

# Global Popular Anger Against Rising Inequality: Why is China an Exception?

Public Lecture by New Zealand Contemporary China  
Visiting Fellow  
Emeritus Professor Martin K. Whyte



In recent years, the world has witnessed spreading popular anger against rising income inequality. Many analysts attribute the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and then the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States at least in substantial part to popular anger against rising inequality. One might have guessed that China would be swept into this populist tide. Most older Chinese grew up under the rule of Mao Zedong, where they were indoctrinated and mobilized to combat any appearance of status gaps based upon income and wealth. But after China's market reforms were launched starting in 1978, China went from having relatively moderate income gaps

nationally to gaps that are as large as, or even larger than, those in the United States, the most unequal of advanced capitalist countries. From this transformation emerged hundreds of thousands of new millionaires and even several hundred billionaires (in US\$ terms), with life styles and privileges far beyond the reach of ordinary Chinese citizens. Yet a series of three high quality China national surveys designed to measure the attitudes of ordinary citizens toward current inequalities, conducted in 2004, 2009, and 2014, doesn't reveal any sign of widespread or rising anger against current income gaps. This public lecture will address three themes: 1. What is the evidence that ordinary Chinese citizens are not particularly, or increasingly, angry about rising income gaps? 2. Why is China an exception to this global pattern? 3. Why should China's leaders nonetheless worry about the prospect that rising popular anger may eventually threaten their rule?

## About the speaker



**Professor Martin King Whyte** is the John Zwaanstra Professor of International Studies and Sociology, Emeritus. He was Professor of Sociology at Harvard from 2000 to 2015. Previously, he taught at the University of Michigan and George Washington University. His research and teaching specialties are comparative sociology, sociology of the family, sociology of development, the sociological study of contemporary China, and the study of post-communist transitions.

Within sociology, Whyte's primary interest has been in historical and comparative questions—why particular societies are organized the way they are and how differences across societies affect the nature of people's lives. Whyte is a member of the American Sociological Association, the Association for Asian Studies, the Sociological Research Association, the Population Association of America, and the National Committee for U.S. China Relations.

**When:** Tuesday, 3 March 2020, 5–6pm (Followed by welcome reception)

**Where:** HMLT002, Hugh McKenzie Building, Kelburn Campus, Victoria University of Wellington ([map](#)) Reception at HM153 (upstairs)

**RSVP:** If you are interested to attend, please [register here](#) or email [Andrew Wilford](#)

*(Attendance is free but registration is essential)*