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The Dragon Still Has Teeth

How the West Winks at Chinese Repression

Joshua Kurlantzick

Every Sunday, a Catholic church just off Nanjing Road, Shanghai's busiest thoroughfare, throbs with worshippers. Elderly men and women pack the front pews, straining to hear the prayers. Younger families, including some recent converts, gather near the back of the building, chatting about upcoming social events and fraternizing with the priests. By noon, the church becomes so crowded that its members spill out into the adjacent courtyard.

The church scene seems to reflect a vibrant religious and social revival in China, which since the Communists took over had followed a policy of state atheism, destroyed thousands of places of worship, and banned virtually all group gatherings. In some respects, it is an accurate picture. China began to liberalize its economy in the early 1980s; since then, civil society—independent social groups, religious groups, and other organizations—which was moribund in Mao's time, has flourished. Moreover, civil society appears to operate with fewer constraints than in the early 1990s, after the Tiananmen clampdown. The security services have become less willing to target openly religious believers, labor organizers, or anyone else Beijing perceives as a threat to its authority.

Yet in many respects, the Shanghai church scene is misleading. What many Chinese—and many foreign observers of China—have not realized is that Beijing's strategy for repressing civil society has become more subtle. Instead of publicly suppressing all religious organizations, political

dissidents, or ethnic minorities, Beijing has begun playing groups off each other, sanctioning a few mainstream organizations while quietly but harshly repressing those that challenge state authority. Unfortunately, the media, nongovernmental organizations, and governments in the West and in the democratic parts of Asia appear unwilling to examine China's backsliding on human rights. In fact, as China becomes an increasingly important market and a more powerful force in global organizations, they seem more and more willing to buy Beijing's rosy portrayal of its human rights record.

After Tiananmen

In the years immediately following the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, China's leadership instituted repressive measures against groups they felt threatened by, including the student protestors who had been demanding more political freedom and the state workers who had been involved in labor protests at the time of the Tiananmen massacre. Much of China's top leadership was still made up of older cadres with revolutionary peasant backgrounds, people like Wang Zhen, a member of Deng Xiaoping's inner circle, who pushed hard for the military crackdown against the student protestors. As revealed in *The Tiananmen Papers*, a collection of official documents related to the massacre period, the old guard had little tolerance for civil society, and little compunction about unleashing the military and the police against any perceived enemies.¹

Accordingly, in the early 1990s Beijing instituted many repressive measures. In regions where ethnic minorities had begun to demand greater autonomy, the central government arrested large numbers of local political activists, increased the police presence in many cities, and even declared martial law in some areas. In Xinjiang, the huge western province where ethnic Uighurs, who generally practice a liberal form of Islam, constitute a majority of the population, the central government rescinded local autonomy over religious institutions and jailed thousands of Uighur writers for “advocating separatism,” which was so broadly defined that simply writing in Uighur qualified as an offense.

In response to unrest in Tibet in the late 1980s, China, according to Human Rights Watch, arrested hundreds of Buddhist monks and instituted “patriotic education” classes at monasteries. Beijing made no effort to hide these moves, which were widely covered in the international press.² The police also arrested the leaders of student pro-democracy organizations throughout China. Many were sentenced to long terms in China’s gulag-like prison camps. This also received widespread coverage in the foreign press.

Yet the early and mid-1990s were also a period of significant socioeconomic liberalization. “The early 1990s were a period when, after Deng pushed for a more open economy, we felt that private businesses, and the media, could really open up,” says one leading Chinese venture capitalist.³ By the early 1990s, China’s top leadership also included younger cadres, such as Jiang Zemin, who were not yet comfortable in power. Focused on consolidating their power within the top ranks of the Communist Party, they were reluctant to push the crack-down too far, or target China’s media, for fear that they might provoke a wave of possibly violent unrest across the country, which would make them look as if they were not in control.

Accordingly, Jiang and other younger leaders in positions of power were reluctant initially to rein in China’s blossoming independent media. As the country’s economy expanded, thousands of private newspapers and magazines sprang up—media watchers estimate that the number of newspapers has grown from 250 in the mid-1980s to roughly 7,000 today—and began to push the boundaries of state censorship.⁴ The Internet, which was introduced in China in the mid-1990s, quickly became the favored means of disseminating information for such dissident organizations as the China Democracy Party and for religious organizations such as the underground Catholic movement, which, unlike the state-run Catholic Church, is loyal to the Vatican. Because Beijing had not yet developed comprehensive policies on Internet censorship, many Chinese could access the websites of foreign media outlets and human rights groups.

With the support of Deng Xiaoping, China’s leader, Jiang and his peers also disbanded state control of many sectors of the Chinese economy, a decision that contributed to the growth of civil society. As the economy was liberalized, many urban Chinese became richer. Their newfound wealth afforded them the opportunity to join social groups as varied as stock market investors’ clubs, salsa enthusiasts’ organizations, soccer teams, and local charities. Informal trade associations sprang up. And as communism waned as the state “religion,” the Catholic Church and other religious organizations, and spiritual groups like Falun Gong, began to gain adherents. Scholars estimate that there were fewer than a million Protestants in China in 1949; today, according to researchers at the Cardinal Kung Foundation, a Connecticut-based organization dedicated to religious freedom in China, there are more than 50 million, as well as over 10 million Catholics.

Many Chinese traveled abroad, returning with ideas about creating religious organizations, independent unions, and even

grass-roots political parties. To take one example, in the early 1990s increasing numbers of Uighurs began making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Many returned to China convinced they should set up schools for Islamic instruction. "It's not easy to make the hajj, but once we could do it, everyone in my family spent as much money as they needed to get permission and make it to Saudi Arabia," said one wealthy Uighur girl I spoke with last year.⁵

During the first half of the 1990s, foreign actors had a significant impact on human rights in China. To some extent, Beijing was constrained by what foreign companies would tolerate. "In the early 1990s, there was a feeling among some in the international business community that investing heavily in China, and getting close to the government, could lead to a huge stain on their reputation," one expert on human rights told me. Moreover, Beijing knew that it would have to improve its human rights record if it were to gain entry into the World Trade Organization. And with the U.S. Congress having to vote each year on whether to grant China normal trading status, congressional hearings provided human rights activists, including many exiled Chinese dissidents, with a high-profile annual forum in which to air their grievances against Beijing. The foreign media, with the memories of the massacre in Tiananmen Square still fresh, were outspoken about China's human rights abuses. Rupert Murdoch, chairman of the conservative News Corporation, predicted that his satellite broadcasting networks would be "an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere."⁶

Beijing's Two-Pronged Strategy

Over the past five years, China appears to have continued marching toward sociopolitical liberalization. Township committees, whose members are directly elected, govern locally, though the committees must answer to Communist Party officials. In Shanghai,

China's second financial capital after Hong Kong, colonial-era buildings have been converted into stock brokerages where hundreds of ordinary young Shanghainese furiously wager on the local bourse. At one brokerage I visited, the punters openly criticized the endemic corruption in state-linked companies. China's business media has continued to flourish. Financial publications like *Caijing* and *Southern Weekend* boldly evaluate companies' performance and expose corruption, though they rarely delve into political or social issues. And at the Communist Party congress last winter, China's leaders formally allowed private capitalists to join the party for the first time.

But in many important respects, progress toward sociopolitical liberalization has stalled. Beijing is once again instituting repressive measures that equal or surpass in severity and scope those supported by the old guard in the early 1990s. Indeed, Beijing seems to want it both ways: to appear to be more tolerant even while relentlessly suppressing dissent. China's current leaders, most of whom would be more accurately described as technocrats than as revolutionaries, are more cautious than their immediate predecessors about managing China's international image. President Jiang and like-minded members of China's leadership tended to avoid blatant methods of control, preferring a mix of carrots and sticks and more subtle forms of repression.

Thus Beijing's two-pronged strategy—a softer line toward docile civil society organizations and a harder line toward those who challenge the state, which can best be seen in its treatment of religious groups, ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, Internet users, and disgruntled peasants. China has relaxed restrictions on the five religions recognized by the country's constitution: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and mainstream Protestantism. The state Xinhua News Agency has begun portraying the official Catholic Church in a positive light, and Beijing has prodded foreign journalists

to report on the freedoms accorded mainstream religions. Last August, the Beijing municipal government announced it would drastically increase its budget for restoring Catholic, Protestant, and Buddhist places of worship, many of which were badly damaged during the Cultural Revolution. In December 2001, Jiang convened a high-level conference on religion, telling participants that “the influence of religion on political and social lives in today’s world should never be underestimated.”⁷

“Strike Hard” Campaigns

Yet even as the Chinese government has sought accommodation with mainstream religious groups, it has quietly declared all-out war on Falun Gong, a meditative sect, evangelical Christians, and other spiritual groups not recognized by the Chinese constitution. (The leadership is hardly unaware that charismatic evangelical groups were partly responsible for the downfall of China’s last dynasty in 1911.) According to human rights organizations, Chinese authorities reportedly have executed several Falun Gong adherents, locked up hundreds in psychiatric hospitals, and imprisoned thousands of others. (Beijing sees Falun Gong as a threat because the sect has been able to organize large meetings of people from many different parts of the country and is thus the type of well-run, mobilized, nationwide group the government fears.) Journalists are not allowed in these hospitals or prison camps.

Government documents issued between 1999 and 2001 and smuggled out of the country by a group linked to Freedom House, the New York–based global human rights organization, reveal a systematic campaign to arrest and kill members of evangelical sects or “house churches,” as they are known in China.⁸ Government officials see religion as a tool of the party and vow to use secret agents to infiltrate and “quietly smash” any religious groups operating outside of state control. Indeed, hundreds of ad-

herents of underground sects have told human rights groups of being beaten and tortured by state security forces.

Moreover, Beijing has employed “patriotic” Catholics and members of mainstream Protestant sects to combat evangelicals and Falun Gong. According to the Cardinal Kung Foundation, priests and lay leaders of the state-run Catholic Church have been pressured to denounce leaders of the underground church.⁹ For example, the mainstream Protestant group Gospel Fellowship agreed to investigate the activities of Eastern Lightning, a charismatic evangelical sect based in Henan Province, and in doing so signed a statement “endors[ing] government agencies’ fight against cults.”

The story is much the same in western China. Outside of Xinjiang, the only region where Muslims have pushed for autonomy or independence, Beijing allows Muslims limited freedom of worship and often arranges tours of these areas for journalists to tout its tolerance. As Dru Gladney, an expert on Chinese Muslims at the University of Hawaii, notes, the state rarely interferes with Muslim practices in the provinces bordering Xinjiang. And even in Xinjiang, the central government allows some freedom of worship, so long as Muslims attend state-sponsored religious institutions. In Tibet, in contrast to the early 1990s, when security forces arrested thousands of worshippers in Tibet and closed monasteries, Beijing now allows several major monasteries to operate.

Yet the government has also launched broad “strike hard” campaigns against Uighur Muslim and Tibetan “splittists.” Linking its crackdown in Xinjiang to the international war on terror (Beijing claims that al-Qaeda terrorists are hiding in the province), the authorities over the past year have burned Uighur-language books, held “political education” sessions for over 8,000 imams, and deployed 40,000 troops to the province.¹⁰ State security forces reportedly have also detained over 3,000 people and executed several alleged separatists. In Ti-

bet, the government has arrested monks and lay Buddhists for attempting to worship at monasteries not sanctioned by the state, and has changed the goal of its overall Tibet policy from “general stability” to “permanent rule.” At the same time, Beijing has promoted its monastery- and mosque-building campaigns to the Western media, taking selected reporters on stage-managed tours of Tibet and Xinjiang. Meanwhile, according to the Chinese media, Xinjiang committee secretary Wang Lequan has instructed the domestic media not to “allow any noise that counteracts the party’s voice.”

In many cases, the state has played ethnic minorities against each other. The central government has used financial incentives to lure Muslims from provinces where people have fewer grievances against Beijing to Xinjiang, and has encouraged them to inform on Uighurs who try to set up traditional *meshrep* social gatherings or other events not sanctioned by the government. Beijing also invited envoys of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists who has been in exile for over 40 years, to Tibet to discuss the province’s development, though it did not publicize their trip in the state media. According to Tibet specialists, Beijing pressed the Dalai Lama’s representatives to dissuade members of the Tibetan Youth Congress, an exile organization that pushes for independence for Tibet, from taking up arms against Chinese troops there.

Beijing has also applied the divide-and-rule strategy to Internet users. Over the past decade, the government has touted China’s potential as a center for information technology companies, and in the late 1990s such Internet start-ups as sina.com became the darlings of investors. Although many of these start-ups died, the government did not kill them—Beijing not only allows its citizens to view financial reports, stock quotes, and other business-related material on the Internet but has adopted policies designed to help Internet companies survive.

Yet the government has also instituted draconian restrictions on personal Internet usage. Over the past three years, it has shut down thousands of the Internet cafes that proliferated in urban China in the mid-1990s. Government regulations require owners of Internet cafes to maintain a capital base of more than 500,000 yuan (\$60,000) to stay in business, a huge sum in China. When I visited Shanghai in June 1999, I found more than 20 Internet cafes within a five-block radius of my hotel; last summer I walked for nearly an hour without finding a single cafe that had not been chained and padlocked. In July 2002 alone, the government of the northern province of Hebei shuttered 528 Internet cafes.

Beijing has also made average Internet users complicit in its crackdown on Internet-based dissent. The state and provincial governments have set up Internet police brigades staffed with over 40,000 people and designed to “maintain order” on the country’s computer networks. These brigades include workers at Internet portals, cafes, and other Internet “on-ramps” who hack into users’ accounts, monitor Web viewing, and block access to websites providing information about Falun Gong, for example. A recent study by two Harvard researchers, Jonathan Zittrain and Benjamin Edelman, found that China has the most extensive Internet censorship in the world, with the government regularly denying access to over 19,000 websites. The list of banned sites includes those of foreign news organizations, Taiwanese organizations, and Chinese pro-democracy groups. Users who repeatedly try to access these sites are jailed. As the authors of the study noted, “Chinese network filtering is an important instrument of state Internet policy, and one to which significant technical and human resources continue to be devoted.”¹¹

Along with its attempt to hamstring religious groups, restive ethnic minorities, and Internet users who might pose a challenge to the state, Beijing has also stepped

up its two-pronged strategy against peasants' rights and labor organizations. According to He Qinglian, a leading Chinese economist, at least 150 million peasants have lost their jobs over the past decade as China has begun liberalizing its economy.¹² In cities throughout northeast China's "rust belt," where thousands of formerly state-subsidized companies have gone out of business, tens of thousands of unemployed workers wander the streets, sleeping on benches, selling their bodies for sex, and begging for scraps of food. Workers who are still employed in state-run enterprises are rarely paid, since many of these companies have been stripped of their assets by their directors and have no revenue. Chinese farmers, who still make up more than 60 percent of the population, are also in a precarious position. Most farms are less than two acres in size and small farmers will be unable to compete with the foreign agribusiness giants who will be entering China's market in the coming years. Today, the per capita annual income in rural areas is only \$266 (the per capita annual income in Shanghai is \$4,000). Making matters worse, farmland is being confiscated to make way for housing for the residents of China's sprawling cities. "We have no future. How will we earn a living?" one farmer asked me as I traveled through Yunnan, a poor southwestern province, in January 2002.

Unsurprisingly, many laborers and farmers have begun to express their anger at their bleak situation, and the number of peasant and labor protests is rising sharply. According to official Labor Ministry statistics, the number of labor disputes in China rose 14 times over between 1992 and 1999, when there were more than 120,000.¹³ In 2000, the most recent year for which statistics are available, labor disputes rose by 12 percent.¹⁴

In several northeastern cities, local officials have tolerated limited protests by farmers and laborers, bought off demonstrators with minimal unemployment benefits,

sacked a few corrupt officials of state-owned enterprises, or tried to integrate laid-off workers into the local state-run unions. In the northeastern city of Liaoyang, for example, after laid-off workers began to protest in January 2002, officials quickly offered the unemployed laborers most of the back pay they were owed. But when protests continue over a long period of time, or threaten to spread to other locales, officials have shown no mercy. As the Liaoyang protests dragged on into a tenth week, state security agents arrested the protest leaders and allegedly tortured them.¹⁵ Meanwhile, state-run unions in Liaoyang reportedly have employed thugs to stifle nascent private unions. Provincial governments have pressured the media not to report such labor disputes.

Repression and Confrontation

China's backsliding on human rights can be attributed to a combination of factors. As the previous generation of leaders passed away, Jiang and his younger colleagues became more comfortable in power, more secure in using China's security apparatus and exerting Beijing's dominance over civil society. At the same time, Jiang and his colleagues realized that as China increasingly abandons communism, Beijing must rely on coercion and force, not ideology, to control the populace. Accordingly, over the past five years Jiang increased the budget of the paramilitary People's Armed Police, which is employed to crush protests, and Jiang and his successor, Hu Jintao, developed close relationships with the top members of the PAP.

As they have become more comfortable managing the internal security forces, Jiang, Hu, and other Chinese leaders have proven no less willing to utilize the security apparatus, though they are more savvy about public perceptions of Beijing's use of force and hence prefer to act under the radar screen of the international media. China's current leaders cut their political teeth in 1989 (Hu

was in charge of Tibet during the late 1980s when the country was under martial law), when they were surprised by how quickly local protests by workers and protests by students on university campuses coalesced into a nationwide antigovernment movement. Consequently, they have developed a fear of civil society groups that aspire to create a national membership.

Yet even as Hu and other leaders have become more willing to use the security apparatus, some ordinary Chinese who gained a measure of freedom in the early 1990s have shown themselves unwilling to surrender their gains. Accordingly, groups that challenge the state have become more confrontational and even violent. "In 1989, student leaders were comfortable using pacifist methods, since they felt their movement was going to triumph, and they seemed to have the upper hand against the state," one leading human rights activist told me. "But by the late 1990s, when Beijing had successfully wiped out many dissident groups and ethnic minority groups and religious sects, these groups began to feel more desperate, and they have used desperate tactics." To take one example, though Falun Gong first gained notice because of its massive meditation exercises, after Beijing instituted repressive measures against the organization in the late 1990s, members adopted confrontational tactics, including interrupting Chinese television broadcasts to show Falun Gong messages and staging protests against the Beijing government. Some members of the group went so far as to immolate themselves in Tiananmen Square.

The International Community Sees No Evil

By the late 1990s, as China's economy recovered from its downturn in the first half of the decade, Beijing was able to push multinational companies toward the government line on human rights. As global growth has slowed and China has become the world's most attractive investment opportunity—due to its combination of large

numbers of skilled workers willing to work for low wages, high-quality infrastructure, and a massive potential consumer market—foreign businesses have proven willing to accede to Beijing's demands. In March 2001, James Murdoch, the heir to the global media conglomerate News Corporation, which has extensive operations in China but also operates Fox News, a television network known for bashing repressive regimes, publicly echoed Beijing's condemnation of Falun Gong and blasted the Western press for criticizing China's human rights record. With his father, who had since retracted his statement about satellite television and repressive regimes, in the audience, the young Murdoch told the audience at the annual conference sponsored by California's Milken Institute that Falun Gong "clearly does not have the success of China at heart." Later, he characterized the foreign media as "destabilizing forces" that are "very, very dangerous for China" and emphasized his support for Beijing's crackdown on the Falun Gong and its criticism of Hong Kong democracy supporters, saying that Hong Kong's pro-democracy forces should accept the reality of life under a strong-willed "absolutist" government.¹⁶

Beijing rewards those, like Murdoch, who ignore its abuses. Over the past year, Star Group, the Murdochs' Hong Kong-based Asia media conglomerate, has won several important contracts to broadcast its satellite television into homes in several provinces in eastern China. In another example, when Li Shaomin, a scholar based in Hong Kong, was detained in 2001 and charged with spying, the president of Princeton, his alma mater, wrote to Chinese officials on his behalf. But when some of Li's former colleagues at AT&T asked the company to join the effort to free him, it refused.¹⁷ The company has since won major deals in China.

In some cases, foreign companies have been complicit in Beijing's crackdown. Last July, the Web portal and Internet firm

Yahoo! signed an agreement on Internet restrictions proposed by Beijing. According to this "Public Pledge on Self-Discipline for China's Internet Industry," Yahoo! agreed not to post information that would "jeopardize state security and disrupt social stability" and to protect "the ethical norms of the socialist cultural civilization." Yahoo! is one of roughly 120 domestic and foreign companies to have accepted the Chinese government's terms. A recent internal America Online memorandum recommended that AOL staff abide by potential Chinese government demands for information on political dissidents.¹⁸ And many foreign Internet security companies are competing to help Beijing develop "Golden Shield," a system for monitoring all Chinese Internet users.

Even the media are knuckling under to Beijing's demands. Star's television broadcasts will be tightly controlled by the company itself. A China-based spokesman for its parent News Corporation admitted to the BBC that "of course we're doing a kind of self-censorship."¹⁹ And the *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's major English-language newspaper, which reportedly wants to print a mainland edition, has fired some of its most outspoken journalists, including former Beijing bureau chief Jasper Becker.

Beijing has also pushed the foreign media to become more subservient by stirring up domestic resentment. As Becker notes, "Just as the press in Mussolini's Italy played up foreigners' slights against Italy, endless articles in China state-controlled press and state-censored films remind Chinese of the West's dominance of Chinese politics and economics before the Second World War and of foreign meddling today. In so doing, the party instills a permanent sense of resentment of foreigners and of the foreign press."²⁰ Meanwhile, Beijing's frequent rhetorical attacks against U.S.-sponsored Radio Free Asia and its censorship of RFA's websites have limited its effectiveness and reach.

China's continued economic growth also has made its leaders more confident in the conduct of international diplomacy and more willing to pressure other countries not to criticize Beijing's human rights record. While in the 1980s and early 1990s China was still a major recipient of international aid, today China gives assistance to its neighbors, providing nearly \$100 million to Thailand in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and offering impoverished Cambodia and Laos millions in loans and grants. Unsurprisingly, when Beijing asked Cambodia's government to deport two Chinese Falun Gong adherents last August, Phnom Penh complied, ignoring U.N. statutes against the repatriation of people seeking asylum from religious persecution. Similarly, Beijing persuaded Seoul, which has developed extremely close trade links with China, not to allow the Dalai Lama to travel through South Korea on his way to Mongolia. As an example of Beijing's reach, when the Thai government refused to grant visas to 19 Taiwanese members of parliament this past January, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra told reporters, "If it affects political relations with China, we can't accept it."²¹

In 2002, none of the members of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights submitted a resolution on China. The United States did not have a seat on the commission, but it seems unlikely Washington would have censured Beijing, even though China has allegedly extended its repression to American soil, using its consulates in the United States to persecute Falun Gong members by refusing to renew their passports.²² Although the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights continue to be critical of China, since 9/11 the Bush administration has largely ignored China's human rights abuses as it seeks to obtain Beijing's aid in the war on terror. "Washington is basically deciding to give China a free ride on almost all human rights issues, even issues of religious freedom, be-

cause [it is] convinced [it needs] Beijing's help with Iraq and terrorism," says one White House official. President Bush has praised Jiang for standing "side by side" with the United States in the war on terrorism. On a recent trip to China, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage pleased Beijing by announcing that Washington had placed one obscure Uighur separatist group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, on America's official list of terrorist organizations, thereby justifying China's quiet scorched earth campaign in Xinjiang. Yet the group is virtually unknown and most independent Uighur experts are unconvinced that it even exists.

At the same time, many leading Chinese activists who once worked to expose abuses in China have given up. Thirteen years after the Tiananmen uprising, many former activists who had sought refuge abroad have returned to China as businesspeople who want to forget their past. One protest leader, Ya-qin Zhang, now heads up Microsoft's research center in China. Over the past decade, China's secret police also have broken up many networks of dissenters who provided information to the West. Today, the best source of intelligence on civil liberties in China is Frank Lu Siqing, who runs a monitoring organization out of his tiny Hong Kong apartment.

Trouble in the Long Run

For now, the Chinese leadership's repressive strategies seem to be working. But Beijing may be trading stability in the short term for trouble in the long run. Its policies will only stifle the country's development. Restrictions on the media and other sources of information mean that ordinary Chinese still too often rely on rumor and the state-controlled press for their information. As a result, important social issues such as the country's burgeoning HIV/AIDS epidemic are ignored, with potentially catastrophic consequences. The United Nations estimates that China will have 10 million people infected

with HIV by the end of the decade, yet studies repeatedly show that less than 20 percent of Chinese know anything about the virus.

Even more important, the lack of clear progress toward greater respect for rights threatens China's ability to develop into an economic and political power. Though many nations are willing to refrain from criticizing Beijing at the United Nations and in other international fora, none of the world's major democracies will treat China as a true equal until it develops a respect for civil liberties. China will never develop a sustainable, dynamic economy fueled by private capital and innovation unless it loosens the restraints on its populace and accepts the rule of law. China needs sustained economic growth to provide employment for the millions of farmers and peasant laborers who are being uprooted and tossed aside. Rebuilding churches and mosques won't be enough to hold back the tide of dissatisfaction and dissent for very long. ●

—February 28, 2003

Notes

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