 0.3. And in the period in which I was conducting these surveys the Gini continued to rise, and the estimates in 2007 were that the Gini coefficient was about 0.49, much higher - even higher at the time than the estimates of the Gini for the United States, the most unequal advanced capitalist society, and more unequal than Russia.

Since then the Chinese Government claims the Gini rise has levelled off, that it's now about 0.46. But other surveyors who have done their own independent estimates think that it's still continued to climb and it's over 0.50. The government for almost two decades has worried that the higher the Gini coefficient is that this somehow automatically translates into popular discontent. You frequently used to see in the Chinese press claims

that if the Gini gets over 0.4 then there is going to be social turbulence and unrest. And the Gini coefficient in China has been over 0.4 since about 1990.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

You've conducted three in-depth surveys in China on social justice issues. Now, we'll discuss your interpretation of the surveys and the resulting conclusion. But first let's talk about your surveys in a bit more detail. Firstly, when were these surveys conducted?

MARTIN WHYTE:

These were conducted at five-year intervals in 2004, 2009 and 2014. They're all national surveys, so they include regions all over the country, rural as well as urban residents, minorities, as well as Han Chinese and so forth. They were conducted in collaboration with a very highly skilled and reputable survey research firm at Peking University directed by Professor Shen Mingming, who happened to be a student of mine when I taught at the University of Michigan. They interviewed people in questionnaires, roughly an hour-long questionnaire, and these questionnaires all included translations of questions that had been asked in other countries, looking at distributive justice and injustice issues. So we can both look at how Chinese feel about current inequalities and also how their feelings compare with people in other countries.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

How were the questions translated into Chinese? And any tweaks to the questions? Any changes at all?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Insofar as possible we tried to do exact translations to get comparable meaning in each survey and that involves kind of standard procedures that survey researchers use, including back translations. You translate questions into Chinese and then you have naive people not involved in the project to do a back translation into the original language and see if they come up with the same wording that you started out with. We're pretty confident that the meanings of these questions are comparable across the different populations that we surveyed.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Martin, can we compare the results from the surveys in China with the results from developed economies and the post-communist economies, like Eastern European nations?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Yes. I didn't do the surveys in the other countries, so I'm limited by where the original international social justice project surveys were carried out. And there were several rounds of surveys carried out both in East European transitional economies, including Russia, but then also in advanced capitalist countries as well. Then follow-up surveys, they started in 1991 and the most recent survey is in 2006. For instance, I don't have a survey in India, I don't have a survey in Australia, so there are other countries - I would like to have a survey in Taiwan to see how Taiwan attitudes compare. So we're limited by the comparisons. But for those countries where these surveys were conducted and we asked exactly the same question, my contention is we can make a direct comparison.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

In your 2010 book, *Myth of the Social Volcano: Perceptions of Inequality and Distributive Injustice in Contemporary China*, you explained that the growing wealth gap or distributive injustice is not a major concern in China's citizenry. You conducted one more survey after your book was written and your three surveys span a full decade. Does the data from the third survey, which was conducted in 2014, support the conclusions in your 2010 book?

MARTIN WHYTE:

The 2010 book, just to be precise, only reflects the 2004 survey, the initial survey. So I've done these two more surveys since. And basically those confirm - if you like, you could say, still no social volcano, when it comes to popular anger about inequality, particularly income inequality. Even in the most recent survey the average Chinese doesn't express a high degree of anger or a growing degree of anger about the gap between rich and poor. There have been expectations after the 2008 financial crisis and then again after the slowing of the economy more recently that each of these would precipitate a turn toward more critical attitudes. But so far, at least 2014, less than three years ago, we did not see any signs of overall growing anger.

In fact, there's a great deal of perception among the people we interviewed that within the current structures of inequality there are lots of opportunities for getting ahead. And

Chinese are much more optimistic than people in the other countries surveyed, whether East European transitional countries or the advanced capitalist countries.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Do the Chinese recognise that the wealth gap is increasing and is there resentment? You said there's no anger, but is there resentment toward the wealthy?

MARTIN WHYTE:

They certainly recognise that there is growing inequality. Most of the questions are in terms of income rather than in wealth. You understand the distinction.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Mm-hm.

MARTIN WHYTE:

A high proportion, about three-quarters, and a growing proportion of Chinese say income inequality in China is too high. But it turns out in all the other countries a majority of people also say that, so Chinese don't stand out in feeling more so that the growing income gap is unfair. But when you ask about chances for people to get ahead and whether being rich or poor is determined by merit or by unfairness in society, Chinese are practically off the charts compared to the other countries in thinking that the inequalities they see around them are mainly determined by merit, not by societal unfairness. And their degree of optimism about their own ability to get ahead and their optimism about how their family will be doing five years down the road is higher than any of these other societies.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

So, in an age of Brexit and Trump why is it that the Chinese are not resentful of those that have become wealthy from the economic reforms of the last 40 or so years?

MARTIN WHYTE:

The main difference is simply that the income improvement for most Chinese has been really extraordinary. The reduction of poverty has been dramatic and most people that we survey say they're doing better, or much better, than they were five years ago. And this was true in 2004. It's even more so in the most recent survey. So the idea of the rising tide lifting all boats, most Chinese feel that that is definitely the case. So another way of

looking at it, they don't see income gains as a zero sum game. If some people are getting very rich and unfairly so, they may resent that to some extent, but they don't feel that that really has an impact. They don't think that translates into less chance for them to get ahead. They don't see it as the elites taking the gains and they're left behind. Objectively there is just no comparison with most of the other countries on the planet where people have not experienced this kind of change.

But I think another very important part of it has to do with the very strange features of Mao era socialism at the end. It was, in terms of income distribution, a much more equal society than China is today and most other societies, but it was also a highly inequitable society. And this is a very important distinction between equality and equity. They're often used interchangeably. But China was highly inequitable. Over 80 per cent of the population were in rural areas, they were engaged in agriculture, and they were essentially bound like serfs to the soil in the communes. They were forbidden to migrate into the city. They were forbidden to decide to stop farming and take up handicrafts or become a peddler or something of the sort, and the rural areas were systematically disadvantaged compared to the urban areas.

And even within urban areas people were assigned to jobs. Many people who began work in the 1950s were receiving the same monthly wage 20 years later, no matter how hard they worked or how many contributions they made and so forth. So Mao had a very strange view, particularly after the Cultural Revolution. He thought using material incentives to try to get people to work hard or produce more, be more efficient, that that was somehow bourgeois, capitalist, and so forth. None of the other socialist countries did that. They all believed in the formula, to each according to his contributions, so if you work harder, if you produce more, you get more pay, among other things. But Mao thought that was bad, so people were locked into lives that they had very little control over and in which their lot in many cases, such as rural people, depended on where they were born, not on their own merits.

So, even though there's much more inequality now, people feel today they have much more ability to change their fate, to decide to leave farming, to go to work in a factory. And more than 200 million Chinese have migrated into the cities. Now their lot in the cities is often - they're not treated the same as urban people, but nonetheless they have a lot more ability to improve their lives than they had in Mao's day. So I think all of this makes the

increased inequality palatable because at least a lot of it is seen as more equitable. Okay? It's more fair. At least some of the riches that are being accumulated are due to people being more productive, being more inventive, and so forth.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

But it does seem that the Chinese in general would like the government to do more to address the wealth gap, but they don't want redistribution of wealth. How do they reconcile these two apparently opposing positions?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Well, that's a very good question. But in general we find in our survey questions that there is strong and growing support for things like minimum income guarantees and greater access to health insurance, better schooling, and so forth for the poor, for migrants, and so forth. There is a lot of support for things that would lift the bottom of society up further, even though the record is one in which a lot of that has already occurred. But there's less support than in many other countries for taxing the rich or placing income caps on what the rich people can earn in order to do that. So they seem to feel that many of the rich people deserve to be able to spend what they've made and that the government should find some way to come up with resources to support the poor more actively.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Economic data do show that [the] income wealth gap in China has grown tremendously and you have referred to that earlier on. And this is since the nation implemented pro-market reforms. And the central government in China has been concerned about the increasing wealth gap as well becoming a source of disaffection among the masses. It's expressed the concerns publicly. Consequently the government's been active in taking action to redress distributive injustice and has been equally active in publicising their programs towards this end. What have been some of the key programs to address the widening income and wealth disparity?

MARTIN WHYTE:

In the last three Chinese leaderships, beginning with Jiang Zemin, who was leader of the Communist Party at the time of the new millennium, and then the subsequent leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao and Xi Jinping, the leader who took over in 2012, all three leaderships have declared that this is a serious problem. And particularly that second

leadership that was in charge from 2002 to 2012 instituted a number of policies to make China [a] so-called harmonious society. Some of those had very impressive results. So they abolished the agricultural tax that farmers for many millennia had had to pay, including in the PRC.

They did an extraordinary job of extending at least minimum basic health insurance coverage to rural people. So we found in our surveys that in 2004, at the time of our first survey, only about 15 per cent of rural respondents had public medical insurance. By the most recent survey more than 93 per cent had such coverage. Barack Obama in the US would be extremely envious of the ability to extend coverage. The earlier leadership, [and] Jiang Zemin, had a program to develop the west, so one of the things that's very important in China is regional differences. The Gini coefficient is high partly because of the rural/urban gap and extreme differences between the most developed parts of the country and the least developed.

Many of the least developed parts of the country, like Guizhou and Gansu and so forth, are internal provinces in China. There were various kinds of incentives and government investment priorities that were developed to try to help the western regions of China catch up more. These have still only made a modest dent in the Gini coefficient, but nonetheless they have at least a good sort of public relations impact on people who feel that the government is doing things to care for the most poor and disadvantaged.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

You're listening to Ear to Asia brought to you by Asia Institute of the University of Melbourne. Our guest on this episode of Ear to Asia is sociologist, Professor Martin Whyte, who's been studying contemporary Chinese society since the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. Martin, your empirical research makes a strong case to allay the concerns of the Chinese government that the increasing wealth gap that's resulted from capitalism would bring social unrest to the Middle Kingdom. As such, you've declared that particular volcano as dormant. Why dormant and not extinct?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Well, it has to do with the fact that things can always change in China. At the moment Chinese citizens, like citizens in any country, don't respond to objective economic statistics like Gini coefficients and growth rates and so forth. They respond to what they see happening around them and in their own lives and their own personal experiences and

others that they know. As of 2014 they still saw those mostly in very positive terms compared to other societies and even compared to the 2004 survey, the one that started all of this, when already at the time I declared, maybe prematurely, that it was a myth of a social volcano.

Now I'm declaring that it's still dormant, but if there is an economic crisis, government scandals that lead people to feel that the government officials are rigging the system against ordinary people and so forth, it's always possible that feelings of distributive injustice could increase. But in general the government has been doing a good job up to now to make sure that that doesn't happen. And I argue that it's relatively feasible for them to do so, because the main way to try to combat feelings of distributive injustice is through financial measures that help the poor and disadvantaged and try to limit the growth of inequality and try to compensate for the growing Gini coefficient. So, even though there are, according to recent reports, more than 600 dollar billionaires in China, more than in the US, the resentment of Chinese people does not seem to be mainly focused on the very, very rich.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

But great income inequality, or distributive injustice, is not the only social volcano in China. You point to another that's far more likely to erupt than the gross income disparity volcano. Describe this other volcano for us.

MARTIN WHYTE:

Basically, what people are most concerned about, and what is most difficult to get a handle on because it's too politically sensitive to do surveys in China, are procedural injustices rather than distributive injustices. So it involves abuses of power, lack of protection of the population, lack of ability to obtain redress if they're mistreated, and so forth. One of the background contexts of all of this is that during this period of the last couple of decades there have been a growing number of social protest movements in China. In 1993 there were less than 9000 a year. Now there are maybe close to 200,000 a year, more than 50 a day, in China. Many previous commentators had claimed or suspected that those were connected to the rising income inequality.

If you look at the work that other people have done, not through surveys such as I've been doing, but through doing case studies of different rural protest movements, protests against chemical contamination, protests against environmental problems, abuses of

labourers, and so forth, the targets in those cases are not the very rich. They're against people who have authority over Chinese citizens. And Chinese citizens feel that they're not sufficiently protected, that they can't obtain redress, and so forth, now there's a lot of corruption and a lot of unfairness. So it's these procedural injustices. Now, it sounds like a technical distinction between distributive injustice and procedural injustice, and it's true people in power can use their power to gain financial wealth as well. So the two are not completely independent, but nonetheless it's really the inequalities of power rather than the inequalities of income that mainly are angering Chinese citizens.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

While this other social volcano has to do with the use and abuse of power, it seems to be made up of a patchwork of issues, Martin, like displacement, the household registration system, pollution, and food safety. Let's focus on two of these issues, household registration, and corruption in the various levels of government. Export manufacturing, that's been such a large part of China's economic reforms, has brought citizens from rural areas into the big cities, like Guangzhou in the south. Now, Martin, as you mentioned earlier, not all citizens are equal. Chinese citizens who move to the big cities for work are not afforded the same services, such as healthcare, education for their children, as generational urban dwellers enjoy. How is this form of discrimination manifested?

MARTIN WHYTE:

This is connected to what's called the hukou system, the Chinese term for household registration system. China actually had a household registration system, a hukou system, in imperial times. And of course, other countries do as well, places like France and Russia and Taiwan and so forth. The general rule is that those are simply a way of keeping track of people. When they move, they have to report that they're now residing in a new place. What happened under Mao in the 1950s was that the hukou system was used to keep people in place, as I mentioned previously, to prevent them from migrating into the city. From 1960 onward basically it became virtually impossible for rural people to move into the city.

What happened in the reform period is that the migration ban was lifted gradually, so you had millions and millions of migrant labourers leaving the countryside and fuelling China's economic development. These migrants still are classified as rural. So, for instance, even if they have health insurance now, it's usually health insurance back in their village. So if

they want to get reimbursed for medical expenses, they can't do it from their employer or from urban authorities and so forth. There are also many housing developments in the city. China has carried out, starting in the 1990s, housing privatisation, so urban people who were renting from their work units or renting from city housing authorities receive very favourable treatment to become owners of the houses that they've lived in.

And many Chinese now in cities, long-time city dwellers, a major part of their personal and family wealth is their housing. But the migrants in most cities - large cities anyway - have been barred from these housing privatisation plans. They often have to rent in the suburbs from peasants. So there are just a series of major ways in which migrants, even though they're a very important force in China's economic development, have continued to be discriminated against, even though increasingly everybody in China - and this is reflected in our surveys - thinks that this system is grossly unfair. Even urban people themselves in our surveys, large majorities of them say it's unfair to deny benefits to migrants compared to urbanites.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

So is anything being done about this by the central government?

MARTIN WHYTE:

The central government has declared a desire to eventually eliminate hukou-based discrimination. But it's a long-term project and basically they're making it easy - relatively easier - for migrants to get full equal treatment in very small towns and cities. But in the larger cities it's still very difficult. They have a kind of point system which is, of course, similar to international immigration procedures in many other countries where, if you invest a lot, or if you have a higher degree of education and so forth, you can accumulate a certain number of points to eventually give you an urban household registration. But most ordinary, you know, modestly educated, manual labour migrants cannot qualify for this kind of treatment in Beijing or Shanghai, Guangzhou, these other large cities.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

When Xi Jinping became president of China in 2012 one of his platforms was to eradicate corruption at all levels of government. Professor Minxin Pei of Claremont McKenna College in the US has written a book about crony capitalism in China and describes this

phenomenon as the largescale looting of public assets. Do the Chinese people regard this as a serious problem?

MARTIN WHYTE:

They definitely do. It's - again, in the kind of survey research that I do it's very difficult to ask about it, but we did have a question in the most recent survey. More than 80 per cent, if I recall correctly, said that corruption is a serious problem. But the way that Xi Jinping is addressing it, it's not clear that it's going to be all that effective in the long run. So at the moment fear of being arrested is causing more caution and so forth, but basically it's still being done in an internal, secretive fashion within the Communist Party. Other countries that have tried to attack corruption, even places like Hong Kong, had an independent commission against corruption.

It's important to have a transparent and autonomous agency to investigate corruption and Xi Jinping and his colleagues in the Communist Party are not willing to do that because they're worried it would endanger their own political power. That's, in my mind, connected to the difficulty of trying to attack procedural injustices in general. Most measures that would be designed to try to check the abuses of power, unfair confiscation of land, and housing, and all of these other problems would involve limitations on the power of the Chinese Communist Party and its lower level officials. And Xi Jinping and his colleagues, they're trying to prevent that from happening by everything else that they do.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Martin, why is it more difficult to study this procedural injustice in China that you've been talking about a fair bit today?

MARTIN WHYTE:

It's basically because of the sensitivities of the Chinese Communist Party. And I should mention that when we began our distributive injustice surveys people told us that that was too politically sensitive. We wouldn't be able to do it. So before we did our three national surveys we did a pilot survey in Beijing, which we were able to carry out without major problems. But it is still the case that asking questions about unfairness of officials, corruption in the Communist Party, and other things of the sort in surveys of the kind that I'm conducting would still cause a lot of trouble for our Chinese collaborators. It would be impossible for me and my western colleagues to carry out independently without our

Chinese collaborators. So it's very difficult to get this kind of research carried out in China because the Chinese Communist Party does not want attention called, any more than has already been called to all of these procedural injustice problems.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

What have been some of the greatest challenges, I mean, broadly speaking?

MARTIN WHYTE:

Well, one of the things I've said over time is I can try to study these things because I have tenure, so if it doesn't work out, I haven't lost a great deal. China is - has always been a challenging environment for people doing research. I have had - not on this topic, but on other more innocuous topics in the past - I've had survey projects in collaboration with Chinese colleagues interfered with, been told we couldn't collaborate with them, and so forth. So it's always a changing environment and many people are worried about the political atmosphere in China now. Xi Jinping says he wants to do reforms and he wants to have the legal reforms and other kinds of things, but, as I'm sure you're aware, there are increasing numbers of arrests of human rights activists, of lawyers that are helping people involved in protest activity, and so forth.

There are also various kinds of edicts claiming that universities, for instance, in China are too much infected by western liberal ideas and they have to pledge new loyalty to the Communist Party and so forth. So all of this is leading many of us outside China, who have been carrying out these kind of collaborative surveys, to be very worried about the future, that what we've been able to do in the past doesn't necessarily indicate what will be possible in the future. Because, after all, the whole point of the Chinese Communists' maintenance of their Leninist system is there can be no institutionalised protection from Chinese Communist Party power. The party always has the ability to change its tune, change its direction, and you never know, it's still unpredictable. I'm nearing the end of my career myself. I'm not sure that I'm going to be doing more surveys in China. But I'm worried about the future if some of these more ominous signs in China continue.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Now, what motivated you to make this study of Chinese society your life's work?

MARTIN WHYTE:

I actually started out in Russian studies before I went into Chinese studies. You could say I was a child of the Sputnik generation in the United States, growing up in the 1950s when Americans were shocked that the first satellite was sent up by the Soviet Union rather than by America. Khrushchev said that the Soviet Union would bury the US. So I was originally interested in studying this very different kind of society and understanding the challenge it represented for western capitalist democratic societies. Of course, when I started and shifted to China the Cultural Revolution came along and China seemed to be going off in an even more extreme socialist direction at the time than the Soviet Union was, so that made it very fascinating to me. But, of course, China has changed in the other direction now. It's a more successful, increasingly capitalistic society than Russia is, so it still remains fascinating, but the original interest is really - comes from a comparative societies, comparative communism interest of mine when I was just growing up.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

Martin, we have run out of time. I really appreciate you joining us today on Ear to Asia. Many thanks for your time.

MARTIN WHYTE:

My pleasure, Clement.

CLEMENT PALIGARU:

We've been speaking with Professor Martin Whyte, who has been studying Chinese society since the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on iTunes, Stitcher, or SoundCloud. If you've enjoyed this or other episodes of this podcast series, it would mean a lot to us if you'd give us a generous rating and write a review in iTunes, or like us on SoundCloud, and of course let your friends know about us on social media. I'm Clement Paligaru. Thanks for your company and bye for now.

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