

**Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time
with Edward Cunningham
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Ezra Vogel: This is Ezra Vogel. I'm delighted to welcome you back to Critical Issues. We have a session today and then we'll have a session next week, Jim Millward, who has been studying the Xinjiang area, will talk to us about the Uyghur issue. And then we'll have a long vacation until late in January, when we resume at that time. But we're very lucky to have with us today Ed Cunningham. And Ed got his start at Milton Academy in Chinese as a very young man. Went to Bei shi da for a while, developed the language. Went to Georgetown, his undergraduate in politics. Came to Harvard for an MA in regional studies, so we're glad to have him back with us. And from there, he went on to MIT where he studied with Ed Steinfeld after getting his degree taught for a while at Boston University. And then we were able to recapture him back here at Harvard at the Kennedy School, where Tony Saich made very good use of him and working on energy, environment issues. We had a wonderful program where we trained Chinese bureaucrats. And Ed was attested to that program and did a lot of looking after bureaucrats. So he got to know at a personal level a lot of that great group of Chinese bureaucrats that have been here and therefore, he got a very good feel for those bureaucrats. And then after that, he started this survey about 14 years ago, over 30,000 local officials who've been serving those people for 14 years. And therefore, he has an unusually good sense. He's worked on issues like energy and environment, but he's also had a very deep interest and a very deep personal sense of these bureaucrats, who he got to know at a very personal level. I'm not gonna take any more of his time. Ed, it's yours, but first, I wanna have Nick say a word about how we'll conduct the questions.

Nick Drake: Hi, so those of you who have been here before know the drill, those of you who are new, welcome. We have, at the bottom of your screen, there's the Q&A tab that you can click on. You can enter your question in there. There should be an option to do so anonymously, or if you choose not to do so anonymously, please identify who you are and where you're affiliated so that we know who's asking the question, thanks.

Edward Cunningham: Thanks again, well, thanks, Ezra, for inviting me and really the opportunity, for the opportunity to discuss this public opinion work. So this work began, really, at the Kennedy School as a complement to our, that executive education training program that you mentioned of government officials that began in the early 2000s. And the goal was really to really inform the teaching content and the research with the perspective of Chinese citizens, how satisfied were they with performance of government, from roads and bridges to health care, one child policy. So this talk will cover our analysis of the results from those surveys that were executed from 2003 to 2016 and are pretty roughly in line in terms of the time that we ran those training programs. And when I say we, of course, I mean Tony Saich, but also Jesse Turiel, who was one of our post-docs. So the three of us have been writing recently and analyzing these results, and we've written in China Quarterly a piece about a year ago, but are now also writing a book manuscript. So hopefully, this will be of interest to people, and I look forward to the discussion. In terms of just a quick roadmap, what I thought I'd do is talk a bit about the link to big issues, right. So this survey of the satisfaction of Chinese citizens and the link to CCP

resilience and that literature. Then talk a bit about some trends that we saw over the years, something about the best and worst services, at least from the perspective of those respondents. A bit about the geography of satisfaction, so where was highest satisfaction growth over this period. And then a bit why, how do we explain satisfaction and geography of satisfaction over time and what does it mean? So what, sort of transitions, challenges, and takeaways. So if you go all the way back to Max Weber, who often focused on, one aspect of his writing, of course, was sources of legitimacy and sources of power from the traditional and historical through to the charismatic in terms of leaders and then into the rational or the legal institutions. I think that's where Andy Nathan picked up in 2003 to write persuasively about authoritarian resilience. And he, as most of us know, looked at the ways in which the CCP at the time was attempting to strengthen that last of Weber's categories, was rational, legal sources of legitimacy. And he had examples that were quite useful around the institutionalization of the system, around limits, for example, term limits, leadership succession normalization, meritocratic advancements instead of factional ties relating to promotion. We saw a bit of that within the Organization Department, for example, and Li Yuanchao's, on his reforms, more functional specialization, more avenues for political participation. So he had laid that out and a lot of the empirical data around these reforms, I think, supported that argument. Then what we see, of course, under the Xi Jinping era has been a reversal in many ways, right. An end of, obviously, presidential term limits. Ended the, actually reversed a lot of the meritocratic reforms to cadre management. The strengthening of ideology as a guiding force. He has imposed these leading working groups in a way to really sideline a lot of the functional professional institutions of the party and the state that had been built up over time. And so one of the interesting questions, at least from our perspective, is how do you then explain the fact that the CCP at least appears to be fairly resilient? It's moving into its 100th year, next year, of its founding. And what we're more interested in is also how can we understand that resilience, particularly as economic growth begins to decline as it is? And so we're getting more of a new normal in terms of growth rates. I think Liz has done a great job, Liz Perry has done a great job. She wrote at one point, will dwindling political support under conditions of adversity spell the downfall of the regime as proponents of performance legitimacy and that explanation often predict? Or does the communist regime, Chinese, the CCP command a level of popular legitimacy that may allow it to withstand these substantial domestic and global challenges, right, that we all know it faces? And so that's sort of, it's that nature of question that we're trying to address.

So I'd like to say a few words about performance legitimacy in particular, right. So this is framed often as quite economic, as instrumental, that effectively, legitimacy, or at least satisfaction and support of the CCP, is largely the result of pragmatically being able to deliver the goods. And historically what that has meant I think for most people writing about this has been the economic goods, right, delivering economic growth. What that, of course, leads to is interesting questions around, well, performance is by definition and economic performance in particular can wax and it can wane and it's cyclical. And so therefore is that inherently an unstable source of legitimacy or at least of support? And that's often why, when you, when we see Xi Jinping in particular, but also other leaders from the party, I think that informs and that concern informs their search for complementary sources of support, from historical justification, right, through the obviously having the CCP allow, enabling China to stand up through to various forms of cultural appropriation, right. So under certain conditions, people, writings of Confucius, for example, certainly are out of fashion and actually attacked. These days is coming back as a form of

legitimacy, a source. Promotion of nationalism, of course, and also coercion. People like Marty Whyte, scholars like Marty, right, of course, here at Harvard and in a range of other surveys have suggested that through a combination of these different sources, what they see is that in the end, there really doesn't seem to be any type of upward pressure or any type of social volcano that those who have been left behind by economic growth, so lower income groups, for example, people living in rural areas, that there's not much evidence that these individuals, these groups in society are so dissatisfied that their support is waning of the party, and in fact, they report through often one year surveys, shorter surveys sometimes in rural areas, sometimes and often in urban areas, that in fact, satisfaction is increasing over time. Other scholars like Yang and Zhao, for example, have stressed the importance of social policy to say that in effect, what's happening is the CCP has not only through diversification of different sources of legitimacy and not only through pure economic goods, so the delivery of economic growth, but more importantly, through social policy have been able to maintain such support from large swaths of the population. And that is one of the driving logics of why we see the CCP as resilient or seemingly as resilient as it seems to be.

So then to just jump to our survey, what we did was over eight waves in 14 years, we analyzed results of these face-to-face interviews of over 31,000 respondents. It was a, just quickly, it was not randomly selected. The sites were not randomly selected in 2003, it was what is termed a purposive stratified sample, meaning we took ages 16 to 60. We then looked at, we wanted, we were interested in different levels of government, what people thought of different levels of government. And so we had three different levels of city, township, and village. And we picked different sites based on geographical location, average per capita income, population, and making sure they varied, obviously, in those all three variables, but also representing therefore lower middle income, middle income, upper middle income, but also many regional variation. But the respondents were then randomly selected through neighborhood committee lists. So what's interesting and important to note is what also is not covered. So while this is incredibly long in terms of a longitudinal survey and has a lot of respondents, it does not include ethnic minority populations that have different policies in terms of how they're governed. Let's say around, for example, one child policy. It does not include migrant worker populations who often lack legal access to many of the public goods and services that were being surveyed. And then sadly, of course, it ends in 2016. And hope springs eternal that it will be able to be run in the future, but of course, given the current conditions, these types of surveys are quite difficult and therefore, it ends. And I'll get to that towards the end as well in terms of where we might be in 2020.

Just a quick map showing those different areas. So it's the survey sites of 22 different locations, basically 22 different locations, 15 larger geographic areas. And then we just split them into two groups for comparison purposes so that those coastal more wealthy blue dots, which is, we call it the core. And then those red dots that are more the hinterland, which we call the periphery, to be able to start making some interesting and meaningful comparisons around what different respondents were saying about government performance.

So just quickly, two trends. First, like many other surveys that are, that were quite short, that were shorter, what we saw was confirmation that respondents in China, Chinese citizens do continue to disaggregate the state. Meaning they express, while they express higher levels of satisfaction with the central government, which is what we've seen in a lot of other writing, that satisfaction declines significantly with each lower level of government, when you ask them about

the performance of each lower level of government. And of course, that's important, because it's, as we all know, most public goods and services are provided by the local government. This is the reverse of the US where satisfaction is often higher with local government than with the federal government, for example. In 2003, the central government enjoyed a high level of relative satisfaction with about 85% of respondents in 2003 expressing approval and only about 9% or so disapproving of the central government. The second point is it is noticeable that across the board, satisfaction levels have risen, right, since 2003. So I'm just showing you 2003 to 2016. And satisfaction with the central government, which was already high as I said at the beginning of the survey, rose just a few points, so from about 85, 86% to 93%. What's, at the township level, you can see there, more than half of respondents were disapproving of township government at, 52% were disapproving in 2003, so more than half were not happy. And that dropped by about one half. So what we saw was by 2016, only about a quarter are disapproving and about 70% were satisfied. Just one caveat for people who are interested. In terms of those headlines, the numbers sound quite high. Right, so 93% or so, by 2016, of people were satisfied with central government. But if you look inside that number, that of that 93%, only about 32%, so about a third were very satisfied, about two thirds were somewhat satisfied. So even though 93% sounds quite high, it's only about a third one when you ask them if they're very satisfied or not. Similarly, when you look at local government, so their satisfaction with local government 2016, 70% are satisfied, but of that, only 13% were very satisfied, right. So you have big swaths of the population that are somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, just as a caveat to not over-interpret those high numbers.

So then what we did is we tried to understand which services citizens were most satisfied with and which they wanted the government to pay more attention to. So what you see here is first, there are higher levels of satisfaction, if you look at sort of the patterns, there are higher levels of satisfaction with the public goods and services that the central planning system has always been fairly good at delivering. So water, right, electricity, roads, bridges, maintaining social order. What's also interesting though is secondly, it's those services that the citizens thought were most important, but where they were least satisfied that were really those areas that were challenges that were created by the reforms and that tend to be more household or individual based. So combating corruption, creating employment, medical services. So related to that, I think there are two other points that are worth noting. First, and this was quite interesting, family planning often every year we'd see would enjoy the highest marks for satisfaction, so satisfied with family planning. But that's not that surprising given that it's a government priority, right, historically. But when we asked and we check on it and we asked how important it was for government to be involved in that kind of work and in that policy area, the respondents indicated that family planning was not seen as an important task for government. So it's very low in terms of importance and for the role of government. And then secondly, when at the time the survey began, environmental health, for example, environmental governance was not seen as highly important. So it was very, very low in the importance for government. As pollution has increased over this period of time and the government has talked about it much more in terms of the media, citizens have started to view environmental protection and health as critical and are dissatisfied with that work. And I'll get to that at the end in terms of where some of the cracks that we see in terms of this support and what, and the relationship between the environment and particularly health.

So a pointer on the geography of the data, so geography of satisfaction. It's quite telling. Whether you're rural or you're urban, if you're, the respondents have reported significantly higher gains in satisfaction in the periphery areas, in those areas that I showed you in the map that were right here, right. So these peripheral areas that were in red. So they have by far larger increases in satisfaction as opposed to their counterparts in those coastal or what we termed core areas. And that's regardless of the level of government, as you can see, that you're asking them to evaluate. And this is despite the fact that as we all know and as Ezra wrote about earliest, in earliest times, this is despite the fact that coastal areas, of course, have received the majority of FDI, have enjoyed the accelerated trade, right, following WTO accession, and experienced the most economic growth through the modern reform period. Yet we see the largest increases in satisfaction happening in those peripheral, periphery areas. And again, you can see whether it's urban or rural, you see the same pattern. And you also see the largest increases happening in terms of satisfaction with the performance of the local government, county, town governments, right. Also what's interesting is even in coastal regions, we see that it is the low income respondents, right. So this is showing you red is low income, pink is high income. So it is the low income respondents who report the largest gains in satisfaction. And you can see where they really are, it's at the county and town levels of government, so at the local level of government performance. So what we, so after looking at, taking those quick cuts at the data, what we did is we tried to, we basically hypothesized, right, saying, were these results, do they attest to the impact of government policy, particularly social policy that redirected more support and resources to those areas that have not developed so quickly, such as reviving, for example, the cooperative medical insurance scheme in the countryside, where basically coverage had collapsed to 2% or 3% in the 1990s, or providing minimum living support payments to low income urban dwellers. So that's what interested us, how can we figure out what's driving these changes and these significant satisfaction increases, particularly in periphery, but also in coastal low income populations?

So what we did is we added a whole range of macroeconomic data to the analysis to try to figure out those relationships. And what we found, which at least to us was interesting was that there were, if you, when you do the multivariate analysis, it was really three key variables that mattered and that exhibited a significant and positive relationship with government satisfaction, right, by respondents. The first was spending as a percent of the local budget on education, health, and welfare. The second was spending on road infrastructure, and the third was the ratio of urban-rural disposable income inequality. And what was interesting is when you also, when you take away those variables in the analysis, right, so they're controlled when they're in, when you take them out the, the income, right, so the low income that we're seeing that effect of low income people experiencing much higher rates of satisfaction. So that effect and the region effect, right, where the peripheral regions we're seeing increases in satisfaction, largely disappear, right. So that suggests that much of the observed variation that we see in relative satisfaction is due to those actual flows of government providing goods and services. So when you go back to the literature and then look that these results do support the findings of other scholars, but broaden them in terms of the empirical data in both the time and the geography covered. So people like John Knight and Ramani Gunatilaka, for example, reported that perceived income change over the past five years was positively correlated with political trust. People like Bruce Dickson, his colleagues as well, found that county level spending on health care, education, social welfare are all significant in terms of satisfaction, but particularly in the

urban areas where he covered, his work covered. And also, the effect of public goods provision on satisfaction is greater at the local level than at the central level is something else that Bruce and others showed. And then lastly, Ethan Michelson in a similar study, but he was measuring perceived rather than actual flows of public goods. He found that there was an association between self-reported improvements in local service provision after China's 2008 stimulus program and an enhanced opinion of government officials. Marty, again, Marty Whyte wrote that, although a majority of Chinese citizens expressed concern about disparities, for example, in income, most feel that they can be attributed to variation in ability, hard work, education, rather than any kind of societal unfairness, right, so that was what Marty wrote in the Social Volcano and others important work that he did.

So deeper dives. So I just wanted to say a few words about some transitions and what we see when we go a bit deeper into the data. So those are the broad trends. First, in terms of that shift from really, purely, or at least majority economic policy towards a more nuanced social policy and emphasizing social policy through increases in resources and delivery. This is, to us at least is interesting chart that shows 2005-2011. It doesn't go to 2016 just because of the wording of the question, so it's hard to compare. So this is to really be tight and be able to compare apples to apples. It's, what's quite interesting when you ask these respondents, well, all right, how much, how many of you are covered by these different schemes, right, whether it's, you can see that, for example, pension plans, medical insurance, at the urban, even down to the village level in 2005, you had a third to about a half of the respondents that were covered in 2005 in those basic pension, basic medical, that been dramatically increased, but even just by 2011, six years later, right, where you then have around 80% or so of respondents that are covered in these two areas. The picture's a bit different when you start getting into unemployment, into work injury, maternity, housing funds, for example, where the levels were much lower in 2005, but did experience significant growth to the point where, for example, unemployment insurance in the city was about 20% in 2005, that doubles at the city level. You see major growth at the town level, right, in unemployment from one, from basically nothing in 2005, 2%, to about 20% in 2011. And also more than a doubling of the village level for unemployment. So you see over time, not just through the economic data in terms of the amount of money that is spent and where, but also through our survey and who is being covered and coverage ratios that there's been significant improvement. That's not to say that everyone's covered, of course. You can see that access to none of the above, which is in red, are still significant swaths of the population, even in 2011, not the city level where it's only about 11% say they have access to none of these schemes or none of these policies, but even, but at the town level, 22% said, responded who had access to none. And at the village level, 13%, so still quite important in terms of that, we can come to that for people who are interested in the poverty alleviation campaign, for example, and zero absolute poverty by the end of this year, in a few weeks, in fact, and how that's impacted that.

The second point is around, just in terms of a deep dive of the three, the second one is related to corruption. This one is interesting but is something we're still wrestling with to really understand, particularly for the book manuscript, because in some ways, the case of corruption shows that even during periods of increasing overall satisfaction, right, as we just, as I just laid out, citizen attitudes towards the government's handling of specific issues can deviate significantly, right. So by the end of the Hu-Wen era, there was a sense that, despite progress in spurring economic development and raising living standards, efforts to promote good governance, particularly

through cadre accountability, had stalled or even regressed. And you can see in the data. But only, maybe it was only after the central government signaled its commitment in the form of a real true campaign, an anti-corruption, a mass anti-corruption campaign with very real consequences for powerful individuals that public opinion really begins to shift in a more positive direction. And that's something we're trying to figure out. So for example, as most of you know, by, so if you look at that chart and you see how people, how the respondents evaluated the overall cleanliness or uncleanness, right, so the level of corruption of government, of local government officials, you can see that in 2007, nearly half, and by 2011, actually more than half, and by 2015, still more than half viewed them as, the majority as unclean or effectively corrupt. And then there was a major shift one year later by 2016, where it drops from 53%, right, 53 to 29%. What's interesting is, as people know, late 2013, you have Zhou Yongkang placed under investigation. You have Xu Caihou, who was China Military Commission vice chairman in March 2014 placed on a commission, his, another vice chairman of the CMC, Guo Boxiong, April 2015 placed under investigation. So you had very senior people who were in the standing committee or in the CMC who publicly by 2014 and into 2015 had actually been arrested. And a major shift in terms of the way people, respondents viewed local government officials and the corrupt levels by 2016. This is just interest, I just wanna note it for people who are interested, it's something we still are trying to figure out, to be honest. So that's what, and what's driving such a shift.

The third point in terms of a deeper dive that I find very interesting is environment, just given my own interests and also the interests of Jesse Turiel, our post-doc, who was actually also my doctoral student at BU. And this was a shift like the shift from economics to, from economic policy to social policy, from really government acceptance of corruption to the real anti-corruption campaign drive. This is from a complacency, government complacency of, towards environmental issues to really a true war on air pollution in particular and an informed public, which I think is an important aspect of this. So what, when you look at 2016 and our 2016 results, it revealed that respondents were actually most concerned about air pollution with about a third naming it as the most important issue. Then followed by food safety, about 19% saying it's the most important issue. Then climate change, all right, so global environmental issue, 16%, and then water pollution at 12%. If you think about, if you then sort differently and look at place of residency, urban dwellers disproportionately are likely to view climate change as the most serious environmental issue, while rural villagers are most likely to be concerned about water pollution. But what I think is most interesting is actually not that. It's more that the results show a clear correlation, which is what this chart is, between daily measured air quality index, so the quality of the air, the actual quality of the air, and citizens' perceptions of local air quality on that same day, right. So that's indicating that subjective assessments of air pollution in China do have a strong basis in reality, in the actual pollution levels.

Why it was even more interesting is that it's also negatively correlated with the reported life satisfaction. But here, it's about the deviation from average air quality that's critical, not the absolute level. So in other words, these Chinese citizens, these respondents report increased life satisfaction on days when their local air quality is better than the annual average and decreased life satisfaction on days when the local air quality is worse than annual averages. So that suggests that although people in China are fairly accurate in gauging local air quality, they become habituated to pollution over time. So they only display a response when the measured air quality deviates significantly from typical levels. What's also interesting, I think, on the

environmental side is that respondents who had a negative view of local air quality were also the same respondents who were more likely to give the government poor marks for its handling of environmental issues, right, so we saw that relationship. So for, and for those who are interested, we can go even deeper into it. So statistically, a one point drop in perceived local air quality produced a 0.08 drop in satisfaction, which is only on a four point scale, so it's important. And so it just indicates that ordinary people in China, respondents to the survey attribute the problem of pollution at least in part to specific human factors, right, so governance, not simply, they don't simply view it as a random act of nature or the inevitable price of economic progress. And the perceptions of local air quality are influenced by what they see outside their own windows, making it difficult, I think, for local officials to divert blame by engaging in political stunts or controlling access to information, for example.

The last thing I'd just like to mention in terms of this deep dive in environment is the link to action, in particular to protests and to complaints. And what all this is saying to us effectively is by itself, really poor air quality, even though it's critical in terms of the way residents view government performance, it does not, you can't take the next leap, which is necessarily leads to widespread citizen action. Only 10% of respondents had ever filed an official complaint or a petition related to air pollution. But two thirds of those surveyed said that they would consider participating in a hypothetical air pollution protest in their city, but that's just hypothetical. What was also interesting was the respondents were much more likely to lodge complaints or protests if they felt that air pollution had negatively impacted their own health or the health of their immediate family members, that was 30% of the sample. So pretty large group of individuals. The other thing that was interesting, we thought, was that reliance on the internet was correlated with a higher willingness to protest, right. So that suggests that it is those tech savvy individuals with more access to independent media sources that are more likely to challenge the status quo when talking about the environment.

Last two slides. Ezra had asked also early, before in emails about some of the specific conduct of local government officials and responses. So when asked about the specific conduct and attributes of local government officials, increasing numbers of respondents viewed them as kind, as knowledgeable, as effective over time. So for example, in 2003, more than half of respondents felt that local officials were all talk and were not practical problem solvers. So more than half in 2003, which is pretty damning. By 2016, 55% felt that officials were practical problem solvers, while only 30% disagreed with that. Similarly, in 2003, the proportion of respondents who felt that local officials were beholden to the interests of the wealthy was nearly double the proportion who felt that they were concerned about ordinary people, which you can see there. But by 2016, the situation reversed with over half, about 52% agreeing that local officials prioritize the needs of ordinary people and only 40% or so agreeing that they prioritize those of the wealthy. So that's a pretty significant shift. Other thing that's interesting, there's a lot of numbers, I know, which is a bit frustrating on a chart. That's why I put those red stars just to draw attention, but for those who are interested, they can look more deeply. When you look at the bottom, for example, impressions of interactions with local officials. Were you satisfied with the eventual outcome? In 2004, about a third were, they said yes, 31%. By 2016, three quarters were, so 75% satisfied with the eventual outcome. There were still areas where that, specific areas where the support is not as strong. So for example, by even 2016 at the end of these waves of surveys, 44% of respondents viewed local officials as aloof and conceited. If you look and you keep going down, for example, still a third view them as talk only, all talk, no go, effectively. 40%, as I said, beholden to the

interest of the wealthy. 43% concern only with pleasing their supervisor, so upward really management. And what I found to be also quite revealing was some of the biggest progress we saw in the data but also, in the broader data but also in what you're looking at here is real progress in the imposition of illegal taxes, tax collection, where you're seeing that people have a significant shift, where originally, many local government officials were viewed as the key conduits to the imposition of illegal taxes and fees or even legal fees like the agricultural tax. And by removing the agricultural tax, removing many of these fees, you see a real shift in the way, a positive shift of the way that people, respondents viewed local government. So finally, takeaways, these are just a few. I just wanna reiterate that while the numbers sound large, 93% satisfied with central government by the end here in 2016, again, only a third are very satisfied, two thirds are somewhat satisfied. If you look at same numbers for the township level, 70% are satisfied, but again, only 13% are very satisfied, 57% somewhat. I thought it was important just to reiterate that citizen perceptions of governmental performance respond most to real measurable changes in their material wellbeing and particularly health. And that's what we, in that China Quarterly piece and other writing, that's what we spend a lot of time looking at. And in particular, perceived threats to the health of the individual or their family members is a specific area in which we see a link to protests and to petitions. Lastly, what we think about in terms of moving forward that as a potential point of concern is if provision of public goods and services depends upon effective governance, it also depends upon adequate fiscal revenue. So debt, sure, debt at the local level can always be increased given the lack of capital account convertibility, but the declining economic growth in China may begin to undermine the second capacity. Particularly if the government, for example, the central government begins to truly put more restrictions on the ability of local governments to issue bonds and things of that sort. So there's just a question there, I think, around the ability to continue. The other is we think the survey raises an important question around just can authoritarian regimes enjoy greater citizen satisfaction, particularly through public good provision, than other systems and therefore, enjoy higher levels of support? I think, given time, I think, but I'll leave it there, Ezra, and then, and turn it over to you.

Ezra Vogel: I think that's a terrific presentation, Ed, and very informative. Let me start out by taking one step backward and trying to be a bit global. What I take away from, my takeaways. One is that the government did a very good job between those two period of time, 2003, 2016, in providing education, health, and welfare expenditures. And that was appreciated by the local people. And that had a big change in their attitude toward local officials too. So that was one big takeaway. And another takeaway is that perhaps the coming of Xi Jinping and the attack on corruption, as I looked at your charts, that seemed to be a big turning point. Since then, there has been a recognition by the public that there was great progress made in dealing with the corruption issue. Is that...

Edward Cunningham: Yes.

Ezra Vogel: Is that the correct understanding of the situation? The third is that the overall concern about the air pollution and environment is now becoming relatively more important. Is that because of an increase in those problems or do you think it's a relative increase in attention to those problems?

Edward Cunningham: Right. That's, and a lot of people ask us that. And that's something that we're addressing in the book manuscript, because it's, a lot of it relates, of course, to how you measure the amount of attention the government has paid, right. So what is the role of propaganda, what is the role of media in driving public opinion? So one of the things we're doing now for example is aggregating that type of data around money spent in terms of, at the local level through which media, through different media channels around, so that we can start to answer the question of the extent, the exact extent to which, the extents possible these shifts in opinion relate to the environment, relate, do they relate more to the fact that the government has willing, has recognized the scale of the issue and has allowed respondents to be able to understand that this is something that is politically acceptable in terms of it is an issue that has been identified, it is an issue that the government has prioritized and therefore, it is important, right. And to what extent is it the impact that they're seeing directly on their own lives, right. So 'cause there's other intervening variables like that, right, the propaganda, state media. So I can't, we can't answer it quantitatively yet because we're gathering that other data.

Ezra Vogel: Well, also, if you think about the growth of heavy industry and the number of tons of iron and steel that are produced using coal, how do the recognition of the importance of environment, does that correlate pretty much with the increase or reality? I mean, that would, in a way, give partial answer to the question of whether it's from subjective attention and to what, do you have a-

Edward Cunningham: Yeah, I see what you're saying.

Ezra Vogel: An overview of whether, what's the reality of how much that problem has gotten more severe and did that correlate with the public opinion?

Edward Cunningham: Good, yeah. So what we saw was people habituate to the levels of air pollution. So as they, as it worsens, people are not only aware of it, it's worsening. But it actually fairly, so they're fairly, they can objectively understand this worsening. But in terms of their focus on whether it's a problem to them, it's not the absolute level, it's how is it compared to the annual average, right. So now as the, as, for example, as, so as pollution now has increasingly been resolved, which even me, I met many people who were very focused on the energy sector, actually surprised in some ways at the level of progress given the complexity of the challenge. As that has improved in terms of air pollution we're talking about, you have seen that over time, they have also started to habituate, because the deviation between the annual average and what they see every day is also declining, right. So there's less and less of a deviation.

Ezra Vogel: The second question I have is a methodological one. When you do comparisons like this, then how truthful people are is not really an issue, because you're getting relative changes in your sample. And so that clearly tells us something. The question, of course, a lot of us have is when you pass out questionnaires in China, how cautious are people about saying things critical of the government and what kind of methodological tools did you use that you're trying to reduce the risk that people are just paying attention to what, that they're being cautious about criticizing the government?

Edward Cunningham: Yeah, good, yeah, so that's another one we often get, yes. One way we, so yes, you're right, in terms of we're looking at change over time, right, so that's one way to deal with that issue. But the other important issue is the only thing we can, there's only a few things you can do. One is you ask other questions, right, that's why we spend so much time and effort asking around importance, how important is it that government is working in this area? So that, so I use the example of one child policy just as a way to get at that. So that they can get through the point that even if they're satisfied, they don't think government should be involved, right, in that type of a policy area. And I think that's another example to your previous question about the environment, where one child policy is a known factor, it's been, it had been there for so many years that people understood there was a priority and therefore, they said they were satisfied, but they didn't think it was important that government should be involved. So it's a way for them to indirectly show their questioning of whether government should be involved. So that's one way we did it, yup. And then the other way to get at that question is there actually is more and more written around survey methodology and specifically bias. One of the things that's interesting is also how censorship really works in China. And I think one of the critical ways is really self-censorship, not always, not at the individual level, but self-censorship through publications, right. So taking the actual data and then writing about it and self-censorship of platforms, whether they're media platforms, publication platforms, rather than necessarily at the individual level. Because again, when you, and we're gonna do it differently in the book where we're gonna have, I think, a whole chapter on this, there's actually a lot of negative, there's a lot of low levels of satisfaction in many, more than half responding to, evincing very low levels of satisfaction. So if there were, if it were purely just check the box in a face-to-face interview, then it would be, you wouldn't necessarily, we probably wouldn't see such low levels of satisfaction.

Ezra Vogel: When the Russian Research Center at Harvard got its big start, Alex Inkeles led a huge survey of refugees from the Soviet Union. And what he argued in a presentation of the results at that time was that he would not talk about levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. He would use the data and do comparisons within the sample. So what parts of samples go up or down or where the differentials were. This is something, I think it is unassailable in your research, I mean, you can't have doubts about those comparisons, I mean, that's solid data. And I think your way of making it [indistinct] in high levels of satisfaction on lower levels is interesting too. And therefore, these comparisons between samples and over time are really very informative and very solid. I have one more question, then I'll let some of the other people's questions come through. And that is, you said that from 2016, 2020, you haven't been able to do the surveys. You have some contacts with people in China and some of the people that you've been helping with surveys. What would you guess are some of the kinds of changes between 2016, 2020?

Edward Cunningham: Yeah. What we're, what we think is, so these are all, this is all just, in many ways, semi-informed guesses, of course, but what we, and we've talked about it within our group a lot. On the one hand, we assume what we would see is, particularly in the urban, in terms of urban respondents versus rural respondents, that given the increased focus on self-sufficiency and on, for example, redirecting the economy more towards consumption, which has been a long term, of course, focus, but has been even brought into more, been highlighted more given trade

tensions with the United States, that combination of a real push towards consumption to drive the economy and towards increased promotion of nationalism, that in many ways, we would expect this survey, the way it's designed, to reflect really two things. One is that for urban residents, their relative satisfaction with government performance may start to decrease given the fact that it's so difficult for consumption, to make that shift to consumption. So that's one issue. And the second is when you look at the rural areas, and this gets to these other questions around financial, financial concerns and debt. Whether there's, whether social policy, because there has been some weakening of social policy in certain areas, whether that, we would assume that would also weaken some of these satisfaction levels to date. So those are two of the ways we think that there actually may be weakening occurring, but again, we don't know without the data. One of the one . Just one last thing.

Ezra Vogel: Go ahead. Let's start with some of the questions, this is a question from Yang Ling. He says he comes from a small village in China as a graduate student in the United States. And he wonders, how did you survey in rural areas, since a lot of people don't even speak Mandarin and the literacy levels in some of them was not high. So how did you do the survey work in the most remote areas where you conduct your-

Edward Cunningham: Yep, no, that's a good point. And there's a lot of challenges, actually, related to surveys as people know. One is around literacy, literacy was not an issue in the sense that they were face-to-face interviews, right. So they weren't, that was a way to get around that. And in terms of the dialects-

Ezra Vogel: And can you say the interviewers-

Edward Cunningham: I'm sorry, the enumerator, yeah, so the enumerators were trained, so they were employees of the research company that we are partnered with effectively. And they have been there and trained for, have been trained by that company. And when there were dialect issues, they had interpreters to deal with that. Although, again, that was less of an issue because of the, when you go back to the map, of the areas we were in, right. So it was more of an issue in the southwest, it was a less of an issue in the center, less of an issue in the northeast. But yes, that's how they dealt with it.

Ezra Vogel: Okay. Here's one from Matt Chitwood, Institute of Current World Affairs. He has a couple of questions, the first one is, why does the Communist Party prioritize these efforts in rural areas to add, this isn't exactly a survey question, it's a question about the background of the people who made those decisions. Maybe it's not a question for the survey, but in your own general sense, is the reason because of political legitimacy, is it social stability? And do those years, 2003 to 16, correspond with the real emphasis on getting some of those backward areas? Is that the time period when that was the critical policy?

Edward Cunningham: Yes. So good, great question. And again, really, that China Quarterly article, I think, goes into depth on this issue. So yes, yes, absolutely, that are, it just happened to be that at the start of that survey in 2003 very much coincided with this shift of, and particularly as Hu-Wen took over to shift towards, and as most people know, in terms of elite politics and

looking at rhetoric, but also in terms of actual policy, which is what we lay out. A shift away from urban elite priorities to much more the rural and not only rural, but rural and low income priorities. And so yes, that's why, and it wasn't by design. It was just happenstance that the survey began with that shift. I think that shift, the shift happened on, for many reasons. One was, as most people know, the Gini coefficient. China's Gini coefficient was dramatically, was shifting to a point where it was even worse than the United States at certain points. Particularly in the mid of the 2000s. And so part of it was a signal, that was a signal of the importance, the ways in which economic reforms were impacting the lower income and the rural areas. So that was, I think that was critical and was part of this shift around focus on stability. But I think the other was also recognition that precisely, and this is what you see in some of the writing, that economic growth is cyclical. And so you saw several reports coming out concerned about that issue and the inherent instability. So I think it was not necessarily simply social stability, but it was also political stability and linking, hitching the wagon to simple economic cycles was probably not the most durable strategy.

Ezra Vogel: This is a off the wall question about probably a different kind of system. As you know, currently in United States, there's a new recognition that income inequality has increased in the last few years. And as you think about the methods that China has used to make that progress in 2003 to 16, what would you advise a different system like the United States to approach that issue? Are there lessons that you've learned about that system and knowing what they did during that period that you think would be applicable to very different kinds of systems?

Edward Cunningham: Okay, yeah, that's a big one. I mean, it's something, so Tony, Jesse and I have talked a lot about this. In relation to the poverty alleviation, for example, campaign, I think a lot of people often take the wrong lessons, right, to look at, well, the CCP was able, has reduced poverty. Which is true, of course. As you know, 600-700 million people, however you wanna measure it. But the argument is often through government policy, meaning through a lot of these schemes that I mentioned. And while that's true, of course, particularly in the 2000s, when you really look at originally, like a lot of your work, Ezra, look at the reform, early reform period, much of the actual solution around dealing with poverty alleviation was simply the basic shifts they made, right, from household responsibility to many others and shifting factor inputs, prices. So those policies to reform the market, I think, were quite critical and more critical than a lot of the more mandated policies that I think a lot of people today focus on. So I think that's important point to remember, given how extreme the command economy had been set up before. So it's hard to compare in that sense, because in some ways, China, I think, lived out the experiment of, by unleashing the market in an imperfect way, they were able to, of course, solve many of these poverty issues. But then they ran up against the inherent bias of market mechanisms and lack, and had not used social welfare support systems, had not invested adequately until 2003, 2004. So in some ways, I think, for the United States, we've sort of, I think we're learning a similar lesson that, when you underinvest in the ability, for example, to train, retrain groups who have been, who have felt the brunt of, whether it's technological change or whether it's increasing efficiency through automation, lots of other ways in which trade and globalization affect labor markets. I think really what the lesson is that the US, of course, has dramatically reduced those types of, at the local level, investments. And that's, I think, why the Biden administration is rightly now focusing on how do those buffers, how do those, how do we

create those buffers to the shocks that have, that that many have felt in the US economically, which is separate from the bigger issue around racial equality and other types of inequality.

Ezra Vogel: Here's a question from Yifei Sun. He says, I'm wondering if you consider that satisfaction is sometimes something very personal that has to do with expectation, personal expectation. And I guess one of the questions that might follow from that is now that people are more satisfied and they have a higher basis, will the next generation, would you expect to have as high levels of satisfaction, because in a way, they, things have not exceeded their present expectation, would that be your expectation?

Edward Cunningham: Yeah, I mean, and this is another issue, of course, we talk about a lot. So it's the rejection of any meaningful political reform, we think would indicate that, absent significant coercion, the administration will remain increasingly reliant on ensuring the satisfaction, right, via the provision of these public goods and services. So for us, the importance of understanding satisfaction has never been more important and might even be critical to analyzing Chinese governance and resilience moving forward, which is why we think it's an important topic. The, we all, and yes, it's true that there, going back to the previous question you had, since there was such a gap in economic performance from pre-78, in some ways, although you give, we have to give incredible credit, obviously, to the party to be able to do what it did. It was much easier to create, to overcome that gap initially than it is moving forward. Similar with satisfaction, there was a significant gap as well that's been closed. And so yes, moving forward, is it relative? It is relative. People do have increasing demands, we see it even in our data the last few years, where you can see a shift in some of their priorities that are much more related. again, to those specific household issues as opposed to general infrastructure issues. So yes, that's, it is a concern, I think, moving forward.

Ezra Vogel: Here's the question by Tom Remington. He says the latest book by Terry Sicular, Li Shi, and Sato incorporate estimates of the incomes of very high income group at the top into their estimates of inequality. They come up with much higher final Gini figures, very similar more to the United States. What evidence is there that awareness of top 1% is widespread among the population, general population?

Edward Cunningham: So awareness of, I guess the question is awareness of inequality among the 1%?

Ezra Vogel: I'll just read you what he said. What evidence is there that awareness of the top 1% is widespread among the Chinese population? And in other words, I guess, among the general population, yes.

Edward Cunningham: I see-

Ezra Vogel: Are they aware of that, the high levels of-

Edward Cunningham: About the gap, right, about the gap. Right, about the relative gap, got it. So when you look at other surveys, which is what we're doing now, right, to compare, and you

look at other surveys, you, like Marty Whyte's survey, as an example, it is, you can see that people, that the respondents in those surveys are very much aware of the gap, but they don't ascribe that gap to some systemic problem. They ascribe the gap to hard work, effort, and intelligence and levels of education. So that, so if you look at other writing, including Marty's, that's why it militates towards arguments saying, well, it's really not an issue, it's not a source of instability, because people are not blaming the system for that gap. In many ways, at least in our experience, right, and this is, 'cause we didn't ask that specific question in these waves. But when it, and any of you, I think, who live in China have had this similar experience where I tend to agree with what Marty and others have written that most individuals you speak to at different levels of society often continue to ascribe it not, that gap not towards systemic problems, but towards their own lacking qualities if they're lower on that, in that system or to the presence of those qualities if they're higher in the system, so that's, I don't think that's changed dramatically. Awareness.

Ezra Vogel: Here's a question by Charlie Wang. Your survey does not include the view of migrants who are numbered perhaps in excess of 200 million. In your opinion, this may require some guesswork, but how would you view the effectiveness of central or local officials over time and the impact of the virus on the employment and welfare this year? I don't know whether you wanna make any guesses about how the migrants might've answered this. And then also, what are these changes over time? Excuse me.

Edward Cunningham: No problem. So yeah, so we, yeah, this is something we have definitely talked about, obviously, in terms of the migrants. And what we would hazard, first of all, there are surveys that had, people like Pierre Landry, for example, and others have looked at, have done GPS-enabled surveys, right. So they have included migrants in shorter periods of time more recently. What you tend to see, at least from what we've looked at, is migrants, in a way, surprisingly, have fairly positive points of view vis-a-vis government and government performance, often because of efforts to reform the Hukou system and to try to attempt to serve their needs in a way that's better, at least in relative sense, than it was at the beginning, so in early 2000s. So that's some of the evidence that has, from what we've seen, that's emerged from those types of surveys. Which in some ways was surprising initially, but then when you start thinking about it, it makes sense, because in relative terms, a lot has improved when, compared to when you were really locked out completely on this system. So that's one way of thinking about that issue of migrants. In terms of your other issue, in terms of COVID and the impact of COVID, there, it's interesting, because first of all, and I have been wrong on this, I thought I did, I thought the impact economically would be larger and immobility would be higher than it has been. So the economic impact was more muted than I think, at least for me and others who I speak with and read thought. But what it has done, of course, has followed the same pattern in terms of disaggregating the state. So when it first hit, there was significant negative reaction from people online, at least, and in the media, Chinese respondents, citizens, about the response of government. And so they were blaming the local government, disaggregating the state and blaming the local government for the outbreak. Then by the time Beijing responded and you saw significant lockdowns of Wuhan and other, and Beijing and other areas, then you saw a dramatic shift, where respondents to other surveys and also to, and just in terms of media, where people

began to really support the central government and were highly satisfied with that response. So you saw that evolution right there in the disaggregation that we see even in our data.

Ezra Vogel: Another question here has to do with whether you could say something about regional differences. I mean, you analyze the size of place. But I noticed in the beginning, you make, in your map, you have some coastal and then some more inland. Can you make some general response about coastal versus inland? And the question right here says, is there a difference between north and south? He says the cities in the north are declining, while those in the south are increasing, urban areas in the south. So do you see differences between cities in the north and south? So the two big, the coastal versus inland and then north and south .

Edward Cunningham: Yep, good, great questions. Yes, so that's the second level underneath, geography, the geography of satisfaction. That's one level deeper and it's a good question. So yes, do we see a Rust Belt effect? To some extent, yes, so the northeast, you see, compared to the southwest, suppressed satisfaction, so lower satisfaction. Yes, although we don't, you don't wanna get too hooked into, you don't wanna, that that can also be over, I think we have to be careful because of the number of locations, so the 22 locations. I would be more comfortable if there were many more locations in the northeast versus southwest to truly do that type of a micro analysis of let's say provincial disparities. So we don't really have, even though it's 31,000 respondents, it's really 22 locations. So I think it would be, if you had more locations, you could be more granular in what's driving that question. But there is, yes, there is a Rust Belt effect, that in addition to the broader periphery core effect.

Ezra Vogel: And what about new urbanization, say in the, new urbanization from growth of urban areas in the south?

Edward Cunningham: Yes, and so yeah. So you see that over time in the survey, that as those, the provision of public goods and services increases, particularly as the, some of the, again, this is not in our data, because our data, the locations that we chose, that were chosen were not, did not change like that, you don't see urbanization en masse because they weren't there, their jurisdiction, for example, didn't shift. When you look at other surveys and other research that, where you actually see urbanization occurring, and then a jurisdiction shifting from village to township to county onward up the ladder to municipality. Because of the increase in investments, you do see increases in satisfaction, particularly, not related to, again, to infrastructure, but specifically around unemployment. So the economic buffer, so unemployment insurance, medical insurance, those areas is where you see significant satisfaction increases, yes.

Ezra Vogel: I'm afraid our time is coming to an end, Ed. But this has been extremely informative and we're lucky to have such broad, big survey data, we're glad you've got enough funds to get such a huge sample and to give us the results of your sample. So thank you very much. Okay, we'll have you back again, bye-bye.