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Final Paper: Interview

Section One

Person Interviewed: Dr. Carol Hamrin

Interviewee's title and position: Senior associate at the Global China Center; previously a research professor at George Mason University and senior research specialist at the State Department

Date, time, & length: The interview took place on 11/13/15 at 10:33 a.m. and lasted one hour and two minutes

Objective: to learn about the career path of Dr. Hamrin and how that is reflective of the role of women in U.S.-Asian relations

Section Two

Before the interview, Dr. Hamrin sent us a resume with information about her education, her different positions in her career, her publications, and links to various videos of her speaking. Unfortunately, the videos didn't work but the rest of the information was very valuable in our preparation. We had already read excerpts from a book that she edited, *Salt and Light*. We utilized resources she provided us with along with information we found on the internet from researching her, to formulate the questions. We prepared 13 questions. We asked three questions about her early life, which allowed us to understand how her childhood and education helped shape her path. We asked five questions about her career in the State Department and her involvement in human rights and religious freedom. Finally, we asked five questions that asked her to reflect on her career and the role of women in US-Asian relations. Of all these questions, we emailed her five that we felt were comprehensive of the entire set:

- Because we are interested in women in US-Asian relations, we wondered if being a woman affected your career path.
- What led you to choose to focus on religion and how does it impact your career?
- What influenced you to pursue a career as a speaker and consultant?
- What, in your opinion, is one of the biggest issues concerning religious freedom?
- What, in your opinion, is one of the biggest issues concerning human rights? How does it affect women in China?

Section Three

For our interview, we definitely got very complete answers to our questions from Dr. Hamrin. She took time to think about her answers and gave very thorough responses. For the most part, because of how complete her answers were, the interview was mixed structured. We were able to ask questions about her opinion or experiences in situations that we didn't anticipate being able to ask ahead of time but for much of the interview, it wasn't necessary. She answered the questions to the fullest so we didn't need to ask many follow up questions. In fact, sometimes her answers allowed us to skip other questions. Our questions about the actual subject matter of her career were probing. They were questions that asked her to tie her career to current affairs and allowed us to gain much more knowledge about the subjects.

Our team was very balanced in our work. Asha initiated contact with Dr. Hamrin, Arianny contacted her about the questions we would ask, and Shamarie sent her a follow up thank you email. During the interview, we all asked questions in a rotation. Although Asha was designated to take notes, we all jotted down comments we found interesting or important so we could get a more accurate portrayal of our opinions during the interview. Dr. Hamrin didn't

outright give us resources but she did mention various people that were involved in her career and the State Department as a whole.

Section Four

Through the interview, we were able to understand Dr. Hamrin's career path and how that ties in with the role women play in U.S.-Asian relations. Dr. Hamrin's interest in Asia, particularly China, started with her father who was in the Pacific during World War II. The souvenirs from his time overseas and the Pearl Buck books that lined his bookshelves peaked her curiosity. She didn't realize how much this impacted her until recently when she began writing memoirs for her own children.

Her motivation to go to college came from her mother. As a widow, her mother constantly said that it would be Dr. Hamrin's brother that would go to college so that he could support the family. This instilled a sense of determination in her to have a higher education. She knew that she wanted to go to college out of state and was able to do so by attending St. Olaf College with a scholarship from her church. This also allowed her to study abroad in Thailand and Hong Kong. At the time the Red Guards were rioting in Macao, and even though she couldn't go there due to the chaos of the rioting, she was able to witness in person the Cultural Revolution in Macau. These experiences sparked an interest in her wanting to understand the Cultural Revolution in China as a whole.

While doing her Masters at Yale, she focused on China and learned the Chinese language. She got married after college; she and her husband moved to Wisconsin after she finished her Masters. She struggled to find teaching jobs and instead applied to be a typist at an Asian American Studies office. She ended up walking out of the office with a four-year fellowship to study in China. She earned her Ph.D. in comparative world history from the

University of Wisconsin. Even though it was atypical for anyone, let alone a woman, to go for a doctorate, her husband encouraged her to pursue the degree. Fortunately, it opened up many doors for her.

She entered the State Department during the feminist movement. During this time, there was a raising of social consciousness and her coworkers were aware of her stance and involvement as a feminist. When we asked her if being a woman affected how she was treated, she said that it didn't. Because her coworkers knew she was a feminist, they occasionally make jokes and tried to be politically correct. Her doctorate allowed her to be taken seriously; her high level of education outweighed her gender.

Dr. Hamrin became involved with human rights and religious freedom because the State Department was required to do an annual human rights analysis on every country around the world. Specialists had to figure out the human rights platform of China, and one of the categories of the report was religious freedom. At the time they didn't know much about the situation and it was difficult to get information. For the most part people saw China as having a secular society. There was so little information about religion. People believed there were underground Christians, but that only ethnic minorities were religious believers. Using her own contacts with missionaries, Dr. Hamrin was able to start working on preparing information.

It is important to note that not only is she a career woman but she is also a family woman. She has a husband, Bob, who she said is very supportive, and at one point was the only supporter she had in pursuing higher education and achieving a high level career. She also has three children, and when she needed to focus more on her family, her and Bob both stepped up. He started working at home, and she had the State Department create the first part time job in history for her-- even though she was still doing the work of three people. Back then, it was the norm for

women to stay at home and care for the family instead of pursuing a career, but she did both because she had that support from her husband and children.

During this time, in 1986, Dr. Hamrin was approached by Ruth Graham (the wife of the famous evangelist Billy Graham) to help them prepare for their first trip to China. The Grahams wanted to be conscious and respectful of Chinese culture so they wanted an expert involved in their plans. She worked with them from 1986 to 1988 by doing research on the history of the Church in China, helping them prepare, and travelling with them to China.

She continued to do more reporting and analysis on religion in China for the annual reports. She said that she was considered an expert on China and its religious issues because she was the only one who cared. Under the Clinton Administration, the White House asked her to brief Congress on religion in China and work on a plan to send a group of religious leaders to China during the big debate of what was the most favored nation. The Clinton Administration wanted to find ways of dealing with the issue of religious freedom in China so it took the initiative of trying to get business people to pay more attention, sending religious delegations to China, and requiring more reporting on religious freedom.

Dr. Hamrin mentioned that it was evident that the U.S. government was just touching the surface of understanding foreign relations and foreign policy with China, at the time when China opened up to a market economy. The U.S. didn't understand certain things because the government didn't have the resources to thoroughly investigate and study certain changes. All the U.S. learned and had time to focus on was what was given from the foreign ministries and high-level leaders. She made it her mission to know more so she took a 2-year sabbatical to study the Five Year Plan in China. This was the start of her being the one to take the initiative to not just speculate and reach for the surface of what was going on in China, but to dig deeper.

Dr. Hamrin said that around the late '90s and early 2000s the U.S. government would ask the Chinese about religious freedom but ignore the big underlying issues. The U.S. would focus on major world religions like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, but ignore the issue of religious freedom for the 90% of Han Chinese who were being persecuted. This was an issue for her and when there was a big internal debate in the government about whether or not a persecuted cult religion in China should be defended, she argued that as long as its practices are safe and legal, it should be defended just like any other religion.

In the early 2000s, Dr. Hamrin was eligible for early retirement from the State Department and decided to take it. She was tired of politics and wanted to work for herself. She now works from home as a senior associate for the Global China Center in Virginia.

After covering her influences and career path, we transitioned to more reflective questions about the current state of China and where it could be headed. There is great controversy among experts on religious freedom in China. There are some that would agree that things are getting better and some who wouldn't. According to Dr. Hamrin, the growth of religion in China has forced the government to recognize religious freedom, but it doesn't know how to fix the issue. Dr. Hamrin mentioned that people in China on the ground are choosing more and more to ignore governmental restrictions and policies, and are living by their commitments and faith. She said that this gradually will force change de facto and the government will have to respond to the issue. She also mentioned that this way in which the people has stood up for themselves, has forced a lot of change in China already, including economic change, and the government has had to change policies to keep up with what's happening.

The interrelationships among different sectors (i.e., economic, political, cultural, social) have impacted foreign relations and domestic change in China. Dr. Hamrin mentioned that the basic freedoms in China need help, but the freedom of association is one of greatest concerns. She said that China's governmental structure is still Marxist-Leninist although the economy is Capitalist. So, in theory equality reigns but this is not the case in practice. The Party dominates key decision making, though the leadership at the top is having a power struggle that isn't getting resolved. She said that Freedom of Association has been growing for non-governmental organizations, but the party still has strong control over these organizations by authorizing those that work closely with the party, and delegitimizing those that don't.

We ended the interview with asking Dr. Hamrin for advice she could give to us or anyone who wants to pursue a career similar to hers. She told us to find our calling, find our niche in a field, and pursue it. She particularly emphasized not letting anyone talk us out of our interests because even if it might not seem viable or traditional now, what we want to do might be the norm in ten years. She told us that perseverance and passion are crucial for a successful and happy career.

Section Five

Overall, there were many parts of the interview that we found useful, both for this project and as a personal takeaway. Hearing about her career path was definitely useful. It gave us a clearer picture of how women in government can be involved in foreign relations and how being specialized opened doors for her. It was interesting to see how sticking with a particular area of interest can be incredibly helpful. When she first started out, she struggled to get a teaching job. But because of her education and her focus on religious issues, she was able to go farther than she imagined.

It was also great learning about how much the State Department changed in the years she was working there, and how she became a part of that change. Her interest in China was something that ultimately benefitted not only her but the State Department as well. We also found the fact that she noticed a bias occurring when people discussed religious freedom in China and worked towards rectifying it meaningful. In the interview, she stated that she wanted to work towards religious freedom for all, not only her religion and the fact she recognized the fact that minority religious groups indicated a lot about the type of person she is and why she choose to focus on religious freedom.

Dr. Hamrin's advice to us was particularly useful. She told us to find our unique calling, and focus on that. It's not often that you get to sit down with someone that's made it in her field and ask for help. It's an opportunity that all three of us valued. Students often hear advice to chase their dreams but it never seems realistic. The way Dr. Hamrin phrased it made having a career in something you're passionate about seem doable.

In general, we would've liked to hear more about Dr. Hamrin's work now with the Global China Center and exactly what that entails. Learning more about how her previous experience affects her work now would've been very interesting. In fact, learning more in depth about the various stages of her career would've been useful. The purpose of our interview was to learn about her career path so it wasn't feasible for us to go into depth when her career started in the '70s. After listening to the presentations of other groups we would have also liked to learn more about current projects that she is involved with. Although many of the women in other groups stated that their work didn't focus specifically on women, their role in current projects was essential and would have been a great way to map Dr. Hamrin's career trajectory.

All of the projects that we got to see were fascinating; it was great to see all these different perspectives on women in U.S.-Asian relations. It was especially interesting to see when other interviewees touched on subjects similar to things Dr. Hamrin told us. One of these ideas was the fact that Dr. Hamrin felt like being a woman didn't negatively affect her career path. She gave us a specific answer to the reason for this, that she was well educated. However, the groups that interviewed Jennifer Chou and Dr. Latha Chandran mentioned that their interviewees felt the same way. If we had known beforehand that many people had this experience, we would've asked her more about how she thinks being a woman affects other careers.

Another idea that was similar to something Dr. Hamrin said, and something we've touched on in class, was mentioned by Margarethe Adams. She said that female ethnographers have a different perspective than male ethnographers. She would get the perspective of other females especially those who have families whereas single male ethnographers would get the perspectives of other single men in the area. This was a sentiment that Dr. Hamrin also expressed when she talked about her work in the State Department. She said that the men would approach situations with solely a political perspective while she would look more at social issues.

Hearing about Dimon Liu was exciting because she is also involved in human rights in China. This was an interesting juxtaposition because Dimon Liu worked directly with the issue while Dr. Hamrin worked to rectify these issues from a different position. It's important to consider that when Dimon Liu was trying to get the government's attention about China, it refused to help as opposed to when Dr. Hamrin was in the State Department and they especially focused on it. It highlights the need for different positions of power and ability when it comes to righting wrongs.

We could talk about all the women we learned about for pages. They all offered such interesting perspectives and work in such powerful ways to try to change the world. It's easy to get something out of each presentation and be able to relate to all these women. The biggest takeaway from this project is that there are so many ways of being involved as long as you don't let anything hold you back. Whether or not they felt like they were being faced with injustice, these women fought to break that glass ceiling and get to where they want to be. They showed us that there are many different ways to be involved with foreign relations and that being a woman in this is a very specific, important niche.