

Stratification, Social Action and Morphogenesis: Structures and Agents in Contemporary China's Social Transformation

*Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh**
University of Malaya

Abstract

The process of social change typically involves a combination of four different components: context, institutions, agents and events. Upon the praxis between operating structures and purposely acting human agents, agency is constantly shaped by structure which in turn is being reshaped in the process. Amidst the dynamic interplay of such an array of critical socioeconomic factors that underlie the surging currents of social change, the role of the individual as a catalyst for change cannot be underestimated, even if the long-term impact of the individual's action is not immediately explicit and the lone crusade involved does not receive adequate sympathy of the wider public. Such is the tragedy of the commons. Beginning with the problem of increasing inequality and ethnoregional dimension of poverty which together constitute the epitome as well as the root of China's social ills resulted from her recent decades of continuous, astounding economic *tour de force*, this paper examines contemporary China's social transformation as a phenomenon that is neither simple nor unidimensional, wherein social and in particular sociopolitical change could be said not to be a multiattribute concept, but a *multiconcept* construct. Due attention is paid to various different dimensions of such changes, both positive and negative, including socioeconomic inequalities, socioracial stratification, ethnoregional disparities and State-civil society relations, in particular the structure-agency interface in the challenge of ACES (active citizenship and effective State) evolution. At any one time, certain dimensions may increase in severity, while others remain constant or decline. Certain dimensions or variables are considerably more difficult to measure than others but their inclusion is essential to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges of China's social transformation in her contemporary reform era.

Keywords: *State, inequality, élite, dissent, structure, agency, morphogenesis, morphostasis, civil rights, activism*

JEL classification: *H11, H12, Z10, Z13*

1. Introduction

In the government document “Scientific Concept of Development and Harmonious Society” that formed *the* theme of China’s 17th National Congress of the Communist Party, 2007 (15th–21st October 2007), it was reiterated that “[t]o coordinate development among different regions, we should promote the common development of all regions. Regional gaps are not only found between eastern China and western China, but also between provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government. This problem should be gradually addressed in the course of industrialization, urbanization and market development.”¹ While brief, this statement reflects the probably understated concern of the ruling regime of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) over the widening gap in economic development between eastern and western China, between rural and urban population, and between different social strata. In spite of the astounding economic performance – nothing short of a miracle – over the past few decades, China is undeniably facing acute problems on various fronts. For instance, agriculture accounted for only about 14.6 per cent of China’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 2003 but 49.5 per cent of her labour force, while up to 59.5 per cent of the country’s total population is rural. This is in addition to the fact that only 13 per cent of China consists of arable land and the country has 40 per cent less arable land per capita than anywhere else in the world. Hence, with more people and less arable land in rural areas, the country has a lower comparative advantage in agriculture, and investments have therefore been concentrated in the cities and industries and this has led to increasing rural-urban disparities in socioeconomic development and income distribution (Bi, 2005: 114), as well as the increasingly alarming socioeconomic disparity between the country’s eastern, coastal regions and the inland, especially western, regions.

To place them in the proper perspective, such problems in development that China is facing today could be said to be by nature the same ones that many other developing countries were experiencing in the second half of the last century and now at the beginning of this century. Woo *et al.* (2004) found that of United Nations’ 15 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)² relevant for China (targets 1-12, 15, 17-18), the country has already achieved 1.5, made above-average progress in 6, and attained satisfactory progress in 1. In summary, China is on-track for 8.5 targets, off-track on 4, and has made unknown progress on 2.5. In general, China’s amelioration of the poverty problem has been nothing less than remarkable. In 1978, China’s population in poverty totaled 250 million. Entering the new millennium, poverty has been reduced to 29.27 million in 2001, 28.2 million in 2002 and 29 million by 2003, with the incidence of poverty having declined from 30 per cent to

just 3.1 per cent, according to official figures. (*IDE Spot Survey*, 2001, p. 54, Table 1; Chen, 2006: 174)

In fact, with rural poverty rate declining from 31.3 per cent in 1990 to 10.9 per cent in 2002, China had greatly exceeded MDG's Target 1 which only requires that the poverty rate be halved in the 1990-2015 period (Woo *et al.*, 2004). However, as Woo *et al.* (2004) noted, the number of China's rural residents below the poverty line of US\$1 a day (at 1985 PPP) in 2002 was still 102 million, which was more than one third of the United States of America (USA)'s population, making "Impoverished China" the 10th largest "country" in the world (the other countries with populations exceeding 102 million in 2002 were Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Japan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, and the USA).

Beginning with the problem of increasing inequality and ethnoregional dimension of poverty which together constitute the epitome as well as the root of China's social ills resulted from her recent decades of continuous, astounding economic *tour de force*, this paper will examine contemporary China's social transformation as a phenomenon that is neither simple nor unidimensional. Like Rose's claim with respect to the institution of government (Rose, 1983: 159), social and in particular sociopolitical change could be said not to be a multiattribute concept, but a *multiconcept* construct. Hence, due attention should be paid to various different dimensions of such changes, both positive and negative, including socioeconomic inequalities, socioracial stratification, ethnoregional disparities and State-civil society relations, in particular the structure-agency interface in the challenge of ACES (active citizenship and effective, accountable State) evolvment (Yeoh, 2010a: 271-272), which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent sections of this paper. At any one time, certain dimensions may increase in severity, while others remain constant or decline. Certain dimensions or variables are considerably more difficult to measure than others but their inclusion is essential to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges of social transformation of China in her contemporary reform era.

2. Poverty Reduction and Rising Inequality

One of the most important changes in recent years in China's poverty eradication efforts is the switch of focus from absolute poverty to relative poverty. Even while the overall proportion of population in poverty dropped impressively from 30.7 per cent in 1978 to 3.4 per cent in 2000, according to government statistics, income inequality was increasing, with the Gini coefficient reaching 0.415 in 1995 and continuing to rise (Chai *et al.*, 2004: 2). Hence, while China's reforms have been successful in giving many people higher incomes and producing more goods and services, they also led

to increasingly acute inequality in income and wealth among the populace. From one of the most egalitarian societies in the 1970s, China has turned into one of the most unequal countries in the region and even among developing countries in general. Bert Hoffman of the World Bank noted in 2006 that China's Gini had risen from 0.25 – equal to that of Germany – in 1980 to about 0.45 today, as the country becomes less equal than Russia or the USA. Yan (2010), on the other hand, gave a “conservative” Gini estimate of 0.475 for the year 2007. In the 1980s the richest 10 per cent of the people of China earned 7 times the income of the poorest 10 per cent, today they earn more than 18 times as much.³ Or as another observer put it, “Ever since the early years of reforms, the divide between the rich and the poor had been emerging, and it is now getting to the stage of ripping the entire society apart.” (Zhou, 2006: 286).

2.1. Income Disparity in Chinese Society

Computing using disposable income and excluding welfare payments, Huang and Niu (2007) found that China's urban Gini coefficient since 1998 hovered between 0.4 and 0.5, showing a clear tendency towards increasing income inequality. The encouraging sign was that after peaking in 1998, Huang and Niu actually found a slow gradual decline, albeit slight, in Gini from 1998 to 2003 (see Table 1).

Observing that Gini is relatively sensitive only to income changes of the middle-income group while the Theil index is sensitive to changes of the high- and low-income groups, Huang and Niu gave an interesting comparison over the 1999-2003 period of Gini with the Theil index (Table 1) which, reflecting income changes of the high-income group, continued to rise significantly, except for the decline in 2003, while the second Theil index L and the log variance V, which reflect the income changes of the low-income group, experienced continuous slight but steady increase, pointing to the remarkable transformation underway in the income distribution of the high-income and middle-income groups, reflecting the transformation in size and structure of the middle class in China's rapid economic development. The peaking of Gini in 1998 was related to the rapid unbalanced economic growth of that period, while the significant decline of L and V during that period – especially L which was lower than 0.1 for quite long after 1996 – was an indication of the egalitarian tendency of the low-income group: a general widening impoverishment (Huang and Niu, 2007: 156).

However, Yan (2010) gave a high Gini for all China as early as in 1994 at above 0.43, which had risen to a “conservative” estimate of 0.475 in 2007, which is of course a far cry from the Gini of below 0.3 (averages of 0.16 and 0.22 for urban and rural areas respectively) before the economic reforms. This

Table 1 Income Inequality amongst China's Urban Population

Year \ Index	Gini coefficient (G)	Theil's entropy measure (T)	The second Theil's entropy measure (L)	Log variance index (V)
1985	0.268	0.129	0.116	0.202
1986	0.265	0.131	0.116	0.202
1987	0.264	0.131	0.118	0.204
1988	0.275	0.138	0.124	0.214
1989	0.271	0.143	0.128	0.22
1990	0.272	0.139	0.125	0.215
1991	0.262	0.132	0.119	0.206
1992	0.272	0.16	0.131	0.224
1993	0.297	0.167	0.149	0.252
1994	0.234	0.177	0.158	0.266
1995	0.229	0.17	0.152	0.256
1996	0.449	0.296	0.049	0.253
1997	0.3	0.181	0.161	0.271
1998	0.494	0.081	0.073	0.245
1999	0.487	0.086	0.076	0.246
2000	0.4784	0.091	0.08	0.253
2001	0.476	0.097	0.086	0.263
2002	0.417	0.157	0.113	0.31
2003	0.41	0.133	0.12	0.315

Note: Huang and Niu's computation followed Lambert and Aronson (1993) with data from issues of the *China Statistical Yearbook* of the years 1986-2004, noting that G was sensitive to the income changes of the middle-income class, L and V were sensitive to the income changes of the low-income class, and T was sensitive to the income changes of the high-income class.

Source: Huang and Niu (2007: 157), Table 5-1.

alarmingly high Gini of 0.475 in 2007 represented a growth of 135 per cent from 1978, over a 29-year period in which GDP per capita (at constant prices) had grown by almost 10 times over the pre-reform level with an average annual growth rate of 8.6 per cent. Yan (2010: 176-177) divided this growth of inequality into four phases:

- the "relatively egalitarian" (by international standard) period of 1978-1984 with Gini between 0.2 and 0.3 and little urban-rural disparity, while the rural economy developed immensely under the full force of reform;

- the “relatively justifiable” period of 1985-1992 with Gini hovering between 0.3 and 0.4 while the whole economy was expanding vibrantly with the emphasis of reform shifted to the cities since 1984, though the accompanying inflation and expansion of the income gap had begun to overshoot people’s psychological expectation threshold, resulting in rather serious social instability;
- the worrying period of 1993-2000 of yearly increasing Gini index, with increasingly rapid reform and marketization pushing Gini over the international alarming line of 0.4 in 1993, and further over 0.43 in 1994, before the coefficient dropped back below 0.4 in 1995 and 1996 but rose again with increasing urban-rural, employment, intercommunal and interstratum differentiation amidst the intensifying marketization and growth of the private-sector economy following the 15th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)⁴;
- the high interest polarization period since 2001 to the present wherein the globalization of China’s growing economy and the wealth effect of the capital market have led to the continuous expansion of the income gap, with Gini reaching 0.475 in 2007, even by “conservative” estimation.

Besides the disparity shown in Table 1 that was based on the individual as unit of analysis, Huang and Niu also computed the disparity index (D), the Ahluwalia index (A) and the Kuznets index (K) with household as unit based on the categorization of the *China Statistical Yearbook* (see Table 2).

Huang and Niu’s indices in Table 2 bring us to the fact that the urban income disparity has been getting more and more noticeable, with the D index showing that the gap between the highest 20 per cent and lowest 20 per cent income groups continued to expand rapidly, from 2.3 times in 1985 to 5.4 times in 2003. On the other hand, the Ahluwalia index (A) shows that the share of the poorest 40 per cent has dropped by 38 per cent over the two decades, from 0.296 in 1985 to 0.185 in 2003, while the Kuznets index (K) indicates that the share of the richest 20 per cent has increased by 25 per cent over the same period, from 0.411 in 1985 to 0.549 in 2003 (*ibid.*: 158-159). Nevertheless, Yan (2010: 177-178) pointed out that China’s rural Gini has always been higher than the urban, implying that the intra-rural income disparity is fueling the expansion of the national income disparity, while the urban-rural income disparity is almost the main cause of the continuous expansion of the national income gap. In fact, the 20 per cent urban highest income group’s income is shown to be 5.5 times the income of the 20 per cent urban lowest income group whereas the 20 per cent rural highest income group’s income is 7.3 times the income of the 20 per cent rural lowest income group.⁵ Besides urban-rural, such widening of income and wealth disparity is also manifest in various other aspects (Table 3). Yan’s analysis

shows further that changes in national Gini is positively related to changes in urban-rural income ratio, and concludes that China's present Gini coefficient has reached a stage of too big a disparity and could be even higher if various informal incomes of the middle stratum and upper stratum are included in the calculation, even allowing for some scholars' view that China's Gini could be permitted to be higher, e.g. at 0.45, a line that had almost been reached as early as in 2001.

Table 2 Income Inequality amongst China's Urban Population (Stratified)

Year \ Index	Disparity index (D)	Ahluwalia index (A)	Kuznets index (K)
1985	2.294	0.296	0.411
1986	2.340	0.293	0.416
1987	2.322	0.294	0.416
1988	2.422	0.288	0.423
1989	2.489	0.284	0.428
1990	2.451	0.286	0.424
1991	2.332	0.294	0.418
1992	2.535	0.281	0.430
1993	2.771	0.268	0.451
1994	2.981	0.258	0.457
1995	2.878	0.263	0.451
1996	2.869	0.263	0.451
1997	3.120	0.252	0.462
1998	3.246	0.246	0.468
1999	3.378	0.241	0.475
2000	3.610	0.232	0.483
2001	3.817	0.225	0.494
2002	5.151	0.190	0.539
2003	5.388	0.185	0.549

D – Ratio of the income share of the highest-income 20 per cent of the population to the income share of the lowest-income 20 per cent of the population

A – Income share of the lowest-income 40 per cent of the population, with maximum value = 0.4

K – Income share of the highest-income 20 per cent of the population, with minimum value = 0.2

Source: Huang and Niu (2007: 62-63, 158), Table 5-2.

Table 3 China's Income and Wealth Disparity: Results of Various Surveys and Estimations

Data source	Item	Highest income/ greatest wealth	Lowest income/ least wealth	Note
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Proportion of wealth in family wealth per capita	Highest 20% residents having 72.41%	Lowest 20% residents having 1.35%	Gini coefficient = 0.6865
	Proportion of residential house estate in family wealth per capita	Eastern region: 81.4% Non-agricultural households: 80.7% Urban households: 82.0%	Western region: 66.5% Agricultural households: 69.6% Rural households: 72.1%	Sample volume = 5118
China's Renmin (People's) Bank	Proportion of household average saving deposits in urban renminbi deposits	Largest (household average) 20% households having 64.4%	Smallest (household average) 20% households having 1.3%	Local currency deposits: differential = 49.5
	Proportion of household average saving deposits in urban foreign currency deposits	Largest 20% households having 88.1%	Smallest 20% households having 0.3%	Foreign currency deposits: differential = 293.7
National Bureau of Statistics	Urban-rural income ratio	About 40% of urban residents getting near 70%	About 60% of rural residents getting near 30%	Income differential = 2.33 times
	High-low income groups' income ratio	20% high-income group getting 40% income	80% middle- and lower-income group getting 60% income	Income proportion of high-income group getting larger

Source: Yan (2010: 180), Table 4-1.

Table 4 China: Ranking of Ten Major Social Strata by Average Monthly Income

Stratum	Period	Before 1971	1971-80	1981-90	1991-99	2000-01	2005	Overall ranking	Overall ranking of last four periods
State and social administrative stratum (2.1%)		1	1	4	3	3	4	3	3
Managerial stratum (1.6%)		3	2	3	4	2	2	2	2
Private enterprise owner stratum (1.0%)		-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
Professional skilled stratum (4.6%)		2	3	6	5	4	5	4	5
Officer stratum (7.2%)		6	7	8	6	6	3	7	6
Individually-owned business & industry (<i>getihu</i>) stratum (7.1%)		7	6	2	2	5	6	5	4
Commercial- and service-sector personnel stratum (11.2%)		4	4	5	7	7	8	6	7
Worker stratum (17.5%)		5	5	7	8	8	7	8	8
Agricultural labourer stratum (42.9%)		8	8	10	10	10	10	10	10
Urban and rural vagrant, unemployed and semi-unemployed stratum (4.8%)		9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

Source: Yan (2010: 186), Table 4-4; stratum's present proportion in brackets from Li and Chen (2004: 13), Figure 1-3.

Table 5 China: Average Monthly Income of Ten Major Social Strata and Differential

	Before 1971	1971-80	1981-90	1991-99	2000-01	2005
Mean value of the strata's average monthly incomes	42.0	52.8	145.3	465.3	641.1	754.4
Income differential between highest and lowest stratum	2.7	3.8	13.8	21.7	19.4	19.9

Source: Yan (2010: 179), Figure 4-3.

In terms of income ranking, the social stratum that is rising fastest since the beginning of the “reform and open” policy is that of the private entrepreneurs, followed by managers, State and social administrators, skilled professionals, and business and industry *getihu* 个体户⁶ (Table 4). The interstratum income gap has indeed been expanding with the differential between the highest average monthly income stratum (that of the State and social administrators up to 1980 and that of the private enterprise owners after 1980) and lowest income stratum (always been that of the agricultural labourers) spiraling from 3.8:1 during the 1971-1980 period (52.8 yuan) to 19.9:1 by 2005 (754.4 yuan) (Table 5).

Huang and Niu's analysis also found that, in 2003, provinces/zizhiqu/zhixiashi⁷ whose Gini coefficients (G_i) are lower than the national figure (G) of 0.45 totaled 20 (Table 6).

The poor zizhiqu of Tibet was rather egalitarian, with Gini lower than 0.3. Other provinces/zhixiashi with a reasonable level of 0.3-0.4 were Shandong, Jiangxi, Hubei, Guizhou and Chongqing. The majority of provinces/zizhiqu/zhixiashi, totaled 23, had Gini levels between 0.4 and 0.5, showing the inclination towards widening gap between rich and poor. Two provinces, the economically advanced Jiangsu and Zhejiang, had Gini greater than 0.5 (*ibid.*: 162).

At his first press conference in 2003 as China's premier, Wen Jiabao summarized the coming headaches in his new post in a group of figures, including China's labour force of 740 million *vis-à-vis* the Western advanced countries' total of just 430 million, and China's annual additional labour force of 10 million, *xiagang* 下岗 and unemployed figure of about 14 million, and the rural-to-urban migrant labour of about 120 million – all giving rise to the huge employment pressure the country was facing (Liu, 2010). In

Table 6 Comparison of China's Provincial Gini (G_i) and National Gini (G)*, 2003

$G_i < G$	$G_i \geq G$ (higher by)
<i>Eastern Region</i>	
Beijing 北京 zhixiashi	Fujian 福建 (1%-10%)
Hebei 河北	Guangdong 广东 (1%-10%)
Shandong 山东	Hainan 海南 (1%-10%)
Shanghai 上海 zhixiashi	Jiangsu 江苏 (10%-15%)
Tianjin 天津 zhixiashi	Liaoning 辽宁 (1%-10%)
	Zhejiang 浙江 (15%-29%)
<i>Central Region</i>	
Heilongjiang 黑龙江	Anhui 安徽 (1%-10%)
Henan 河南	Jilin 吉林 (1%-10%)
Hubei 湖北	
Hunan 湖南	
Jiangxi 江西	
Shanxi 山西	
<i>Western Region</i>	
Chongqing 重庆 zhixiashi	Ningxia 宁夏 Hui zizhiqu (10%-15%)
Gansu 甘肃	Qinghai 青海 (1%-10%)
Guangxi 广西 Zhuang zizhiqu	Sichuan 四川 (1%-10%)
Guizhou 贵州	
Inner Mongolia / Nei Monggol 内蒙古 Mongol zizhiqu	
Shaanxi 陕西	
Tibet / Xizang 西藏 Tibetan zizhiqu	
Xinjiang 新疆 Uygur zizhiqu	
Yunnan 云南	

* $G = 0.45$ *zizhiqu* 自治区 – “autonomous region”*zhixiashi* 直辖市 – municipality directly ruled by the central government

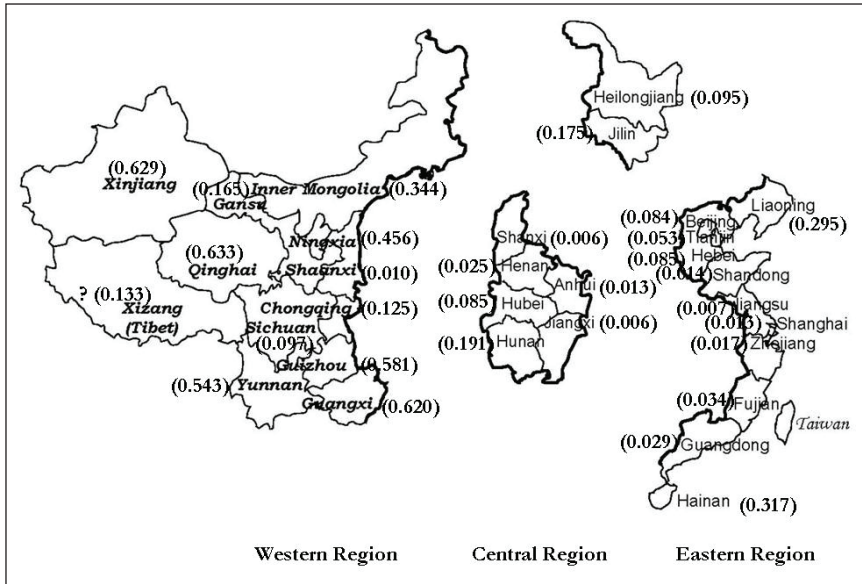
Source: Huang and Niu (2007: 161-162), Table 5-3(2).

terms of poverty and stratification, Wen pointed out that there were 900 million peasants among the country's total population of 1.3 billion, with about 30 million still being trapped in poverty – and the latter figure was derived based on annual income per capita of 625 yuan⁸ which was in fact too low a poverty line: if the line were to be more accurately placed at 825 yuan, the rural poverty population would be about 900 million. In terms of interregional disparity, Wen pointed out that the GDP of the 5 or 6 provinces in eastern, coastal China had exceeded 50 per cent of the national total GDP (*ibid.*).

2.2. Ethnoregional Dimension of Poverty

In line with the now well-known fear of instability (*luan 乱*) on the part of China's ruling Communist Party, the main objective of the country's poverty alleviation policy is to prevent income and wealth inequality from growing out of political control, by attempting to improve the economic position

Figure 1 China: Ethnic Diversity by Province/Zizhiqu/Zhixishi



Note: For the computation of the ethnic diversity/fractionalization index (EFI), with a range of 0–1 from hypothetically complete homogeneity to hypothetically perfect diversity, see Yeoh (2003: 28). EFI for China as a whole is only 0.125, indicating high homogeneity (*ibid.*: 30-32, Table 1).

Source: Computed with data from the 2000 population census.

of the poorest through considerably limited administrative intervention. Furthermore, discontent brewing in the areas resided by ethnic minorities⁹ is taken seriously because these areas are also places that show a relative concentration of poor people.

Just how the western region populated by the non-Han peoples¹⁰ has been left behind in China's economic development is clearly indicated by the poverty problem. Any political or social instability in this ethnic minority region could have grave ramifications throughout the economy that would threaten the development efforts of the central government especially in regard to the development of the regional cores. The *Green Book of China's Rural Economy 2008-2009* gave the rural Gini coefficients (year 2007) of 0.3, 0.3 and 0.4 respectively for the western, central and eastern region (Sheng and Bo, 2009: 131, Table 10-2). Related to this, the *China Development Report 2007* that specially focused on poverty elimination gave the regional distribution of rural absolute poverty as shown in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7 shows that of the 23.65 million rural poor of China in 2005, the eastern region, central region and western region contributed 3.24 million (13.7 per cent), 8.39 million (35.5 per cent) and 12.03 million (50.8 per cent) respectively, with incidence of absolute poverty of the central region and western region being respectively 3.1 times and 6.5 times that of the eastern region. Compare this with the 1993 figures of 19.5 per cent, 31.1 per cent and 49.4 per cent for the eastern region, central region and western region respectively (*Zhongguo Fazhan Baogao 2007*, p. 37), it is obvious that the changes in the regional distribution of the rural population in absolute poverty were mainly reflected in the decline of its proportion in the eastern region, increase of that in the central region, while that in the western region had remained largely unchanged, with the implication that the extent of decline of the number in absolute poverty in the eastern region actually surpassed the national average, that in the central region was obviously below the national average, and that in the western region was the same as the national average (*ibid.*).

Table 8 shows the interregional differentials in rural poverty incidence. Those provinces/zizhiqu with incidence of poverty above 5 per cent (i.e. double the national average) in 2005 were Inner Mongolia, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang which were all in the western region. The only province/zizhiqu/zhixiashi of the western region that had incidence of poverty below 5 per cent were Chongqing, Guangxi, Sichuan and Ningxia – the last one, Ningxia, having experienced a steep decline in rural incidence of poverty from a height of 14.5 per cent in 2000 to just 3 per cent by 2005. Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong which are all provinces/zhixiashi in the eastern region have basically eliminated absolute poverty, with incidence of poverty at just 0.2

Table 7 China's Rural Absolute Poverty: Regional Distribution and Change, 1998-2005

	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Decline during 1998-2005	Rate of decline during 1998-2005 (%)	
Poverty population (million people)	CHINA	42.10	32.09	29.27	28.20	29.00	26.10	23.65	-18.45	43.8
	Eastern	6.22	4.87	3.93	4.65	4.48	3.74	3.24	-2.98	47.9
	Central	15.59	10.91	9.96	8.88	10.30	9.31	8.39	-7.20	46.2
	Western	20.30	16.32	15.37	14.68	14.22	13.05	12.03	-8.27	40.7
Incidence of poverty (%)	CHINA	4.6	3.5	3.2	3.0	3.1	2.8	2.5	-2.1	45.7
	Eastern	1.7	1.3	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.0	0.8	-0.9	52.9
	Central	4.8	3.4	3.1	2.7	3.2	2.8	2.5	-2.3	47.9
	Western	9.1	7.3	6.8	6.5	6.2	5.7	5.2	-3.9	42.9
Proportion of rural poor (%)	Eastern	14.8	15.2	13.4	16.5	15.4	14.3	13.7	-1.1	7.4
	Central	37.0	34.0	34.0	31.5	35.5	35.7	35.5	-1.5	4.1
	Western	48.2	50.8	52.5	52.0	49.0	50.0	50.8	2.6	-5.4

Source: *Zhongguo Fazhan Baogao 2007*, p. 38, Table 2.2.

Table 8 Incidence of Absolute Poverty of the Provinces/Zizhiqu/Zhixiashi, 1998-2005 (%)

Year	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
CHINA	4.6	3.5	3.2	3.0	3.1	2.8	2.5
Eastern							
Beijing	1.6	0.6	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Fujian	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1
Guangdong	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Hainan	2.7	1.9	1.7	3.0	2.1	1.9	2.2
Hebei	2.0	1.9	1.8	2.9	2.3	1.9	1.5
Jiangsu	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2
Liaoning	3.1	3.5	3.2	3.2	3.6	2.5	2.2
Shandong	1.4	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.3
Shanghai	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tianjin	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.0
Zhejiang	1.0	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2
Central							
Anhui	3.2	2.5	1.8	2.0	3.3	2.7	2.4
Heilongjiang	8.2	5.6	4.6	3.4	5.6	3.6	3.2
Henan	4.0	3.0	2.1	1.7	2.4	2.1	1.9
Hubei	4.4	2.2	1.8	2.0	1.8	3.3	3.1
Hunan	5.0	2.3	2.1	1.9	2.1	1.9	1.8
Jiangxi	6.5	2.8	2.8	3.4	3.6	3.8	3.5
Jilin	4.2	4.1	3.1	2.6	3.0	2.0	1.5
Shanxi	6.0	6.8	6.6	5.0	3.9	3.1	2.3
Western							
Chongqing	6.6	4.2	4.0	3.0	3.0	2.2	1.6
Gansu	11.5	9.7	9.6	9.2	8.6	8.4	8.1
Guangxi	5.5	5.0	3.4	2.7	3.6	3.5	3.2
Guizhou	12.9	10.8	10.4	10.7	10.1	9.7	9.0
Nei Monggol	6.4	8.2	13.3	9.8	9.4	7.5	6.6
Ningxia	12.6	14.5	13.6	8.9	8.4	3.8	3.0
Qinghai	14.0	18.6	16.9	16.1	15.6	13.6	11.5
Shaanxi	9.0	7.9	7.8	6.2	8.3	7.8	7.2
Sichuan	5.5	3.7	3.3	2.2	2.5	2.2	2.0
Xizang (Tibet)	19.0	19.8	15.2	15.6	14.0	8.8	7.2
Xinjiang	8.9	10.0	6.5	6.9	5.7	5.7	5.1
Yunnan	12.2	8.2	7.9	11.1	7.9	7.5	7.0

Source: *Zhongguo Fazhan Baogao 2007*, p. 39, Table 2.3.

per cent and below in 2005. Shandong also had incidence of poverty below 1 per cent. Hainan, Hebei and Liaoning were the only provinces in the eastern region that still had incidence of poverty above 1 per cent in 2005. On the other hand, all provinces in the central region – Anhui, Heilongjiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Jilin and Shanxi – had rural absolute poverty incidence from 1.5 to 3.5 per cent in 2005.

There are four characteristics typical of the distribution of poverty population in China:

1. Concentration in the mountainous areas.
2. Concentration in the western region.
3. Concentration in environmentally fragile areas.
4. Concentration in ethnic minority areas.

For instance, out of the 29 million people in absolute poverty in 2003, 15.5 per cent were in the eastern region, 35.5 per cent in the central region, and 49 per cent in the western region. Areas with incidence of poverty less than 1 per cent were all located in the eastern region. Guangxi, Sichuan and Chongqing were the only places in the western region with incidence of poverty between 1 and 5 per cent. Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia and Xinjiang were places in the western region with incidence of poverty between 5 and 10 per cent. All areas with incidence of poverty above 10 per cent were in the western region, viz. Guizhou, Tibet and Qinghai. Rural population with income from 637 to 882 yuan per annum are officially classified as the low-income group. In 2003, those in the low-income group totaled 29.46 million just within the poverty counties alone. (Chen, 2006: 175, footnote 1) Combining the rural poverty population and the low-income group, the number in 2003 totaled 85.17 million, of which 40.14 million (47.1 per cent) were in the western region, 31.2 million (36.6 per cent) in the central region and 13.83 million (16.2 per cent) in the eastern region. (*ibid.*: 176, Figure 7-2)

In 2000, of the 592 officially designated poverty counties¹¹ – including 257 ethnic minority poverty counties – 62 per cent were concentrated in the western region. Of the 32.09 million poor in 2000, more than half were among the ethnic minorities (i.e. non-Han) or in the ethnic minority areas, totaling 17 million people. Not much had changed in the subsequent years. For instance, out of the national figure of 29 million people in poverty in 2003, 16.98 million or 58.55 per cent were in the 12 zizhiqu and provinces of the western region. (*Zhongguo Minzu Fazhan Baogao, 2001-2006*, p. 235) Hence, it is discernable that there is a trend of gradual concentration of the poor towards the western region and the frontier areas, and towards the ethnic minorities. Estimation of the extent of absolute poverty among the ethnic minorities ranges from 40 per cent of the total population as estimated by researchers

in China to 60 per cent as estimated by Nicholas Stern of the World Bank. In view of the fact that ethnic minorities only constitute 8.41 per cent of China's total population, that 40 to 60 per cent of China's poor come from them is indeed alarming. (*ibid.*)

One of the most crucial aspects of China's poverty problem hence is the very fact that the dominant component of the rural poor is the ethnic minorities – as mentioned above, out of the 592 poverty counties, 257 (44 per cent) are ethnic minority counties. Among the poor of the 592 poverty counties in 2003, 46.7 per cent were in ethnic minority areas, with incidence of poverty of 11.4 per cent that was higher than those of the mountainous areas (10.1 per cent), hilly areas (7.1 per cent), old revolutionary base areas (7.7 per cent) and the plains (7.8 per cent). Eighty per cent of the 4.59 million poor of Guizhou were ethnic minorities, and almost all of the 3.1 million hard-core poor of the province were ethnic minorities. In the mountainous areas of southern Ningxia, 60 per cent of the 520 thousand poor were Hui. Eighty-five per cent of Yunnan's 4.4 million poor and more than 90 per cent of Tibet's 250 thousand poor were also ethnic minorities. (Chen, 2006: 177) In fact, out of the country's 29 million poverty population, 45 per cent or more than 13 million were in the ethnic minority areas. Among the 630 thousand people of 22 ethnic minority groups each with population less than 100 thousand, 394 thousand were in absolute poverty or in the low-income category. (Wu, 2006: 15)

Ethnic minority areas' rural absolute-poverty population constituted 47.7 per cent of the national total, according to official figures (end of 2004), while the incidence of poverty was 5 percentage points higher than the national figure, population with low income constituted 46 per cent of the national total, proportion of low-income population in rural population was 9 percentage points higher than the national figure, absolute-poverty population plus low-income population constituted 46.6 per cent of the national total, and the proportion of absolute-poverty plus low-income population in rural population was 14 percentage points higher than the national figure. Almost 80 per cent of China's ethnic minorities are found in the country's western region, especially the rural areas. China's northwest with about 20 different ethnic minorities and total minority population of more than 15 million and southwest with more than 30 ethnic minorities and total minority population of more than 29 million being the country's two areas with the most complex ethnic composition and the largest number of and most concentrated ethnic minorities, the geographical correlation of ethnic minority distribution (largely populating the frontier areas) and poverty population distribution is unmistakable, hence reflecting the composite phenomenon made up of rural poverty, geographical poverty, ethnic poverty and frontier poverty. (Nie and Yang, 2006: 153)

According to the *Green Book of China's Rural Economy 2008-2009*, the western region's rural disposal income per capita was 2,281 yuan (year 2007), compared to 3,054 yuan of the central region and 4,375 yuan of the eastern region (Sheng and Bo, 2009: 131, Table 10-2). As China is experiencing a continuous expansion in urban-rural income gap, such interregional rural income disparity has in fact been widening since economic reform began, as can be observed in Table 9. The ratio of eastern to central to western rural income has been expanding from 1:0.83:0.79 in 1980 to 1:0.75:0.63 by 1990 and further to 1:0.68:0.52 by 2005. An example of such widening gap is the regional GDP per capita differential between Zhejiang Province (in the eastern region) and Guizhou Province (in the western region), with the former's 37,411 yuan *versus* the latter's meager 6,915 yuan (year 2007), as highlighted in the *2010 Blue Book of China's Society* (Yang and Chi, 2009: 239) – Guizhou's figure being just 18.48 per cent of Zhejiang's.

According to official figures shown in Table 10, western regional to national GDP ratio appears to be stable, with slight increases in later years, and there was steady increase in western regional GDP per capita, though it still lagged behind the national level by a very large differential. Even official figures admitted that the gap between the ethnic regions and the advanced eastern region was expanding, with Shanghai's and Guangdong's respective annual average growth rates of 13.11 per cent and 13.97 per cent for the 2000-2004 period exceeding the 13.05 per cent of the ethnic regions, and the annual average growth rate of Guangdong's total import-export surpassing that of the ethnic regions by 9 percentage points for the same period (*Zhongguo Minzu Fazhan Baogao (2001-2006)*, p. 64). The disadvantage of the western region is even more glaring in terms of public revenue, where the differential has been expanding over the years.

Table 9 China's Rural Annual Average Net Income per Capita by Region (yuan)

Region \ Year	Eastern	Central	Western
1980	217.6	181.0	171.6
1985	452.2	377.8	313.4
1990	847.6	632.9	533.8
1995	2127.2	1402.7	1060.7
2000	3063.3	2077.1	1592.7
2005	4416.6	2999.5	2300.4

Source: *Dangdai Zhongguo Shehui Ge Jiecheng Fenxi 2007*, p. 212, Table 7-2 (data from *Zhongguo Nongcun Zhuhu Diaocha Nianjian 2006*, pp. 72-82).

Table 10 GDP and GDP per Capita of China's Western Region

	Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2008*
	Unit								
GDP of the western region	billion yuan	1464.7	1535.4	1665.5	1824.8	1988.6	2295.4	2758.5	5826.0
National GDP	billion yuan	8278.0	8206.75	8946.81	9731.48	10517.23	11739.02	13687.59	32722.3
GDP of the western region as percentage of national GDP	%	17.7	19.0	18.9	19.0	19.1	19.7	20.1	17.8
GDP per capita of the western region	yuan	4123	4302	4667	5070	5438	6306	7728	13186
National GDP per capita	yuan	6715	6551	7086	7651	8214	9101	10561	21215
GDP per capita of the western region as percentage of national GDP per capita	%	61.40	65.67	65.86	66.26	66.20	69.28	73.2	62.15

Note: * GDP per capita figures are for year 2007.

Sources: *Zhongguo Xibu Nongcun Quanmian Xiaokang Zhibiao Tixi Yanjiu*, 2006, pp. 51-52, Tables 4-1, 4-2; *Zhongguo Xibu Jingji Fazhan Baogao (2009)*, p. 22, Table 6.

3. Environmental Degradation, Ethnoregionalization of Poverty and Social Instability

And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.

– Friedrich Nietzsche (1886), *Beyond Good and Evil*¹²

As poverty and inequality constitute one of the most, if not *the* most, critical challenges China faces in her next phase of politico-socioeconomic development, and as has been noted earlier, poverty in China has the properties of being concentrated in the western region and in the ethnic minority areas, ethnoregionalization of poverty inevitably ensues, presenting China not only with economic challenges but also long-term sociopolitical security risks. Public protests in the ethnic “autonomous regions” lately have been growing alarmingly. For instance, over a thousand ethnic Mongolian herdsmen demonstrated in mid-July 2011 against alleged government-business collusion in an ethnic Han Chinese businessman’s low-price purchase of over ten thousand *mu*¹³ of grazing land, according to the New York-based Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center.¹⁴ The subsequent development of the purchased land had allegedly brought in hundreds of ethnic Han workers with trucks and bulldozers whose brutal intrusion into the ethnic Mongolian village concerned had resulted in the death and injury of over a hundred livestock and the injury of over 20 herdsmen who were trying to defend their rights. Another 20 more herdsmen were injured in the thousand-strong demonstrators’ clash with the police in mid-July.¹⁵ This, in fact, is not the first such incident in 2011. Earlier, on 25th May, over two thousand ethnic Mongolian students and herdsmen demonstrated in front of the government building in Xilinhot (Siliyinqota) following the death of a herdsman after being hit by coal truck on 10th May while protecting his grazing land against destruction by ethnic Han’s economic development drive that has caused increasingly acute resentment among ethnic Mongolians who see themselves as the oppressed people of Inner Mongolia, devoid of political power and falling prey to the insatiable rapacity of the Han Chinese migrants – an extension of the dominant central Han political power of the country – who are destroying their traditional economy, culture and environment. Also, in May, demonstrations erupted in the regional capital Hohhot (Kökeqota) ending with the arrest of 50 students and other citizens, and according the Southern Mongolian Information Center, by early June at least 90 students, herdsmen and other citizens had been arrested in Inner Mongolia’s demonstrations, with many students seriously injured in their clash with the police. The herdsman’s death was not an isolated case in Inner Mongolia. There was another case occurring also around that time that involved the death of an ethnic minority young man being hit by an excavator

Table 11 "Mass Incidents" in Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang: Comparison and Contrast

	Inner Mongolia, 11th May 2011	Xinjiang, 5th July 2009
Trigger	Rights-defending herdsman killed by coal truck	Uighur workers killed by Han Chinese
Background	Herdsmen's livelihood in great difficulty and poverty blamed on mining activity on their grassland	Poor development in Uighur areas leading to acute poverty
Way of protest	Peaceful demonstrations	Violent Uighur backlash killing Han Chinese
Slogan of protest	"Remembrance of the killed! Stop mining!"	"Blood for blood! Han Chinese get the hell out of Xinjiang!"
Participants	Mongolian students and herdsmen	Uighur youths
State response	Suppression with army and riot police; making arrests before situation worsened	Suppression with army and riot police; making arrests after conflict

in a fight with the miners over issues related to environmental pollution due to mining activities.¹⁶

The Inner Mongolia troubles came at a time when tensions were high due to the approaching anniversary of the June Fourth 1989 Beijing massacre, and when this multiethnic nation¹⁷ is still reeling from the shock of the 14th March 2008 Lhasa riots and the 5th July 2009 Xinjiang ethnic conflict. There are indeed many similarities between the new incident in Inner Mongolia and the 2009 ethnic violence in Xinjiang, as shown in Table 11.¹⁸

While the Inner Mongolia trouble is more recent in origin and less volatile as compared to the long-running troubles in Tibet and Xinjiang, Beijing's central government has not been any softer in its suppression of the slightest sign of organized dissent that it perceives as equivalent or a prelude to separatism. The most high-profile case of such suppression is the 15-year jail sentence meted out to ethnic Mongolian dissident scholar Hada who founded the Southern Mongolian Democratic League in 1992 pursuing high autonomy for "Southern Mongolia" (i.e. China's Inner Mongolia) and possible referendum for the unification of Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia (i.e. the Republic of Mongolia). He was sentenced in 1996 for subversion, separatism and espionage, and had since disappeared after his release in December 2010.

What the Beijing central government might find perplexing is the fact that since 2002 Inner Mongolia has been China's number one province/zizhiqu ("autonomous region") in terms of GDP growth rate, with a GDP of 972.5 billion yuan in 2009, mainly from mining, which also gave the prefecture-level city of Ordos a high GDP per capita of US\$15,000.¹⁹ While the rich deposits of Inner Mongolia's minerals such as coal, rare earth, Glauber's salt, trona, etc. have indeed brought wealth to the region, excessive mining has been accused by the locals as the main reason for the deterioration of grassland (receding grassland) for which the official media has also blamed on the herdsmen's over-grazing their livestock. Of Inner Mongolia's over 63.59 million hectares of useable grassland, as large as 38.67 hectares, i.e. 60 per cent, has deteriorated. Horrific pollution and scarred landscape of the Inner Mongolian grassland environment have been caused by excessive mining due to recent years' rapidly rising coal price which have attracted a huge influx of Han Chinese into this largest coal mining region of China, which is viewed by civil rights groups as tantamount to genocide of the Mongolian herdsmen whose life is so closely intertwined with the grassland for hundreds of years till today.²⁰ The peaceful and harmonious society and interethnic relationship, *vis-à-vis* Tibet and Xinjiang, in this top-growth "autonomous region", have been proven to be a façade hiding the simmering, suppressed anger of the ethnic Mongolians against the State-capital collusion in exploiting and destroying their landscape and life for the benefit of Han Chinese migrants and the Han Chinese-dominated central Party-State. Furthermore, the atrocities committed by the Maoist State during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, when hundreds of thousands of people were accused, through torture, to be members of the spurious seditious "People's Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia"²¹, resulting in the death of tens of thousands of persecuted ethnic Mongolians, have also been a ghost haunting Beijing's rule over Inner Mongolia to date, similar to the other volatile ethnic regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, that the cosmetic rehabilitations after the passing of the Maoist era and overall GDP growth have not been able to exorcize.

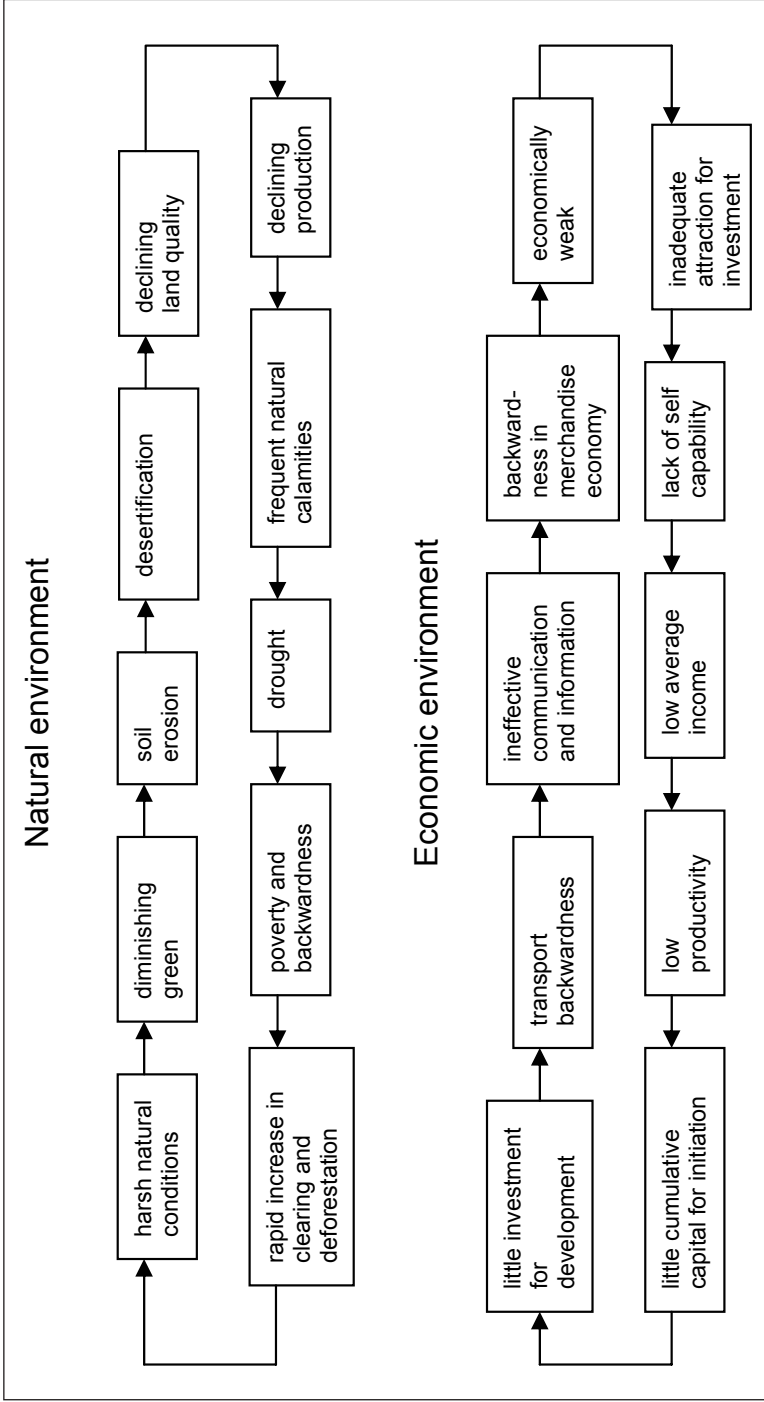
It is also crucial to take into consideration that for China as a whole, poverty is still very much related to ecological factors. For instance, the concentration of the poor in the western region which includes, among others, Inner Mongolia and the other ethnic "autonomous regions" like Xinjiang, Tibet, Ningxia and Guangxi, is related to the fact that, besides desertification, the poverty-stricken mountainous areas are concentrated in this particular region. The country's 64.8 per cent of poverty-stricken mountainous areas (*shanqu* 山区) and 56.2 per cent of the hilly (*qiuling* 丘陵) areas are found in 10 provinces/zizhiqu/zhixiashi of the western region, occupying 72.9 per cent of the total area of the region, with mountainous areas alone taking up 53.1

per cent. The most mountainous provinces are the three southwest provinces of Sichuan (including Chongqing), Yunnan and Guizhou, with mountainous areas taking up 72 per cent, 80.3 per cent and 80.8 per cent of the respective total areas of the said provinces. If inclusive of the hilly areas, the figure rises to 95 per cent for Yunnan and Guizhou, and 97.5 per cent for Sichuan.²² (Chen, 2006: 176; original source: *Zhongguo Shanqu Fazhan Baogao 2003*, pp. 246-247) Out of the 592 poverty counties, 366 are in the western region, and out of these 366 counties, 258 are in remote mountain counties, occupying about 70 per cent of the western mountain counties. Most of these poverty counties are distributed over 6 major areas of fragile ecology, viz. Inner Mongolian plateau's southeastern border area that suffers from desertification, Huangtu 黄土 plateau's gully area that suffers from severe soil erosion, the environmentally deteriorating mountainous areas of the Qin Ba 秦巴 region, the ecologically endangered hilly areas of the karst plateau, the sealed-off mountain and valley areas of the Hengduan 横断 range and the severely cold mountain areas of the western deserts. Being ecologically fragile and sensitive, all these are areas extremely short of resources, with extremely bad environment for human habitation. (*ibid.*: 177) Thus, coupled with structural economic disadvantages, the western region populated by many of China's ethnic minorities is trapped in the vicious cycles of developmental nightmare as depicted by Wu (2006) (see Figure 2).

There are three main issues in the western region's environmental degradation: soil erosion, desertification and grassland deterioration. Major symptoms like the increasingly serious Huanghe 黄河 (Yellow River) drought since the 1990s, the severe flood of mid-Yangzi River (Chang Jiang) 扬子江/长江 in 1998, and the almost yearly spring sandstorm since 2000 all point to the critical stage of environmental degradation of the western region. Take the typical example of year 2008. The first sandstorm came in March from the Gobi desert, affecting not only up to 110 million people in China's 300 cities, towns and counties in 5 provinces/zizhiqu, but also adjacent nations including Korea, Japan and Taiwan, straining bilateral relations. Such sandstorms from China are costing, besides human lives, an estimated US\$5.82 billion of losses in Korea alone.²³

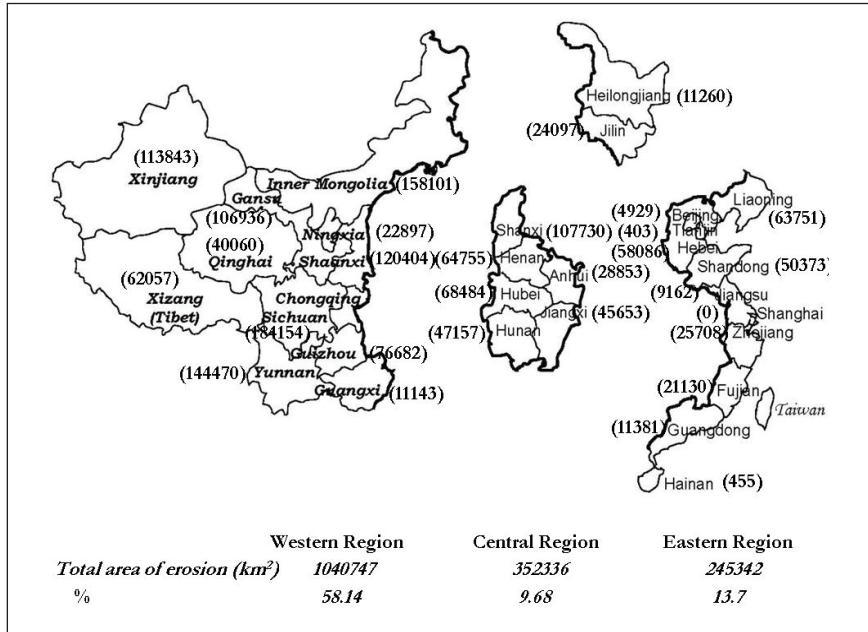
Up to 80 per cent of the country's total area of soil erosion, 81.43 per cent of the area of desertification and 93.27 per cent of the area of grassland deterioration are in the western region. (*ibid.*: 19; original source: *Zhongguo Quyue Fazhan Baogao 2000*) As shown in Figure 3, of all the provinces/zizhiqu/zhixiashi (not including Chongqing), seven have areas of soil erosion exceeding 100,000 square kilometres. Other than Shanxi, all of these provinces/zizhiqu are in the western region: Sichuan, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi, Xinjiang and Gansu. Soil erosion in the southwestern region is also serious (see Table 12).

Figure 2 Vicious Cycles of China's Ethnic Minority Areas



Source: Wu (2006: 2), Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 3 China: Area of Soil Erosion (km²) by Province/Zizhiqu/Zhixiashi



Source: Chen (2006: 19), Table 1-3 (data from *Zhongguo Shengtai Pohuai Xianzhuang Baogao*, June 1997).

Table 12 China: Soil Erosion in the Southwest

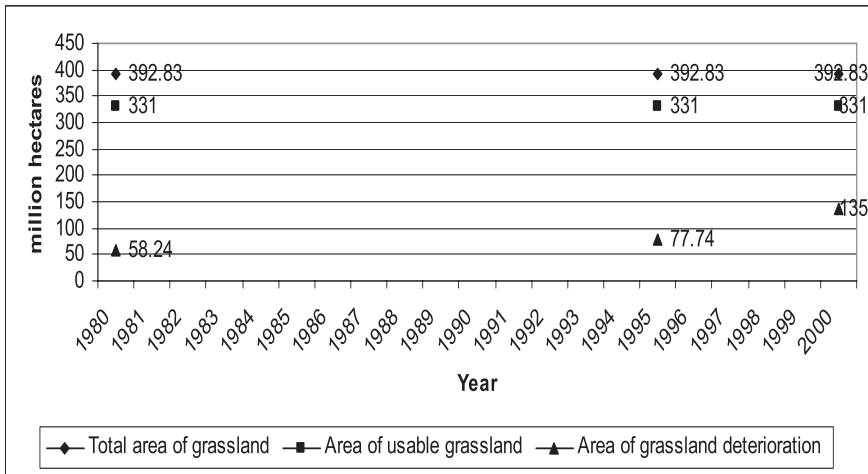
	Yunnan	Guizhou	Sichuan	Chongqing	TOTAL
Area of soil erosion (‘0000 km ²)	14.69	7.4	22.0	4.35	48.44
% of total area of province/zhixiashi	38.3	42.0	45.0	52.8	42.8
Volume of soil erosion (hundred million tons per annum)	5.5	2.7	6.0	2.0	16.2

Source: Chen (2006: 20), Table 1-4 (data from *Zhongguo Quyu Fazhan Baogao 2000*, p. 207).

The desertification of farmland in the western region involves a total area of up to 1.1 million hectares. While this is only 2.24 per cent of the total area of farmland in the western region, it contributes to 43.24 per cent of the national total area of desertification of farmland – that suffering from light- and medium-degree desertification is 87.95 per cent of the national total area and that suffering from high-degree desertification is 12.05 per cent of the national total area. Provinces/zizhiqu in the western region particularly severely hit by desertification are Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu and Tibet. (Chen, 2006: 20) With the “Western Regional Development” (*xibu dakaifa* 西部大开发) strategy inevitably aiming at exploiting the rich natural resources (water, nonferrous metal, petroleum, natural gas, etc.) of the western region, both to promote the region’s economic growth and enhance the living standard and welfare of the region’s inhabitants, and to meet the energy needs of the country as a whole, in time there could arise an inherent contradiction between ecological construction/environmental protection and the basic aim of *xibu dakaifa* that cannot be ignored. (*ibid.*: 33)

With 40 million hectares of grassland (41.7 per cent of the country’s total land area), China is one of the few countries in the world with the largest grassland. The country’s natural grassland is mainly distributed in the ethnic minority pastures in the western and northern frontiers. The area of pasturage totaled up to 3.6 million square kilometres, or 37 per cent of the country’s land area. However, the western region is also the country’s main region of grassland deterioration. Take the case of Xinjiang. According to Abliz Yusuf *et al.* (2009: 60-61), Xinjiang is the region of China with the

Figure 4 China: Deterioration of Natural Grassland



Source: Chen (2006: 21), Table 1-5 (data from Deng, 2005: 122).

largest area, widest distribution and most serious situation of desertification and grassland deterioration, a combined result of aridity, high temperature, over-farming, over-grazing and other man-made damages. Of Xinjiang's 87 counties and municipalities, as many as 80 counties and municipalities and more than 90 farms are affected by desertification. The total area of desertified land has reached 795,900 square kilometres, i.e. about half (49.71 per cent) of Xinjiang's total land area, or 30.35 per cent of China's total area of desertification. While the effective usable area of Xinjiang's natural grassland totals 480,000 square kilometres, the size of the area that suffers from serious deterioration has reached 80,000 to 130,000 square kilometres. In fact, a Tian Shan Mountain grassland has a deterioration area reaching 450 square kilometres or over 48 per cent of the usable grassland. Such desertification in Xinjiang is still currently expanding at the rate of 350 to 400 square kilometres per annum. On the other hand, Table 13 shows that the pasturelands of Tibet, Gansu and Sichuan have been deteriorating very rapidly too. Tibet's area of deterioration was 24.267 million hectares in 1980, with a deterioration rate of 29.6 per cent. The deterioration area rose to 29.285 million hectares by 2000, with a deterioration rate of 35.7 per cent, i.e. an increase of 6 percentage points in 20 years. Gansu's area of deterioration was 2.351 million hectares in 1980, with a deterioration rate of 26.7 per cent. The deterioration area rose to 4.405 million hectares by 2000, with a deterioration rate of 50 per cent, i.e. an increase of 23.3 percentage points in 20 years. Sichuan's area of deterioration was only 1.333 million hectares in 1980, with a deterioration rate of only 9.8 per cent. However, the deterioration area tripled within 20 years and rose to 4.541 million hectares by 2000, with a rapid rise in deterioration rate to 33.3 per cent. Qinghai's area of deterioration was 4.398 million hectares in 1980, with a deterioration rate of 12.1 per cent. The deterioration area rose to 20.367 million hectares by 2000, with deterioration rate increased tremendously to 56 per cent, i.e. a shocking increase of 44 percentage points in 20 years.

Of course, oasisization does occur alongside desertification, as pointed out by Abliz Yusuf *et al.* (2009: 60-61) in the case of Xinjiang, and with diminishing buffer zone between the oasis and desert which are both expanding, the oasis environment is constantly under threat from saltization, desertification and pollution, as the environmental situation of mountains, plains and deserts outside the oases is still in disequilibrium and continuing to deteriorate. With oases constituting only 4.3 per cent of Xinjiang's total land area and 11.1 per cent of total effective usable land area, overall deterioration is still much larger than improvement. Adding to that is the issue of soil erosion which has reached a total area of 103 square kilometres or 28.1 per cent of national soil erosion area, making it Xinjiang's number one environmental problem. As Abliz Yusuf *et al.* (2009: 63) further highlighted, with over 90 per cent of the rural population who are in poverty living in the

Table 13 China: Area and Rate of Grassland Deterioration in Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan

Year	Tibet		Qinghai		Gansu		Sichuan	
	Area of grassland deterioration (million hectares)	Rate of grassland deterioration (%)	Area of grassland deterioration (million hectares)	Rate of grassland deterioration (%)	Area of grassland deterioration (million hectares)	Rate of grassland deterioration (%)	Area of grassland deterioration (million hectares)	Rate of grassland deterioration (%)
1980	24.267	29.6	4.398	12.1	2.351	26.7	1.333	9.8
1990	11.428	13.9	6.191	17.0	3.506	39.8	2.045	15.0
1995	24.944	30.4	5.565	15.3	3.982	45.2	2.154	15.8
1996	21	25.6	10.9	30.0	4.22	47.9	3.981	29.2
2000	29.285	35.7	20.367	56.0	4.229/4.4*	48.0/50.0*	4.541	33.3

* Two figures for year 2000 given by Deng (2005) are based on two different data sources. Source: Chen (2006: 22-23), Tables 1-6, 1-7, 1-8, 1-9 (original source: Deng, 2005: 128-130).

environmentally relatively appalling areas, Xinjiang's severely worsening grassland ecology – with 85 per cent of the region's grassland area suffering from various degrees of deterioration including up to 37.5 per cent from severe deterioration – is leading to intensifying soil erosion and frequent sandstorms, adversely affecting livestock husbandry and becoming the one of the main causes of deepening poverty.

Adding to these problems, there is an alarming degree of wastage and environmental damage in resource exploitation in the western region, the former being partly due to the fact that the right for exploitation is given by the government via administrative measures, hence does not feature in the enterprises' cost structure. Furthermore, resource tax by production volume is as low as just 1.18 per cent of resource volume on average. Zero cost of access to resource and extremely low resource tax have thus led to tremendous wastage in exploitation. For instance, for some oil wells in northern Shaanxi, only around 100 kilograms could be extracted from every ton of crude oil reserve, the other more than 800 kilograms being completely wasted. (*Zhongguo Xibu Jingji Fazhan Baogao 2006*, p. 272) Such over-exploitation and wastage, coupled with neglect in environmental protection, have also led to increasingly severe environmental degradation. For instance, in Shaanxi's Shenmu 神木 county, over-exploitation by the county's 216 coal enterprises has resulted in a cavity of up to 99.12 square kilometres in size, leading to 19 cave-ins. Cave-ins, death of plant life due to the drying up of groundwater, and severe water and air pollution are making the mining regions increasingly uninhabitable. It was reported that while cave-ins are making land uncultivable for farmers and causing grazing problems for animal husbandry, and diminishing groundwater is drying up wells which households depend on for drinking water, the mining company is paying villagers a cave-in compensation of just RMB20 cents for every ton of coal. (*ibid.*: 272-273)

4. Public Protests and Social Crisis

These are the times that try men's souls [...] Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value.

– Thomas Paine (1776), *The American Crisis*, 1²⁴

Poverty and inequality are among the key factors underlying social disturbances. Various estimates have shown an increase in collective protest incidents from 8,700 in 1994 to 90,000 in 2006 and further to 127,000 in 2008.²⁵ According to official statistics, “illegal” *quntixing shijian* 群体性事件 (or *qunti shijian* 群体事件, literally “mass incidents”) nationwide increased from 10,000 to 74,000 cases over the decade of 1994-2004, with an average

annual growth rate of 22.2 per cent, while the number of people involved in the *qunti shijian* went up from 730,000 to 3,760,000, with an average annual growth rate of 17.8 per cent (Hu, Hu and Wang, 2006). The figures continued to climb to 87,000 cases and about 4 million people by 2005 (Yeoh, 2010a: 256, Figures 9 and 10). In general, the number of *qunti shijian* had been rising at an alarmingly increasing rate. From a growth of about 10 per cent from 1995 to 1996, *qunti shijian* was growing at an average annual rate of as high as 25.5 per cent from 1997 to 2004, i.e. higher than the average growth rate of 22.2 per cent during the decade of 1994-2004, with annual growth in certain years reaching as high as above 40 per cent; or with 1994 figure indexed 100, a steep increase of the index from 100 to 740 in terms of the number of cases during the decade of 1994-2004 (an increase of 6.4 times) and from 100 to 515 in terms of the number of people involved (an increase of 4.2 times) (*ibid.*).

4.1. Nature and Types of Public Protests

In terms of the participants' profiles, while at the beginning the people involved in these "mass incidents" were mainly *xiagang* workers²⁶ and peasants (reflecting land loss and corruption issues) but later on the list of participants expanded to include, besides *xiagang* workers and peasants who lost their lands, also workers, urban residents, private individual enterprise owners (*getihu*), teachers, students and a small number of ex-servicemen and cadres, etc. (Hu, Hu, He and Guo, 2009: 143; Yeoh, 2010a: 257, Figure 11), thus reflecting expanding and deepening popular interest conflicts and contradictions. The changing and expanding class structure is not only a society-wide phenomenon but also occurring within the particular social class itself, thus making the grievances of the class-within-class even more acute. Donaldson and Zhang, for instance, classified China's farmers today into five categories based on their role as direct producers and their class relations with the agribusinesses – "commercial farmers" who work independently on allocated family land; "contract farmers" who work on allocated family land to fulfill company contracts, whose harvests are sold to the contracting companies, and while being dominated by the companies manage to retain some flexibility; "semi-proletarian farmers with Chinese characteristics", mainly hired villagers who work on collective land rented to companies as company employees, whose harvests belong to the company, and while being dominated by the companies manage to enjoy a degree of entitlement; "semi-proletarian farm workers", mainly hired migrant labourers who work on company land as company employees, whose harvests belong to the companies, and while being dominated by the companies do have family land at home as a fall-back option; and "proletarian farm workers", mainly hired

landless labourers who work on company land as employees, whose harvests belong to the companies, and who, unlike the other four categories, suffer from complete domination by the companies (Donaldson and Zhang, 2009: 99, Table 6.1).

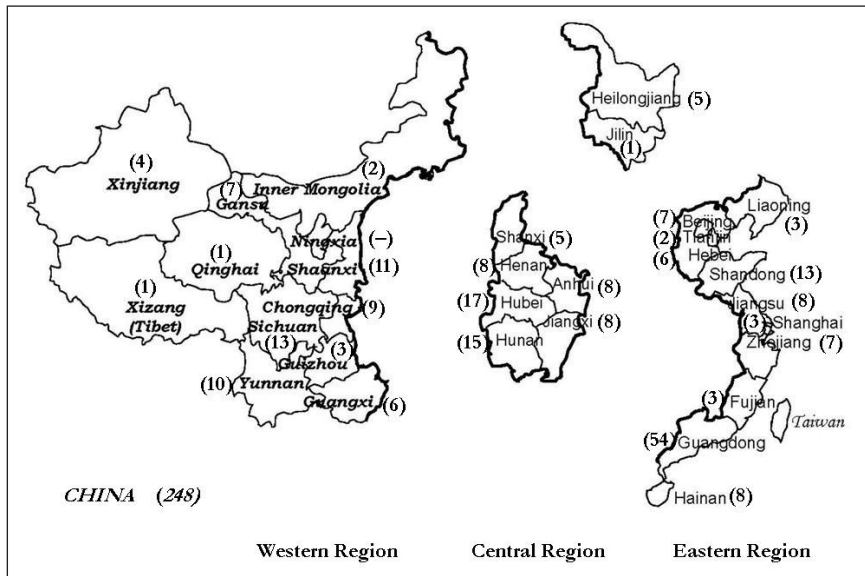
On the other hand, Tong and Lei (2010) documented a total of 248 “large-scale mass incidents” (those with more than 500 participants, according to China’s Ministry of Public Security)²⁷ from 2003 to 2009 (Table 14).

Table 14 China: Large-scale Mass Incidents, 2003-2009

Year	Total Number of Large-scale Mass Incidents
2003	9
2004	20
2005	9
2006	25
2007	63
2008	76
2009	46

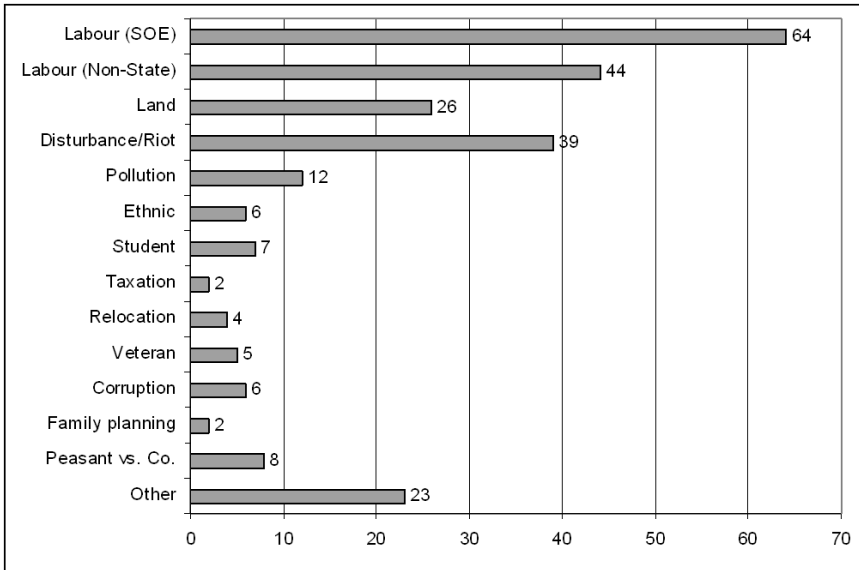
Source: Tong and Lei (2010: 489), Figure 1.

Figure 5 China: Frequency of Large-scale Mass Incidents by Province, 2003-2009



Source: Tong and Lei (2010: 490), Table 1.

Figure 6 Large-scale Mass Incidents by Type (Total Number during 2003-2009)



Source: Tong and Lei (2010: 491), Table 2.

While large-scale mass incidents come in various types, labour and land/relocation disputes top the list (Figure 6), followed by social disturbances and riots usually triggered by isolated incidents but reflecting the people's long-simmering distrust of local government officials with accusation of corruption and government-business collusion (*guan-shang goujie* 官商勾结): the well-known cases being the Weng'an 瓮安 incident of 2008, Shishou 石首 incident of 2009 and the recent riots in mid-June 2011 involving thousands in Taizhou 台州, Zhejiang Province, in a series of latest large-scale riots that also included the disturbances in Guangdong Province's Chaozhou 潮州, Zhejiang Province's Shaoxing 绍兴, Hubei Province's Lichuan 利川 and Xintang 新塘 township of Zengcheng 增城 City (of the metropolis of Guangzhou 广州, Guangdong Province).²⁸ It is undeniable that underlying these large-scale public protests is the issue of rapidly growing economic inequality in the forms of widening income gap, lack of social safety net and perception of social and government injustice, as Tong and Lei commented, "[...] local governments and police force were generally perceived as corrupt and incompetent. The fact that the police force were often dispatched in favour of the capitalists who have close relationship with the government whenever there was a dispute between peasants and the companies reinforced the public perception. There was a profound distrust of the government." (Tong and

Lei, 2010: 498) Such social disturbances and riots with no specific economic demands are seen as the most system-threatening because they are challenging rather than endorsing regime legitimacy:

The outburst of disturbances is often the product of broad and diffused social grievances over a variety of issues ranging from inequality, corruption and social injustice to increasing drug addiction. Disturbance is often triggered by poor local governance, especially the misconduct of *chengguan* [城管, i.e. staff members of the city management agency] or the police. In these cases, social anger, not economic demands, is directed at the authorities.

(*ibid.*: 501)

4.2. Distrust of Political Authority

The frequency and scale of the recent riots has undeniably been increasingly alarming to the government, giving rise to the allegation that the Xintang authorities were under the direct secret order of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party to fabricate the image of the mid-June 2011 Xintang riots as purely clashes between the Sichuan migrant workers and the local Cantonese, even by enlisting the underworld to orchestrate attacks, in order to transform the protests against the government into inter-communal conflicts and to justify the suppression of public protests and demonstrations. On the other hand, the government media *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 (*People's Daily*) has blamed the riots on cultural clash between migrant workers and the local people, while some scholars have attributed the recent Guangdong riots to the recession of an open economy, and the lack of security in the livelihood of the twenty million migrant workers in the province who are also suffering from discrimination and being bullied and harassed by the local underworld and other powers that be. On the other hand, Beijing sociologist Yu Jianrong 于建嵘 pointed to the alarming fact that the recent spate of social disturbances (see Table 15)²⁹, e.g. in Lizhou (Hubei) and Inner Mongolia, were triggered by “sudden events/emergencies” (*tufa shijian* 突发事件) and their participants were mostly unrelated to the original cause and without clear interest demands.³⁰ However, in venting their discontent towards society, the absence of “free-floating aggression” is notable (in contrast with, e.g., the recent summer riots across British cities in August 2011), and the government and State authorities have been the main targets of attack. Widespread support has even been noted on the Internet for such attacks on government offices and even in the case of the killing of judges. During the spate of wanton killings of primary school and kindergarten children that shocked the nation in 2010, the sudden outbreak of fatal free-floating aggression against these young children across China that occurred from March to May 2010 which caused the death of a total of 17

Table 15 Spate of Social Disturbances in May-June 2011

Beginning date of riot	Place	Details
3rd May	Shehong 射洪 County, Sichuan Province	After a secondary school teacher was mistaken as a murderer and beaten up by plain-cloth policemen, over a thousand people including teachers and students demonstrated and destroyed the police station and county government office.
13th May	Tianzhu 天祝 County, Gansu Province	A dismissed employee threw petrol bomb and injured over 60 people.
23rd May	Inner Mongolia	Death of a herdsman after being hit by a coal truck led to demonstrations.
26th May	Fuzhou 抚州 City, Jiangxi Province	A shangfang petitioner detonated bombs at three places including the city attorney's office, killing 3 and injuring 9.
6th June	Chaozhou 潮州 City, Guangdong Province	On 1st June, a 19-year-old Sichuan migrant worker Xiong Hanjiang 熊汉江 asking for unpaid wages of 2,000 yuan was assaulted and had his hand and leg muscles severed, leading to a 10000-people riot, with 18 injured. The badly injured Xiong had recovered in the hospital but could be handicapped for life.
8th June	Shaoxing 绍兴 City, Zhejiang Province	Seven thousand workers and villagers demonstrated against a tin foil factory that had been polluting the place for many years.
9th June	Lichuan 利川 County, Hubei Province	After former anti-corruption office director Ran Jianxin 冉建新 died during interrogation, over a thousand people who believed he was beaten to death walked on the streets and clashed with police.
10th June	Xintang 新塘 Township, Guangdong Province	A pregnant Sichuan woman and her husband who were roadside pedlars were beaten up by security personnel who were allegedly extorting protection money from the couple, leading to a riot by over a thousand Sichuan migrant workers who destroyed the government office and police vehicles, reportedly with 5 people killed, over a hundred injured and hundreds arrested. There are five

Table 15 (continued)

Beginning date of riot	Place	Details
		million Sichuan migrant workers in Guangdong, of whom a hundred thousand are in Xintang.
12th June	Zhengzhou 郑州 City, Henan Province	Over 400 residents of Waliu 洼刘 Village of Shifo 石佛 Township demonstrated against the government over forced relocation and unfair compensation, after unidentified thugs beat up villagers protecting their homes.
13th June	Changsha 长沙 City, Hunan Province	Over 500 residents demonstrated against the government over forced relocation.
14th June	Loudi 娄底 City, Hunan Province	Residents demonstrated against the building of a 220,000-volt cable tower; many injured.
15th June	Taizhou 台州 City, Zhejiang Province	Believing that the village official of the Jiaojiang 椒江 District had been embezzling land acquisition subsidies over the past nine years, thousands of villagers besieged and destroyed Sinopec's petrol station.

people, including 15 children, and injured more than 80, in a string of five major attacks and four other cases that occurred from 23rd March to 12th May (including those that killed 8 and injured 5 in Fujian province, killed 2 and injured 5 in Guangxi, injured 19 in Guangdong, injured 32 in Jiangsu, injured 5 in Shandong and killed 9 in Shaanxi), and another attack on 3rd August that killed 4 and injured more than 20 at a kindergarten in Shandong (Yeoh, 2010a: 247), an iconic banner allegedly appeared at the gate of a kindergarten which read: “*Yuan You Tou Zhai You Zhu, Qianmian You Zhuan Shi Zhengfu* 冤有头债有主 前面右转是政府” [there's a real culprit responsible for any wrong or any debt; take a right turn in front you'll find the government (offices)]. While this can be interpreted as a sarcastic advice to re-direct the free-floating aggression towards the real target of social grievances, the alleged State orchestration of the perception of Xintang disturbances as a clash between the migrant workers and local people would be tantamount to an attempt in re-channelling the anti-State sentiments into inter-communal scapegoating.³¹ Stemming from profound distrust of the government, as Tong and Lei (2010) observed above, such social disturbances and riots with no specific economic demands are the most system-threatening as they are challenging rather than endorsing regime legitimacy.

4.3. System-threatening Social Movements

Governments now act as if they were afraid to awaken a single reflection in man. They are softly leading him to the sepulchre of precedents, to deaden his faculties and call his attention from the scene of revolutions. They feel that he is arriving at knowledge faster than they wish, and their policy of precedents is the barometer of their fears [...] Government by precedent, without any regard to the principle of the precedent, is one of the vilest systems that can be set up.

– Thomas Paine (1792), *Rights of Man, Part the Second*, Chapter IV

Such a distinction between system-threatening and non-system-threatening protests as Tong and Lei pointed out has always been important for explaining State response. Referring to Muslim marchers in 1989 protesting the publication of a Chinese book entitled *Xing Fengsu* 性风俗 [sexual customs] that they claimed denigrated Islam, Gladney drew a parallel with the other, more well-known, protest of 1989:

Just prior to the bloody suppression of the 1989 democracy movement in China, in the midst of the flood of protesting students and workers who, for a remarkably lengthy moment in history, marched relatively unimpeded across Tiananmen Square and the screens of the world's television sets, another comparatively unnoticed, but nevertheless significant, procession took place [...] the protest began with mainly Hui Muslim students who were joined by representatives of all 10 Muslim nationalities in China, including some sympathetic members of the Han Chinese majority [...] this procession was on its way to Tiananmen Square, the so-called "Gate of Heavenly Peace", which soon opened on to a hellish nightmare of indiscriminate warfare in the streets of the terrorized city. This procession to the Square also made its way along Changan Jie, "the Avenue of Eternal Peace," that shortly thereafter was to be renamed "Bloody Alley" by Beijing's citizens [...]

(Gladney, 1991: 1-2)

Gladney moved on further to draw an interesting picture of stark contrast in State responses between this case of "protest *to* the government" and the other case of "protest *against* the government" in those same days³² staged by the students and workers and their supporters from all walks of life around Beijing and other Chinese cities who eventually paid dearly by blood:

Remarkably, and in another dramatic contrast to the crackdown on the student Pro-Democracy Movement, the state took the following actions in response to this Muslim protest over an insignificant Chinese book: The government granted full permission for all the Muslim protests, often despatching police to close streets, stop traffic, and direct the marchers [...] By stressing the legality of the Muslim protests, what Barbara Pillsbury noted as their "protest *to* the government," rather than *against* it – the fact

that the Muslims had permission and were often escorted by police – the state-controlled press sought to juxtapose the legal Muslim protest with the *illegality* of the student protests.

(*ibid.*: 3-5, italics in the original)

These “illegal” student protests of 1989 in Tiananmen 天安门 Square, despite State disapproval, soon evolved into the now well-known broad-based pro-democracy movement after being joined in by other demonstrators from all walks of life from Beijing to Hong Kong 香港, from Chengdu 成都 to Shenzhen 深圳, and was sustained against all odds throughout the 100-day Beijing Spring³³ that tragically ended up with, *à la Asiaweek*, the Rape of Beijing³⁴ on that fateful night of 3rd-4th June 1989, when a besieged regime finally responded with a massacre to reclaim the capital from the unarmed peaceful protesters. While the official death toll stood at four hundred and forty-three, 223 of whom were soldiers and police officers, plus 5,000 soldiers and police officers and 2,000 civilians wounded in the crackdown, exiled dissidents estimated the number of civilians, workers and students killed in the crackdown during the night of 3rd-4th June 1989 to be from 2,000 to 3,000 (Yeoh, 2010a: 273). Soviet sources in 1989 put the number massacred in Beijing as 3,000, as cited by Mikhail Gorbachev at a politburo meeting in 1989.³⁵

One of the most prominent student leaders who led the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square was Örkesh Dölet (Wu'erkaixi 吾尔开希) who, together with Chai Ling 柴玲, Wang Dan 王丹, Feng Congde 封从德 and other student leaders, had launched the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989 against official corruption and political repression. It is interesting to note that Örkesh Dölet was then a Beijing Normal University student of the Muslim Uyghur nationality. However, unlike the protesters in the parallel State-permitted demonstration in Beijing at that time against *Xing Fengsu*, Örkesh Dölet's involvement in leading the pro-democracy movement since the Tiananmen days till today transcends ethnicity, and it was notable that his recent condemnation – jointly issued on 7th July 2009 with Taiwan's China Human Rights Association (中國人權協會) – of perceived government repression in the July 2009 Xinjiang disturbance was issued, while not denying his ethnic identity, as a civil rights activist³⁶, in comparison with some pronouncements made by former Nobel Peace Prize nominee Rabiya Qadir (Rebiya Kadeer), chairperson of the World Uyghur Congress³⁷. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the Party-State during those turbulent days of 1989:

The students [demonstrating on Tiananmen Square in 1989 against corruption and for democracy], as an unrecognized voluntary association, were considered unlawful, riotous, and a threat to the state's order. For that they were met by a military crackdown. The actions of the Muslims [marching against the book *Xing Fengsu*], as members of state-assigned minority

nationalities and believing in a world religion approved by the state, were considered permissible. For that they were inundated with state-sponsored media and assisted in their demands. The difference, from the Chinese state's standpoint, was one of order and disorder, rationality and confusion, law and criminality, reward and punishment.

(Gladney, 1991: 5-6)

However, ultimately, as Fang (1991: 254-255) warned, "There is no rational basis for a belief that this kind of dictatorship can overcome the corruption that it itself has bred. Based on this problem alone, we need more effective means of public supervision and a more independent judiciary. This means, in effect, more democracy."³⁸ Nevertheless, the path towards a North Atlantic liberal democracy as envisaged by Fang has seemed increasingly forlorn as the CCP regime has in the post-June Fourth era led the country to economic miracle and hence, in the eyes of many, has successfully reasserted its legitimacy.³⁹ Describing China as "doubtless a post-totalitarian regime ruled by a ruthless Party", Béja (2009: 14-15) ruminated on the 20th anniversary of the Beijing massacre:

Twenty years after the 4 June 1989 massacre, the CCP seems to have reinforced its legitimacy. It has not followed the communist regimes of the Soviet bloc into oblivion. Its policies of elite cooptation, subtle response to social contradictions, and instrumental support for the "rule of law" have become major complements to its continued control over the press and the political system. It has made concessions to prevent discontent from crystallizing into social movements that might challenge its rule, and it has sent in the police to silence dissidents. Over the course of the same two decades, the opposition has had to wrestle with the trauma of the June 4 Massacre and the huge difficulties that it has raised for anyone who would challenge the CCP's primacy.

4.4. State Response to Social Movements and the Shopworn Conspiracy Theories

Successful it might seem to be, the CCP regime's reassertion of its legitimacy and unassailability has in reality not been immune to a series of challenges, some rather severe and unexpected, since June Fourth, exemplified by the horrific events of March 2008 in Tibet and July 2009 in Xinjiang. Regrettably, in facing such challenges, the regime has never been able to grow out of the tendency to recycle the "black hand" (*heishou* 黑手) theory – the "shopworn conspiracy theories that blame mass protests primarily on the CCP's foreign and domestic enemies, reflecting the classic Leninist insistence that social protest in a Communist country cannot just happen, it must be instigated" (Tanner, 2004: 143) – which is unfortunately so apparent in the ruling regime's

response to the Xinjiang crisis or the Tibet riots. For this “black hand” theory, Tanner gave an example from the 1989 Beijing massacre:

In the days after the Tiananmen demonstrations, this Leninist conspiratorial worldview was typified in a report on the protests issued by Gu Linfang, the Chinese vice minister of public security who was in charge of “political security.” To document a conspiracy in 1989, Gu painstakingly listed dozens of allegedly nefarious contacts among protest leaders; reformist Communist officials; foreign academics; and, of course, Western and Taiwanese intelligence agencies. The vice minister railed against party reformers for coddling schemers who fomented rebellion. A Leninist to his marrow, Gu refused to concede any acceptance of what social scientists have known for decades, that whenever a society grows and changes as rapidly as China has, an increase in political protests is a normal development.

(*ibid.*)

Similar State response can be observed following the 5th July 2009 Xinjiang riots when Nur Bekri, chairman of the Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu, declared on 18th July 2009 the source of the riots being “the triumvirate of terrorist, secessionist and extremist forces”⁴⁰ and Wu Shimin 吴仕民, vice-chairman of China’s State Ethnic Affairs Commission, stated on 21st July 2009 that the July Fifth riots had absolutely nothing to do with China’s nationality (ethnic minority) policies. Without the courage to face up to domestic realities, any solution to the root problems leading to either June Fourth or July Fifth would remain illusive. The ruling regime’s inability to face domestic realities is further manifested in the continued repression including the arrest of ethnic Uyghur economics professor Ilham Tohti of China’s Central Nationalities University and founder of the “Uighur Online” on 7th July 2009⁴¹ and the revocation of licenses of civil rights lawyers who took up cases related to the Xinjiang riots.⁴² In the case of the Tibetans, over 300 Tibetan monks were reportedly arrested during the night of 21st-22nd April 2011 in Sichuan Province’s Ngawa 阿坝 *Zizhizhou* 自治州 (“autonomous prefecture”) of the Tibetan/Zang 藏 and Qiang 羌 nationalities, the site of that devastating earthquake on 12th May 2008 which killed at least 68,000 people. Among the civilians holding a vigil outside the temple concerned, two elderly Tibetans were reportedly killed and various others injured during the police attack which was believed to be linked to the earlier demonstrations after a young Tibetan burned himself to death in self-immolation on 16th March 2011 at the 3rd anniversary of the 14th March 2008 Tibetan riots.⁴³

4.5. Federalization and the Fear of Disintegration

Coupled with the shopworn conspiracy theories is the federal taboo, in which federalization is inevitably seen as a prelude to disintegration – prominent

Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波 was arrested for organizing the signing of Charter 08 that included an Item 18 “A Federated Republic”⁴⁴ for which he was ostensibly charged – though how far that threat is genuinely believed remains dubious as liberal democracy could be the ultimate fear since democratization tends to go hand-in-hand with federalization. However, the danger of fragmentation coming from democratization and federalization is real but not inevitable.

One of the basic features of a federal system, according to Bakvis and Chandler (1987: 4), is that it provides “incentives for structuring group/class conflicts along territorial lines”. When the territories concerned represent the centres of concentration of distinctive socioracial communities, ethnic conflicts are translated into territorial rivalries and the process of fiscal federalization becomes an arena of ethnic resource competition. Nevertheless, Dorff (1994) warned that federal *structures*, when not accompanied by federal *process*, could have contributed to the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, and these one-party states’ federalist structures, without federalist processes, initially used to suppress, not accommodate, ethnic differences, had actually helped to create a political environment ripe for disintegration via ethnic mobilization once decentralization began, as regional leaderships bent on protecting the interests of their territorial constituencies at the expense of other regions and the federation.

It could hence be highly equivocal to keep seeing the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union as a sword of Democles warning against federal structures. On the contrary, the fate of these disintegrated nations could be a lesson to take heed of at this juncture just past the 22nd anniversary of June Fourth, in particular after the foreboding event of 5th July 2009, to begin early the federal process, before it becomes too late when eventually the moment of truth arrives for a China ripe for democratization⁴⁵ it turns out also to be the moment for a China ripe for disintegration. Definitely, a federal process is always full of pitfalls⁴⁶, especially for a country still facing the problems of high incidence of poverty, ethnoterritoriality, sectionalism and ethnoregional socioeconomic disparities. Inevitably, it is also a process abounding with right and wrong options and choices.

The Chinese regional structure bears substantial similarity to the Spanish – for instance, only 3 out of Spain’s 17 *Comunidades Autónomas*, comprising less than 30 per cent of the country’s population, are non-Castilian ethnic regions, in contrast to countries like Belgium or the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia where the state is composed of constituent regions each of which populated predominantly with a differentiated ethnic community. As Spain is pondering her options whether to move on from the State of the Autonomies to a full-fledged federation – through a whole

spectrum of scenarios as summarized by Brassloff (1989: 41-45) into the evolutionist minimalist regional autonomist, radically revisionist neo-centralist, radically European regionalist, nationalist particularist, mixed federo-regional and, lastly, the federalist maximalist in which the presently evolving State of the Autonomies may develop all its potential and end up operating as a federal state – it could also be timely for a China in astounding transformation to ponder new options other than a *dictablanda* or even a *democradura*⁴⁷ with the perpetually uneasy coexistence of economic decentralization with political centralism or, as a former vice-premier pointed out, being constantly trapped in the perennial “cycles of decentralization and recentralization”⁴⁸ that breed unending chaos and instability.

4.6. Ethnicity, Political Mobilization and Social Unrest

Among the types of large-scale mass incidents listed in Figure 6 earlier, Tong and Lei (2010: 495) observed that ethnic differences “are the most difficult to reconcile and are therefore the most persistent cause of social frictions and the most effective means in political mobilization” and ethnic conflicts “are usually not caused by economic grievances, as economic cleavages cross-cut ethnic lines”. As seen earlier, more recent cases of such public order disturbance were alarmingly on the rise in a series of serious incidents including, for example, year 2008’s high-profile conflicts of 28th June (in Guizhou), 5th July (Shaanxi), 10th July (Zhejiang), 17th July (Guangdong) and 19th July (Yunnan). Yet these constitute but just a small sample of the overall rise in social unrest across China in recent years, some of which involved ethnic conflicts⁴⁹. Adding to these are the long-running Tibet conflicts including the March 2008 Lhasa riots and the March 2009 conflict in Qinghai Province’s Guoluo 果洛 Tibetan *Zizhizhou*⁵⁰, as well as the July 2009 Ürümqi riots.

With the memory of the 1989 tragedy constantly hanging like the sword of Damocles, the ruling regime is again facing a dire dilemma, as described by Tanner (2004):

[...] the struggle to control unrest will force Beijing’s leaders to face riskier dilemmas than at any time since the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations. Experiments with less violent police tactics, economic concessions to demonstrators, and more fundamental institutional reforms all risk further encouraging protest in an increasingly restive society. Nevertheless, these challenges must be navigated if the party wants to avoid the ultimate dilemma of once again resorting to 1989-style violence or reluctantly engaging in a more fundamental renegotiation of power relations between the state and society.

(Tanner, 2004: 138)

5. Dilemma of Political Reform and State Response to Dissent

You will do me the justice to remember, that I have always strenuously supported the right of every man to his own opinion, however different that opinion might be to mine. He who denies to another this right, makes a slave of himself to his present opinion, because he precludes himself the right of changing it.

– Thomas Paine (1794), *The Age of Reason*, Part First⁵¹

Such renegotiation of power relations between the State and the civil society, however, inevitably faces critical restriction given that the CCP regime is in no way prepared to take the risk of having to relinquish its monopoly of power in the process of free multi-party elections. Indeed, while promoting the rural elections in 1987, Peng Zhen 彭真 had already argued that such elections were to be used to help the Chinese Communist Party govern the country's rural areas and perpetuate the Party's rule (Zheng and Lye, 2004).

5.1. "Rights-defending" Activism and the State

Hence, any perception that such electoral initiatives are implying that the Party is loosening its stranglehold over China's politics could be illusory as the signals conveyed by the ruling regime regarding the tolerance threshold for dissent remain unmistakable, not least highlighted in recent years by the relentless arrest and jailing of dissidents, including civil rights lawyers Gao Zhisheng 高智晟, Zheng Enchong 郑恩宠 and Chen Guangcheng 陈光诚, researcher Zhao Yan 赵岩 and *Straits Times* (Singapore) journalist Ching Cheong 程翔. Other cases included the arrest of Hu Jia 胡佳, an AIDS and environmental activist, in December 2007, on subversion charges, and Wang Dejia 王德佳, a cyber dissident, in the same month, also on subversion charges for criticizing the government over human rights abuses ahead of the Beijing Olympics (Lye, 2009: 239), and many other civil rights activists including the latest case of well-known rights defender Wang Lihong 王荔蕪 who was arrested on 21st March 2011 in Beijing for her protesting the government's charge against three bloggers in April 2010 outside the court of Fuzhou 福州 City, though the authorities had still seemed to be unable to settle down to a convincing charge against her by the second half of the year⁵². Wang's arrest and the State's struggle to convict her show the increasing uneasiness of the State over the rising use of the Internet for *weiquan*-related social movements. The 56-year-old Wang has been a long-term activist involved in fighting for the rights of the disadvantaged, including the case of Deng Yujiao 邓玉娇, the Hubei girl who killed an official who was trying to rape her, and the murder of the girl Yan Xiaoling 严晓玲. Wang was finally sentenced on 9th September 2011 to 9 months in prison

on the charge of provocation and disturbance.⁵³ In another case of 2011, a Sichuan dissident writer, Ran Yunfei 冉云飞, was arrested in mid-February on accusation of “jasmine revolution” sedition, later released in August but still under virtual house arrest.⁵⁴ He was charged on 17th August with sedition to subvert State power, placed under house arrest pending court hearing, at the time when two other Sichuan dissident intellectuals, Ding Mao 丁矛 in Chengdu 成都 and Chen Weiyin 陈卫因 in Suining 遂宁, were also arrested pending similar indictments.⁵⁵

In the case of Hu Jia, he was charged with “inciting subversion of State power” and sentenced on 3rd April 2008 to three and a half years in prison for his voicing out on social problems and human rights and on the case of Gao Zhisheng. Hu was released on 26th June 2011 but continued to be under tight surveillance. To avoid possible house arrest, his wife and daughter moved to Shenzhen just before his release but were evicted by the houseowner citing heavy pressure from the top.⁵⁶ During Hu Jia’s imprisonment, his 3-year-old daughter Hu Qianci 胡谦慈 became probably China’s youngest political prisoner when she was put under house arrest together with her mother Zeng Jinyan 曾金燕. With Hu Jia ending his jail term, according to Amnesty International, there are still at least 130 rights-defending activists in China who continue to be incarcerated, forced “disappeared”, harassed or held under house arrest.⁵⁷ For instance, civil rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng who first disappeared in August 2006 was later charged with subversion of State power and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment with a five-year probation. He disappeared again in February 2009 after being taken away by the government from his Shaanxi home but reemerged briefly in March/April 2010. In a press interview at that time he revealed that he had been tortured. He disappeared again a month later after he returned home, escorted by government security agents, to pray to his late mother during the *Qingming* 清明 (traditional day of remembrance for ancestors) of April 2010.⁵⁸

The most high-profile case in recent years is, however, that of the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波, who played a prominent role in the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations and hunger strikes, who was remanded in police custody on 8th December 2008 for organizing the signing of Charter 08 (*Ling-ba Xianzhang* 零八宪章) that managed to gather over 300 signatures of prominent Chinese citizens on the eve of the International Human Rights Day. Charter 08 was conceived and written in emulation of the founding of Charter 77 in former Czechoslovakia in January 1977 by over two hundred Czech and Slovak intellectuals, including the dissident playwright and future Czech president Václav Havel. The number of signatories to Charter 08, local and overseas, later increased to about 7,000 by March 2009⁵⁹ and continued to rise. After being taken away for half a year,

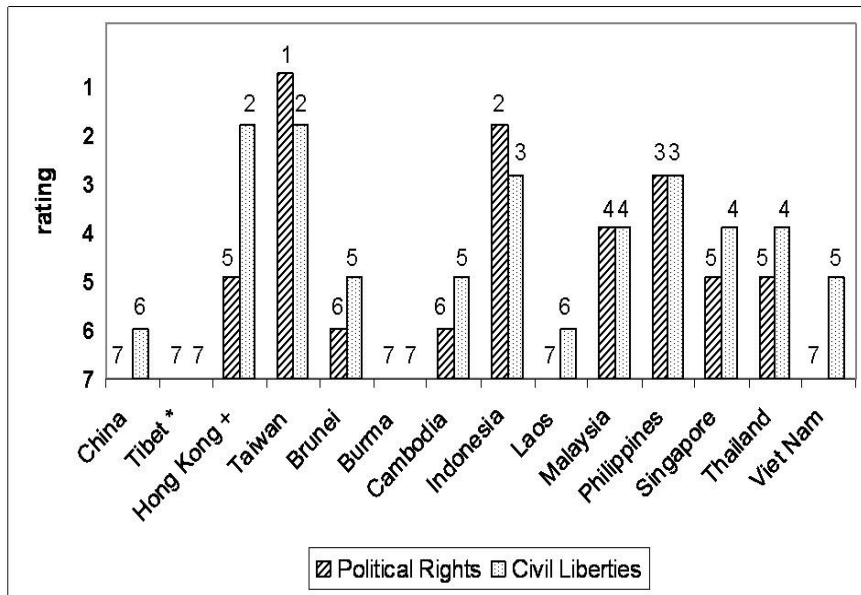
Liu was “formally” arrested on sedition charges on 23rd June 2009 and later sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment.⁶⁰ Liu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 8th October 2010.

About the time Liu was handed the harsh sentence, China’s civil rights issues were also thrust into the limelight with the release of dissident Yang Zili 杨子立 after eight years of imprisonment for advocating political reform on the Internet, while his fellow dissidents Jin Haike 靳海科 and Xu Wei 徐伟 were still languishing in prison.⁶¹ Yang, Jin and Xu, together with Zhang Yanhua 张彦华 and Zhang Honghai 张宏海, were members of the Xin Qingnian Xuehui 新青年学会 (New Youth Study Group) they set up in 2000 for the exploration of China’s political and social reforms. The case of a former People’s Liberation Army (PLA)⁶² soldier Zhang Shijun 张世军 who was taken away by the authorities in 2009, as the year’s 20th anniversary of the 1989 Beijing massacre was approaching, after writing an open letter to President Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 through the Internet citing the “unspeakable atrocities” he witnessed committed against civilians and students twenty years earlier on that fateful night of 3rd-4th June 1989 while serving in a unit that was involved in the bloody crackdown – a rare eyewitness account from inside the PLA – is another reference point for reading civil rights development in China.⁶³ Besides these high-profile cases, there are also many other little observed arrests and imprisonments that rarely raise an eyebrow beyond the border.

Further developments saw the government closing down the Open Constitution Initiative (OCI) (*Gongmeng* 公盟) on 17th July 2009 ostensibly for tax offenses, subsequent to the 5th July 2009 Xinjiang riots and with the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic approaching. OCI is a legal research centre set up in 2003 which has been involved in various sensitive cases in recent years – including the case of the blind civil rights lawyer Chen Guangcheng, the melamine-contaminated baby milk scandal, and various other civil rights and press freedom cases – and published critical reports on China’s human rights and minority policies. The suppression of OCI came after the revoking of the licenses of 53 Beijing lawyers, many of whom being well-known personalities active in civil rights cases.⁶⁴

In the 2011 Freedom House’s Annual Global Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties (ratings reflect events from 1st January 2010, through 31st December 2010), China was rated 7 (i.e. the worst rating) on political rights and 6 (next to worst) on civil liberties (see Figure 7), making her one of the 19 “worst of the worst” countries in terms of political rights and civil liberties (Puddington, 2011: 4), just marginally better than North Korea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Libya, Sudan, Burma⁶⁵, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea and Somalia that were all rated 7 on both political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2011).

Figure 7 China, Taiwan and ASEAN: Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 2010



Notes: 1 is the best rating, 7 the worst. Ratings reflect events from 1st January 2010, through 31st December 2010.

* Xizang (Tibet) Zizhiqu (“autonomous region”), China

+ Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), China

Source: Data from Freedom House (2011).

5.2. Predators of the Press

According to the advocacy group Reporters Sans Frontiers (Reporters without Borders), there are more journalists in prison in China than anywhere else in the world.⁶⁶ A report of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) at the end of January 2009 accused China of renegeing on her promise of press freedom during her bid for hosting the Olympics and called for the country to immediately release imprisoned journalists and halt the repression of journalists with the current national security and other laws – and this came amidst reports that a new series of rules and regulations would be launched in 2009 to strengthen the control on journalists and news reporting ostensibly for maintaining quality and authenticity in news reporting.⁶⁷

Freedom House in its *Freedom of the Press 2010* issued on the World Press Freedom Day of 3rd May 2011 covering 196 countries and regions recognized 68 as having press freedom, 65 partially free and 63 unfree. Among them, China is without press freedom, being ranked 184th, while Hong Kong is partially free, ranked 70th, and Taiwan is free, ranked 47th.⁶⁸

In her comments to the Voice of America, the 1997 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize laureate, Chinese reporter Gao Yu 高瑜 accused that other than being without press freedom, today's media milieu in China could not even be compared to the 1980s, with the current atmosphere of severe self-censorship and constant fear of being persecuted.⁶⁹ Press freedom has apparently also been further curtailed after the recent spate of jasmine revolutions-inspired incidents which were swiftly nipped in the bud, with officials going all out to enforce self-censorship to protect their own careers. Earlier, Lye (2009: 215, 237) also cited Reporters Sans Frontiers ranking China number 167 out of a total of 173 countries in its 2008 Worldwide Press Freedom Index and considering the number of arrests and cases of news surveillance and control by China's political police and Department of Propaganda to be very high, and Human Rights Watch asserting that China's extensive police and State security apparatus continued to impose upon civil society activists, critics and protestors multiple layers of controls that included "professional and administrative measures, limitations on foreign travel and domestic movement, monitoring (covert and overt) of the Internet and phone communications, abduction and confinement incommunicado, and unofficial house arrests [and] a variety of vaguely defined crimes including 'inciting subversion', 'leaking state secrets' and 'disrupting social order' [which] provide the government with wide legal remit to stifle critics". Another development saw the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China – an organization with more than 260 members from 33 countries – issuing a statement in August 2009 accusing China of renegeing on her 2008 Olympics promise of freer foreign press reporting, based on a member survey in the previous month that reported 100 cases of driving away reporters at public places, 75 cases of tailing reporters, 16 cases of physical violence against reporters, 45 cases of threatening interviewees and 23 cases of calling in reporters for questioning.⁷⁰

The persecution of conscientious reporters also includes the threat of dismissal, e.g. the recent dissolution of *Zhongguo Jingji Shibao* 中国经济时报 [China Economic Times]'s special reports department and the sacking of its head Wang Keqin 王克勤 who has been dubbed "China's number one dark-side exposing (*jiehei* 揭黑) reporter" with his track record of being the journalist who brought to the public's attention the notorious cases of the Lanzhou 兰州 securities black market, Beijing taxi monopoly scandal, Dingzhou 定州's horrific homicide, Shanxi's vaccine scandal, the Li Gang 李刚 case, etc.⁷¹ Another reporter, Qi Chonghuai 齐崇淮, who revealed official corruption in the case of the ultra-luxurious government complex in Shandong Province's Tengzhou 滕州 City, was thrown into jail in 2007. Upon his release in September 2011, the court sentenced him to another 9 years based on "missing charges" (*louzui* 漏罪).⁷²

On the other hand, in its annual global list of government leaders accused of suppressing press freedom issued on 3rd May 2011, Reporters Sans Frontiers included Chinese president Hu Jintao as one of these “Predators of Press” (“politicians, government officials, religious leaders, militias and criminal organisations that cannot stand the press, treat it as an enemy and directly attack journalists”), citing the secret arrest and disappearance of over 30 dissidents, lawyers and rights-defending (*weiquan* 维权) activists this year so far by April/May 2011.⁷³ In fact, in trying to control the power of the pen by drawing blood with their swords, these predators’ official policy towards dissent could be chillingly Orwellian, as related in Poole (2006: 203): “In June 2005, users of Microsoft’s newly launched Chinese weblog service were banned from using words and phrases such as ‘democracy’ or ‘democratic movement’: attempts to type these terms invoked an error message that read: ‘This item contains forbidden speech.’” The attempt by the Chinese government in 2009 to enforce the compulsory installation of a “*lǜbā* 绿坝” (Green Dam)⁷⁴ Internet filtering software was widely interpreted to be yet another similar assault on dissent in cyberspace.⁷⁵ The list of forbidden words on the Internet has been growing lately, covering terms that could be even merely remotely related to dissent, including ludicrously *moli* 茉莉 [jasmine], *pangzi* 胖子 [fatty – nickname of the persecuted artist Ai Weiwei 艾未未], etc.⁷⁶

6. Structure and Agency

There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; / Omitted, all the voyage of their life / Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

– William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act IV, Scene III

Causes of social changes can usually be categorized into three groups, viz. the economic, the political and the cultural factors. Economic factors, especially the impacts of industrial capitalism, form the core of the Marxist approach to social changes. Such Marxist emphasis on economic factors, whether for ideological reasons or for the convenience of power maintenance, still forms the basis of the Chinese Communist Party’s fundamental definition of human rights as the people’s rights to be fed, to be sheltered, to be educated and to be employed. Nevertheless, straying from this orthodox Marxist tenet is the neo-Marxist expansion of sources of social contradictions, which are inherent in social structures, to the political, religious, ethnic and ideological factors of conflicts and also the importance of culture not least as a marker for political mobilization. Adapting Buckley (1967: 58–59)’s concepts of morphostasis referring to “those processes in complex system-environment exchanges that

tend to preserve or maintain a system's given form, organization or state" and morphogenesis referring to "those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure or state", Archer (1995), on the other hand, posited that humanity had entered the stage of the morphogenetic society and spoke of the central importance of the role of the human agency that generates both the social segments' morphostatic and morphogenetic relationships which, in turn, are not able to exert causal powers without working through human agents.

Nevertheless, the cautious but pragmatic approach to reform, whether economic or political, of post-Mao Zedong 毛泽东 and post-Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 China seems to reflect the neo-Marxist view that total system or revolutionary change is not inevitable and a stalemate or Reeler (2007)'s cold stuckness could be the preferred outcome of social conflicts – the stance of "stability above all else" (*wending yadao yiqie* 稳定压倒一切) which reaffirms dominance maintained by gradualism in reform and piecemeal changes. Pluralized conflicts, one of the possible major patterns of conflicts from the point of view of neo-Marxists, help in such maintenance of dominance, characterized by the distinctive feature of "fragmentation and absence of a feeling of commonality" of current Chinese extra-Party politics (Benton, 2010: 322), partly as a result of the relentless crackdown on generalist dissent that the CCP regime perceived as most threatening, which has recently intriguingly escalated into a wider crackdown on civil right defenders and whistle blowers.

In addition to those mentioned in the previous section, also noteworthy is the sentencing of dissident Xie Changfa 谢长发 to 13-year imprisonment for his involvement in organizing the China Democracy Party since 1998, which came after the conviction of the civil rights activists Huang Qi 黄琦, Tan Zuoren 谭作人 and Guo Quan 郭泉, who voiced out on the alleged school building construction scandal exposed by the 2008 Sichuan earthquake that resulted in a huge number of student casualties due to the collapse of school buildings.⁷⁷ The epitome of the prisoners of conscience at the moment, as mentioned earlier, is of course Liu Xiaobo, the key founder of Charter 08, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 8th October 2010, in a year with a large number of the nominees for the prize being persecuted Chinese dissidents and civil rights activists including prominent figures like Wei Jingsheng 魏京生, Gao Zhisheng, Chen Guangcheng and Hu Jia.

The widening of persecution of civil rights lawyers and activists has seen the arrest or "disappearance" of 30 to 50 people in the first five months of 2011, including the arrest of civil rights activist and artist Ai Weiwei, and the continued persecution of the "melamine-contaminated baby milk scandal" activist Zhao Lianhai 赵连海 whose son was among the hundreds

of thousands of infant victims of the 2008 scandal.⁷⁸ After being put under house arrest in 2005 following his involvement in the legal cases of women's forced abortion and sterilization in the prefecture-level city of Linyi 临沂 in Shandong Province, the blind rights-defending lawyer and activist Chen Guangcheng was formally charged in 2006 with the destruction of public property and traffic disruption and sentenced to four years and three months in prison. Though he was released on 9th September 2010, he and his family have since been under tight house arrest and complete seclusion. After the publicizing of an image recording he secretly made of his house arrest ordeal, Chen and his wife Yuan Weijing 袁伟静 were cruelly beaten up by seventy-odd people who broke into their house on 18th February 2011, according to a letter sent out by Yuan. The terrorizing and intimidation continued, she said, with their windows being sealed up with iron sheets on 3rd March, television antenna broken on 7th, and the intrusion of forty-odd people who took away their computer and certain handwritten materials.⁷⁹ According to another *weiquan* activist Liu Shasha 刘沙沙, Cheng Guangcheng's 6-year-old daughter Chen Kesi 陈克斯 was denied her right to schooling because of her parents' house arrest although she had reached the school age.⁸⁰

In the case of Ai Weiwei, he was arrested on 3rd April 2011 and accused by the official media of having committed economic crime and tax evasion. Li Fangping 李方平, the civil rights lawyer who had defended Ai Weiwei and Zhao Lianhai, was taken away on 29 April. He was released on 4th May, the day another civil rights lawyer Li Xiongbing 黎雄兵 disappeared.⁸¹ Four staff members of Ai's studio also disappeared on 11th April. Ai was released on bail on 22nd June with the condition that he must not talk to the media or through twitter or other Internet social group for at least one year. The apparently less brutal treatment towards Ai compared to those meted out to other dissidents could probably be attributed to his "red family" background. His arrest represented a State warning that he had overstepped the line in his investigation into many incidents involving government corruption, such as the melamine-contaminated baby milk scandal, the "tofu dregs" schoolhouse scandal that causes a huge number of schoolchildren casualties during Sichuan's Wenchuan 汶川 earthquake⁸² and his vocal support for the persecuted rights-defending dissidents. During his incarceration, Ai was allegedly placed in a windowless room of less than four square metres, and police interrogation had never touched upon the tax evasion issue but on subversion and "jasmine revolution" instead. The police allegedly told him that "you embarrassed the country, the country will embarrass you; this is what you deserve."⁸³

However, in comparison with the different waves of almost a century of Chinese dissent, as pointed out by both Benton and Wasserstrom,

today's dissent in China lacks a unifying thread that connects the actions of different disgruntled groups (Wasserstrom, 2009), partly due to the actions of the regime, partly also being “a result of the increasing complexity, differentiation, and individualization of Chinese society, which is no longer monochrome and predictable but as diverse as other contemporary societies, and geographically even more diverse” (Benton, 2010: 322). This increased diversity has inevitably impacted on the increasingly complex structure of the agent-institution interface (see Green's model of social change as applied to the Chinese case – Green, 2008; Yeoh, 2010a: 271, Figure 19) at the core of the circles of social transformation.

Archer's double morphogenesis sees both structure and agency as conjoint products of interaction in which agency is both shaped by and reshapes structure (Archer, 1995; 1996; 2000; 2003). Operating structures and purposely acting human agencies (combinations of acting individuals) in combination forms the praxis and interface of social interaction that effects social change, wherein agencies are both creating and being limited by the structures, exemplified no doubt by the voicing of dissent and the corresponding crackdowns justified by the notion of “stability above all else”. However, social control, as ironically seen by Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), could be the broadest basis of social conflicts. In a sense, such coercion to extract conformity is normal, as all social systems exhibit association of roles and statuses that embody power relationships which tend to be institutionalized as authority, sometimes self-perpetuated, with normative rights to dominate.

On the macrosociological level, while conflict is an inevitable part of social life and not necessarily negative as it is the engine for social change from both Marxian and Weberian perspectives, the key question is ultimately who gains at whose expense – the question of equity – and this leads to the actions of the rights-defending activists. Indeed, from the interpretive perspective, social reality is ultimately a construction by people – interactions among people so that patterns and standards of behaviour emerge, how these people – be they the ruling political élite or the increasingly persecuted civil rights lawyers and activists, many of whom being the survivors of the 1989 Beijing massacre, who unlike the also persecuted democracy movement organizers like Liu Xiaobo and Xie Changfa, seek instead “to protect and improve the rights of citizens within China's constitutional constraints and legal framework with minimal political requests” yet not totally apolitical (Hung, 2010: 333-334).

From the perspective of interpretivism, change in the forms of interaction, process and negotiation is primal, while structure a by-product and temporary. In this context, both the pro-democracy and civil rights activists and members of the ruling political élite are human agencies engaged in

the constant creation, negotiation and re-creation of the social order. Within this process of social change there exists a negotiated consensus about what constitutes objective social reality – an outcome of the historical process of symbolic interaction and negotiation that is society as social construction because human agencies, be they State agencies, civil societal groups or organizations, become real only if the human agents believe that they are to be real, and in huge and complex societies with a multitude of contending realities whatever consensus on what constitutes objective social reality is at best partial. This can be seen in the context of interpretive understanding of social action (*verstehen*) – the Weberian focus on human agents' interpretation, definition and shaping by cultural meanings well beyond overt behaviour and events wherein human agents define their social situations, while these definitions influence ensuing actions and interactions and such human interactions entail the negotiation of order, structure and cultural meanings. At the level of the individual human agent, Archer (2003) described the integration of subjective projects and objective circumstances in a viable *modus vivendi* linking structure with agency, through constantly examining one's social contexts, asking and answering oneself in a trial-and-error manner about how one can best realize the concerns that oneself determine, in circumstances that were not one's own choosing (Archer, 2003: 133).

While Archer's theorizing has sometimes been criticized as focusing too much on internal conversation, conceptualized as a causal power that transforms both human agents and society, at the expense of intersubjective communication which is crucial for understanding the morphogenesis of structure through collective action and social movements – her emphasis that “[w]ere we humans not reflexive beings there could be no such thing as society” (Archer, 2003: 19) – it could be unfair not to take into consideration the relevance of her theorizing to the latter and the great potential of extracting a theory of collective action from her work. Her “metareflexives” for instance, while – true to her assertion that private life is an essential prerequisite for social life – being idealists seeking self-knowledge and practicing self-critique for self-realization, are also driven by their personal missions to criticize their environment – Habermasian Meadian *wertrationale* social utopians constantly judging themselves and their societies in a critical manner from the point of view of the “generalized other” and the alternate “rational society” (Habermas, 1987, 1992; Mead, 1934), showing concern for social injustice and refusing morphostasis or “cold stuckness” (Reeler, 2007) in the name of some cultural or political ideal or the preference for stability. Mead's “generalized other”, after all, is the “organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self” (Mead, 1934: 154), enabling the human agent to raise questions of justice and rights.

7. State as Racketeer

Every Communist must grasp the truth, “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”

Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, “Problems of War and Strategy”,
6th November 1938

I told myself that no matter what, I refused to become the General Secretary who mobilized the military to crack down on students.

– Zhao Ziyang (2009a: 29; 2009b: 48; 2009c: 62)

Just a year prior to Mao’s passing, on the other side of the globe in 1975, in Spain which constitutes 85 per cent of the Iberian Peninsula, Generalísimo Francisco Franco y Bahamonde⁸⁴ (the *Caudillo*) died. While repeatedly expressing confidence that he would leave Spain *atado, y bien atado* (“tied-up, well tied-up”)⁸⁵, Franco’s death in 1975 was followed within two years by the dismantling of the structure of the whole Franquist regime, and the first free parliamentary elections in over 40 years were held on 15th June 1977. One of the most remarkable developments under the democratic transition had been the political decentralization of the State. Nevertheless, the controversy and confusion over the regional picture and the fear for the loss of Spain’s national identity, as well as the continued attacks by ETA, the Basque separatist group, continued to fuel right-wing discontent, led to a series of conspiracies against the democratic government and culminated in the almost successful military coup of 23rd February 1981. However, the result has not been to roll back reforms but to push the ethnoregional question even more firmly to the top of the political agenda.

Hence, going back to the 1970s, what we are seeing here is that at their respective critical structural junctures three decades ago, in 1975 and 1976, fascist Spain and Marxist-Leninist China embraced different paths of reforms, with post-Franco Spain spurning overnight her fascist-corporatist past and embracing multi-party democracy and federalism, taking the risk of the disappearance of the central State, to hold the country together against potentially separatist ethnoregional conflicts, while post-Mao China has since followed a more cautious path that was to evolve later into an institutionalized relationship between the central State and the localities some would call “selective centralization” (Zheng, 1999).

7.1. *From May Fourth to June Fourth to July Fifth*

O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth!

– Thomas Paine (1776), *Common Sense*

Across the globe in China, since the demise of Mao, another critical juncture arrived in 1989, with the 100-day peaceful Tiananmen demonstrations and

hunger strikes that received global sympathy probably other than those behind the high walls of Zhongnanhai 中南海 whose only known feedback mechanism for dealing with such “deviation-amplification”⁸⁶ that could trigger systemic change was armed repression. These poignant lines from Howard Chapnick’s foreword to *Beijing Spring* (Turnley *et al.*, 1989: 15) speak of June Fourth as a historical milestone:

[...] The martyrs of Tiananmen Square lie silent and still. They spoke for themselves throughout the tumultuous and chaotic weeks of the Beijing Spring of 1989. But now, in the aftermath of repression and intimidation, their symbolic Goddess of Democracy has been shattered, their banners have been removed, and their voices have been silenced [...] We were incredulous spectators as the Chinese students dared to dream what became an impossible dream [...] But certain events are so monumental, so symbolic, so glorious, and speak so eloquently to our highest ideals that they transcend the immediacy of the news. History demands that they be preserved.

Such poignancy results, in Archer (1988)’s explanation, from the disjunction between the system segments’ relations of contradictions and complementarity and those between human agents in terms of conflict and cooperation. Shocking it might have been, it was not surprising that the 1989 Beijing Spring had ended in the tragic Rape of Beijing⁸⁷ when the system segments’ relations did not mesh with those of the human agents – the same mismatch that is still manifesting itself today where the political élite in the life-world is adamant in holding ground against the masses’ demand for transformative political change amidst lively debate and consensus on universal values at the general level of the cultural system – thus nipping morphogenesis in the bud, leading to the subsequent protracted morphostasis.

While Spain’s 1981 failed coup had put the decentralization plan into more urgency by highlighting the peril in the management of decentralization, the threat from conservative forces, and the threat from regional reformers and secessionists, the Tiananmen demonstrations had instead ended in the spill of innocent blood and arrested the maturing of the political system with the purge of Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳, the arrest of Bao Tong 鲍彤 and the exile of other chief reformists and intellectuals who advocated democratization such as Yan Jiaqi 严家其 and Fang Lizhi 方励之 and the student leaders in the forefront of the mass protest.

Aspects of political reform have since been either rolled back or stalled. In view of the close link between political decentralization and democratization,⁸⁸ the tragic end of the Tiananmen protests and democracy movement of June 1989 was a disaster for democratic pluralist development and ethnoregional accommodation. The post-June Fourth robust, even miraculous, economic growth has been used time and again rather successfully by the CCP for the *ex post* justification of the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989,

that the brutal crackdown had been necessary to preserve China's stability and economic progress, but if the blood-chilling words attributed to Deng Xiaoping⁸⁹ – that it was worth killing 20 *wan* 万 (i.e. 200 thousand) people to ensure 20 years of stability for China – in ordering the brutal crackdown of June 1989 were truly his, then the continuing, even recently escalating, social unrest – including those more alarming incidents with ethnic or ethnoregional flavour – that culminated in Xinjiang's July Fifth deadly riots of 2009, just a month past that year's 20th anniversary of the Beijing⁹⁰ massacre, look somehow like an omen that time might be running out. The student movement which snowballed into social protests of unprecedented scale is in many ways a return of May Fourth. While May Fourth of 1919 had eventually led to the triumph of Maoism-Leninism which in a way hijacked the early socialism of Chen Tu-hsiu (Chen Duxiu) 陳獨秀⁹¹, the violent suppression of the 1989 mass protests represented a prelude to the subsequent hijacking of the Hu Yaobang-Zhao Ziyang administration's initiative for politico-economic liberalization⁹² by the strengthening one-party authoritarian State corporatism preferred by Deng Xiaoping who once and again felt wary of and threatened by his protégés' "bourgeois liberalism". The conservative backlash had since worsened the uneasy coexistence of a highly decentralized economic structure with a highly centralized intolerant political regime which has, among other ramifications, stalled the more rational accommodation of ethnic and ethnoregional aspirations and precipitated the horrific events of 14th March 2008 and 5th July 2009.

Yet, the 1989 Beijing massacre could be seen as a wake-up call for the CCP to embark rigorously on a path of continuing economic reform while rolling back the Hu Yaobang-Zhao Ziyang era of limited politico-cultural liberalization (a prominent symbol being the *He Shang* 河殤 [river elegy] documentary⁹³) and the subsequent collapse of Communist Party rule in USSR and Eastern Europe from the end of 1989 to early 1990⁹⁴ had seemed to reaffirm the correctness of such a decision to crack down on the part of the CCP to ensure the survival of its one-party rule. June Fourth could also be seen as a catalyst for the single-minded determination to deliver on the economic front after Deng Xiaoping's "southern tour" (*nanxun* 南巡) later in 1992 to reaffirm the Party's policy of moving forward with economic reform and liberalization, coupled with more determined repression of political dissent. Nevertheless, as Bao (2009) noted:

There are people who said that the crackdown has led to prosperity. What I know is: economic reform created prosperity. It is the people who have, with market economy, crushed the yoke of Mao Zedong to create prosperity. Now there are people who concluded that prosperity is the output of crackdown. Facing the global economic crisis, I do not know whether they are preparing to introduce the experience of crackdown to save the world economy. There

are people who applaud that a muzzled China – a China in Total Silence – has leapt forward to become the world's second largest economic entity – just after the United States; I believe this is true. Under the brutal rule of Kublai Khan, China has so early already been the prosperous paradise witnessed by Marco Polo [...] June Fourth opened up a new phase of Total Silence. After Deng Xiaoping's southern tour, the China in Total Silence reiterated economic reform and wealth redistribution. But who are the beneficiaries of such redistribution in a China in Total Silence?⁹⁵

Such worries are not unfounded. There is indeed little unique for a politically repressive country to achieve economic miracles. Many authoritarian and neo-authoritarian countries have done it before, such as Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石's Taiwan and Park Chung-hee 박정희 / 朴正熙's South Korea, or in a way even Augusto Pinochet's Chile and Soeharto's Indonesia. In fact, many such countries are among the models CCP's China, in its search for a way forward after 1989, found attractive to consider for emulation.

This year 2011 is the 22nd anniversary of June Fourth. It is also the 92nd anniversary of May Fourth. There are indeed many similarities between May Fourth of 1919 and June Fourth seventy years later – the passion for social reform and national rejuvenation, the resentment against contemporary socio-politico-economic injustice, the call for democracy, science, human rights and modernization (in 1989 very much symbolized by the hugely popular *He Shang* documentary), the forlorn challenge against the overwhelming power of a ruthless State. Like May Fourth of 1919 which, while inclusive of the liberal tradition, eventually turned Chinese intellectuals away from Western liberalism to Bolshevism, planted the seeds of Mao's ascending the Tiananmen on 1st October 1949⁹⁶ and of the contradictions between national rejuvenation, modernization and radicalism, June Fourth of 1989⁹⁷, which happened to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, 70th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement and 40th anniversary of Chinese Communist Party rule, in a way also sowed the seeds of escalating internal contradictions and tension in subsequent policy orientation.

Even not seen in ethnic and ethnoterritorial terms, such social contradictions have manifested themselves in the alarmingly widening income gap, deteriorating socioeconomic inequalities and proliferating social unrest. The State's neurosis towards the meaning of May Fourth, which was supposed to be a national pride, and its link to the spirit of June Fourth, for instance, was manifest in the quiet passing of the recent 92nd anniversary of the May Fourth movement in Beijing and Peking University, the birthplace of the movement. Besides the suppression of freethought and dissent and the ubiquitous "thought police" on campus, Peking University's economics professor Xia Yeliang 夏业良 attributed the dire atmosphere to the government's denial of the universal value of liberal democracy and freedom of expression and

political choice.⁹⁸ In contrast with the students who participated and led the 1989 democracy movement who dared to turn ideals into action, according to Professor Ye, today's students tend to heed their parents' advice to beware of the political minefield given the memory of the 1989 Beijing massacre and the subsequent two decades of relentless repression on dissidents, and increasingly, even civil rights activists and lawyers, which has been seen to be deteriorating recently partly due to the CCP regime's fear of the spread of the tantalizing "jasmine revolutions" from the Arab North Africa and West Asia into this East Asian giant.

However, in the interplay between the State and the civil society, much like what Kristensen's law in public choice theories postulates, the negotiation between human agencies as stated earlier in the previous section tends to be asymmetrical. In entrenching and expanding its power, the ruling regime as a rule would resort to exploit such power asymmetry not only by the overt repression of dissent in the preservation of stability as an ongoing stalemate – one of the possible results of social conflicts from the neo-Marxist perspective – but also by forging and re-forging alliances with societal groups based on common interest and the co-optation of the societal élite including segments of the intelligentsia. All these, of course, depend on the State's ability to monopolize the concentrated means of coercion. In this, China is not unique, as Charles Tilly observed:

At least for the European experience of the past few centuries, a portrait of war makers and state makers as coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs bears a far greater resemblance to the facts than do its chief alternatives: the idea of a social contract, the idea of an open market in which operators of armies and states offer services to willing consumers, the idea of a society whose shared norms and expectations call forth a certain kind of government.

(Tilly, 1985: 169)

While that brings to mind Thomas Paine's iconoclastic dictum that "government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one"⁹⁹, Tilly noted that apologists for a government usually argued that the government offered protection against local and external violence and these apologists called people who complained about the price of protection "anarchists", "subversives", or both at once. Tilly found an analogy of such a government with a racketeer:

But consider the definition of a racketeer as someone who creates a threat and then charges for its reduction. Governments' provision of protection, by this standard, often qualifies as racketeering. To the extent that the threats against which a given government protects its citizens are imaginary or are consequences of its own activities, the government has organized a protection racket. Since governments themselves commonly simulate, stimulate, or even fabricate threats of external war and since the repressive

and extractive activities of governments often constitute the largest current threats to the livelihoods of their own citizens, many governments operate in essentially the same ways as racketeers.

(Tilly, 1985: 171)

Such racketeer governments basically perpetuate their power through violence, in one sense or another:

Back to Machiavelli and Hobbes [...] political observers have recognized that, whatever else they do, governments organize and, wherever possible, monopolize violence. It matters little whether we take violence in a narrow sense, such as damage to persons and objects, or in a broad sense, such as violation of people's desires and interests; by either criterion, governments stand out from other organizations by their tendency to monopolize the concentrated means of violence.

(ibid.)

7.2. From Megaghost to Megastar: A Party Reborn?

The mismatch between the system segments' relations and those of the human agencies, coupled with power asymmetry and one-sided monopoly of violence, gives rise to a situation in which social structural stratification leads to even involuntarily placed agents being transformed into social actors during the process of transforming the structural conditions affecting them – Archer (1988)'s double morphogenesis – while they are endeavouring to realize their undertakings and/or to guard their vested interests, as poignantly struck home in the following diatribe by the observing media against the perpetrator of the June 1989 Beijing massacre:

Not only is Peking a nightmare streetscape awash in atrocity and anguish; the nation at large has become a haunted land. This howling, lurching megaghost is the Chinese Communist Party. In one staggeringly brutal stroke, it shot itself through the heart. It will not recover. A regime that professes itself to be the distillation of popular will has turned on the Chinese people, committing the ultimate sacrilege of eating its own children. Hundreds of China's brightest, most idealistic sons and daughters, their movement commanding wide public sympathy, were nakedly sacrificed to the cause of preserving an élite.

(*Asiaweek*, 16th June 1989, p. 16)

While *Asiaweek* in its 16th June 1989 editorial "The Rape of Peking" lamented a Goya-esque landscape, these lines seem today, by hindsight, a gross underestimation of CCP's resiliency and the effectiveness of authoritarian power, and the importance of the constraints and enablements that depends objectively on the relative social position of the human agents and subjectively on the agents' projects which to a certain extent being adjusted

to possibilities through Bourdieu's "causality of the probable" (Bourdieu, 1974), given the stark asymmetry in power relations and one-sided monopoly of violence.

Meanwhile, building upon the foundation set by the Hu-Zhao administration's audacious reformist programmes, Deng Xiaoping moved forward from where his purged former protégés have left by reinvigorating the post-Tiananmen chilling politico-economic milieu through his *nansun* in 1992, culminating lately in China first superseding Germany to become the world's third largest economy in early 2008, ranked only after the United States of America and Japan, and finally superseding Japan in mid-2010.¹⁰⁰

According to Wang Qinfeng 王秦丰, the deputy head of CCP's Central Committee Organization Department (中共中央组织部), from the 4.48 million party member in 1949 at the founding of PRC, the Chinese Communist Party has grown to comprise over 80 million members by the end of 2010, of whom one quarter were below 35 years old. In fact, about 80 per cent of those who applied to join the party in 2010 were below 35 years old, with the party members with university or other high academic qualifications continuing to increase in number.¹⁰¹ CCP has also been intensively recruiting professionals in private enterprises as party members. For instance, of the 200 employees of the Beijing company Hengtai Shida 恒泰实达 about 10 per cent, mainly from the middle and higher echelons, are now CCP members.¹⁰² On the other hand, Chen Xiqing 陈喜庆, the deputy head of CCP's Central Committee United Front Department (中共中央统战部), declared at a recent press conference that China's "multi-party" system was already perfect, hence there was no need to establish new political parties.¹⁰³ The CCP, according to Chen, has been absorbing the workers, peasants, soldiers as well as members of the intelligentsia as party members, while the eight existing "democratic parties" (*minzhu dangpai* 民主党派) are focusing mainly on recruiting people from the middle and upper social strata, including those in the fields of technology, culture and sports, as their party members. In China's so-called "multi-party cooperation" (*duodang hezuo* 多党合作) system, these "democratic parties" are neither "non-ruling parties" (*zaiyedang* 在野党) nor "opposition parties" (*fanduidang* 反对党), but "participating parties" (*canzhengdang* 参政党). Besides that, according to Chen, there are also "party-less" (*wu dangpai* 无党派) people in the system, comprising those who are not members of these nine political parties.

However, nomination of independent candidates for the county- and village-level elections this year (2011) has apparently been blocked on the ground that the nomination of such independent candidates has no legal basis, while official media are accusing these independent candidates as learning from the Western opposition, creating confrontation, being irresponsible and

causing political hazards in China's society. These independent candidates are also warned not to touch the government's "red line".¹⁰⁴ According to China's electoral law, only the "official representative candidates" are legal candidates for the county and village elections, being nominated and recommended by the political parties, civil organizations and the electorate; hence, these "independent" candidates are considered illegal. For instance, a female *xiagang* worker in Jiangxi Province, Liu Ping 刘萍, was placed under tight police surveillance after she declared her intention to stand in Xinyu 新余 City's Yushui 渝水 District elections. A labour-rights activist, Liu has been arrested before for her *shangfang-weiquan* 上访维权¹⁰⁵ activity and believed that she would be arrested again in the government's attempt to stop her from standing in the coming elections.¹⁰⁶

Hence, while many authors inside and outside China have been lauding the country's "grassroots democratization" and intra-Party reforms as pointing to a promising path of de-authoritarian evolvement, the perception that China is moving out from the "politically closed authoritarian" category of regime type (see taxonomy in Diamond, 2002: 30-31, Table 2) could prove to be as misleadingly whimsical as it is empirical unfounded. Furthermore, past record of mismanagement and repressive, often violent, response to dissent, including the excesses during the Cultural Revolution both in China proper and in the ethnic regions like Tibet and Xinjiang, and the June Fourth atrocities, may not be encouraging for many, as a dissident astrophysicist, exiled after the 1989 Beijing massacre, ruminated:

[...] changes are not devoid of suffering. China has again shed fresh blood, blood which testifies to an oft-proved truth:

- Without respect for human rights, there will be resorting to violence;
- Without tolerance and pluralism, there will be resorting to prison;
- Without democratic checks and balances, there will be resorting to armed coercion.

China's history has long since proven, and continues to prove, that using violence and imprisonment and armed coercion to enforce upon a nation a single belief, a single point of view, a single superstition, will only lead to instability, poverty, and backwardness.

(Fang, 1991: 259)¹⁰⁷

8. Élite as Seemers

Hence shall we see, / If power change purpose, what our seemers be.

– William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act I, Scene IV

And as to you, Sir, treacherous in private friendship (for so you have been to me, and that in the day of danger) and a hypocrite in public life, the

world will be puzzled to decide whether you are an apostate or an imposter; whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you ever had any.

– Thomas Paine, letter to George Washington, 1796¹⁰⁸

While not denying that much progress is required before China turns democratic, Bo (2010) argued against the accusation that the CCP's rule is illegitimate:

It is taken for granted in the Western media and academe that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has an issue of political legitimacy. Since China scored very low on a series of widely used international indexes on political openness and governance, it is claimed, the CCP's rule is in a serious legitimacy crisis [...] It is wrong to evaluate the legitimacy of the CCP rule by relying solely on "expert" opinions of the Western academia and media because they are in no position to judge whether the CCP has right to rule or not. To assess the legitimacy of any political regime, we need to see whether such a regime is receptive to the governed. From this perspective, the CCP has no legitimacy crisis. It has been recognized as legitimate internationally as well as by the people of China.

(Bo, 2010: 102, 117)

Yet, according to Arthur Stinchcombe, legitimacy depends rather little on abstract principle or assent of the governed for the "person *over whom power is exercised* is not usually as important as *other power-holders*" (Stinchcombe, 1968: 150, italics in the original)¹⁰⁹ the probability of whose confirmation of the decisions of a given authority constitutes the latter's legitimacy, and these other authorities, as Tilly commented,

[...] are much more likely to confirm the decisions of a challenged authority that controls substantial force; not only fear of retaliation, but also desire to maintain a stable environment recommend that general rule. The rule underscores the importance of the authority's monopoly of force. A tendency to monopolize the means of violence makes a government's claim to provide protection, in either the comforting or the ominous sense of the word, more credible and more difficult to resist.

(Tilly, 1985: 171-172)

It is in this way that these "other power-holders", be they societal pressure groups, professionals, or academics and the intelligentsia, "have been co-opted into the decision-making process, rewarded with perks and privileges, and are no longer available as a source of inspiration [for the dissident activists ...] retreating from 'politically engaged and intellectually oppositional topics' to inquiries reconcilable with the prevailing order and designed to legitimate the hegemonic order" (Benton, 2010: 321-322)¹¹⁰ of a regime claiming credit for the economic successes that brought along heightened international stature

and diplomatic prowess and propounding existing stability as the key to continued economic prosperity which itself being the unfailing characteristic of the Chinese and Chinese diaspora worldwide – achievement which could have come naturally for the people once the Maoist yoke, both in the forms of the suppression of free entrepreneurial spirit and the political horrors, was lifted by the same regime that had foisted that yoke upon the Chinese people for three decades since 1949.

With the carrot-and-stick approach to maintain its survival, the once-brutal-dictatorship-turned-benevolent-*dictablanda* (à la O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986) has managed to preserve the *status quo* of its own rule as well as the interests of the “other power-holders” by both selling the credit it claimed on behalf the industrious, enterprising and persevering masses whose newly freed entrepreneurial spirit, long-recognized in the communities of their brethren worldwide, resulted from the Party's repudiation of the Maoist policies, has doubtlessly led to the country's economic success during the economic reform decades since 1979, as well as extracting the support of these “other power-holders” who are willing to abdicate their opportunity to rule in exchange for other kinds of protection by the ensuing strong State run by the present regime (Stepan, 1985), in a *faute de mieux* deal much akin to Karl Marx's description of the Bonapartist regime in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852). Marx's classic analysis of Bonapartism as a basis of State autonomy rests mainly in the sharing of common interests between the State and the dominant group, which in the case of contemporary China, the ruling CCP regime and the dominant social élite and groups whose inability to overcome the present State's monopoly of violence to force a regime change has given the Party-State the opportunity to use the leverage gained both to preserve the *status quo* and to propound its claim as the protector of stability and prosperity in exchange for the acceptance of its legitimacy, for even when “a government's use of force imposes a large cost, some people may well decide that the government's other services outbalance the costs of acceding to its monopoly of violence” (Tilly, 1985: 172), though it could turn out to be a Faustian bargain that these social élite and groups might live to rue. In the stylized representation in Yeoh (2010a: 254, Figure 8), proscription of even the slightest manifestation of dissent against the one-party rule has managed to contain societal political action to the routine intra-party politics at the far bottom right-hand corner, despite the sporadic outbursts of people power usually stemming from localized grievances which have always been quickly suppressed. Amidst all this, individual political actors are playing a central role in giving existence to the obduracy of the system, for the causal powers of systems and structures cannot exist without the mediation through the human agency, as Archer (2003) admitted despite her rejection of the theorem of the duality of agency and structure.

“Infidelity,” said Thomas Paine, “does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving, it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe.”¹¹¹ Among members of the political élite, without the pressures from emerging critical junctures (Katznelson, 1971), critical decisions like those coming from Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping in 1989 are no longer forthcoming, and political decision-makers tend to lapse, for career security, into the safe zone behind the veil of ignorance – postponing critical decisions on the pretext of maintaining stability in the hope that problems would not come to a head so soon or would fade into the background with increasing prosperity – and come to be political seemers characterized by rhetoric barrages of nationalistic rhapsodies and Poolean unspeak¹¹². As a case in point, Premier Wen Jiabao 温家宝 is increasingly being accused by the disillusioned masses of not matching any action to his frequent verbal outburst advocating political reform the details of which have been noted by observers to be much similar to those advocated in Charter 08 which landed its proponent Liu Xiaobo with an 11-year imprisonment.¹¹³

Postponing critical decisions on the last leg of reform – that in the political sphere – could only be postponing the inevitable and in fact accentuating the existing social contradictions, for both the speed and volatility brought about by the country’s breakneck economic transformation under increasing morphogenesis are making whatever State-sanctioned system with the bottom line of one-party rule short-lived in viability when all State-guided *modi vivendi* as such could be at best *pro tem*. The inability to face up to the rapidly changing reality and shifting social context and keep their meta-reflexivity (Archer, 1995) constantly on call to realistically assess their existing *modus vivendi* and to be receptive to a transformative change (Yeoh, 2010a: 285, Figure 21) has trapped the ruling élite, for political survival, in the unwavering upholding of a prolonged stage of morphostasis, being the agency and most powerful institution that is best positioned to block or promote (Yeoh, 2010a: 271-272, Figure 19) the path of morphogenesis, which according to Archer (1995), like morphostasis, is both generated and only exerting causal powers by working through social agents.

Distinctively, Archer’s critical realism grants causal powers to the human agency that are indeducible from or irreducible to the causal powers of society (Archer, 2000). Such endowment of causal powers must be crucial for the Bourdieuvian human agents who, involuntarily occupying social positions that define their life-chances, upon gaining cognizance of their class members’ common interests, are being transformed into Tourainean corporate agents who now set out as social actors to transform society, personalizing the latter as per their ultimate concerns (Bourdieu, 1974; Touraine, 1969, 1973, 1978). It is in this context that, according to Archer, the existing system itself would shape the life-world practices geared towards reproducing, reshaping or

transmuting the system, whose result, not really incompatible with Deng's "river-crossing" dictum¹¹⁴ or Mao's "perpetual revolution", is poised to be contested and modified in the subsequent phase of the series of endless morphogenetic cycles of sociopolitical and sociocultural interaction and systemic conditioning and elaboration.

The political reform much hoped for by China watchers when Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 and Wen Jiabao – both being former colleagues and subordinates of the former reformist premier Zhao Ziyang who was disgraced in 1989 in a power struggle with hardliner Li Peng 李鹏 who subsequently executed Deng Xiaoping's decision for a brutal crackdown on the Beijing-Tiananmen protesters – took over the presidency and premiership respectively has never materialized. Their absence at the memorial service for Zhao, "the conscience of China" placed under house arrest for sixteen long years for his refusal to repent his decision to oppose the 1989 Beijing-Tiananmen crackdown and to urge for the accommodation of the hunger-striking students' demands, when he passed away in 2005 has added to the doubt regarding the degree of their political power in the central politburo.¹¹⁵ The utter cold-heartedness Wen Jiabao exhibited towards the plight of Zhao Ziyang has long puzzled observers of Chinese politics and Zhao's family and relatives have long found chilling. "Take from the mine the coldest, hardest stone, / It needs no fashion: it is Washington. / But if you chisel, let the stroke be rude, / And on his heart engrave – Ingratitude", said Thomas Paine in his unpublished epitaph for George Washington¹¹⁶. While Washington's betrayal of Paine, the little known father of both the French and American revolutions, during the latter's incarceration in Paris waiting to be guillotined was a political necessity given Paine's open espousal of religious unorthodoxy, the 1796's American presidential elections, as well as America's foreign policy turnabout, the same necessity for political survival could probably explain much the behaviour of Wen who survived through both purges of Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 and Zhao Ziyang. Political seemers they may both be, both Washington and Wen have indeed acted with good political sense as rational human agents interfacing with harsh political realities of their times. Nevertheless, revelations by political analysts based on internal Party sources have shown that, as in the case of Wen Jiabao, the personal allegiance and political orientation of individual political players who were highly visible during those critical junctures like June 1989 might have been greatly misread (see, e.g., Liu, 2010).

The real "ruminating self" that intervenes in between the field and the habitus (*à la* Bourdieu, 1990, 2008) through those soul-trying months of passion and anguish at that critical juncture in 1989 and in the aftermath of the massacre, which constitutes the intercessor that connects the structure's causal powers to agency, may be fully understood only by the particular

human agents themselves whose existential projects that they construct *in foro interno* upon which the actuation of social structures' causal powers through constraints and enablements is contingent (Archer, 2003). It is in this context that human agents act to mediate their own social conditionings as well as effectuate the reproduction or transformation of society. "It is not an accident that Premier Wen Jiabao once called himself 'grandpa Wen' – *Wen yeye* [温爷爷] – in front of the people", noted Hung (2011). In a sense, the role of Wen, long cultivated as the loving grand patriarch who is at every scene of disaster to offer moral care for his "children", is orchestrated to be an on-site projection of the central Party-State as the modern successor of the caring benevolent emperor who was always there to *zuozhu* 做主 (do justice) for his downtrodden subjects and punish his abusive officials, in a system that survives till today in the form of *shangfang* 上访 (travelling to the capital for petitioning) by the abused people suffering in the hands of corrupt local officials. Such an image is crucial to the survival of the Party-State, as any self-seeking dynasty-builder has long been acquainted with, for the mandate of heaven would be lost if that image is shattered – ever since Mencius (Meng Zi 孟子) emphasized two thousand three hundred years ago the people's satisfaction as an indicator of a ruler's moral right to power, and justified the overthrow of an unworthy ruler¹¹⁷.

The ultimate project of a self-seeking State is also manifest in the single-mindedness in pursuing greater economic prosperity, sometimes dubbed "GDPism"¹¹⁸, a crazed quest that is increasingly unfolding in recent years to be at a terrible social cost, epitomized recently by the horrible train mishap in Wenzhou 温州 on 23rd July 2011 – the very Wenzhou that has long found its place in modern Chinese history in the typonym of the "Wenzhou model". The scandalousness of the mishap lies neither in the derailment itself, which is not an uncommon phenomenon in China, nor the scale of the human casualties, nor the unfolding or imminent clampdown on media reportage and civil rights activists and lawyers which has been quite a routine from the Sichuan earthquake's "tofu dregs" school-house scandal to the Sanlu 三鹿 milk contamination disaster, but rather in the scale of the disregard for the dignity of human life. However, the uniqueness of this event, the unusual uproar it has led to stems from the open urban setting of the occurrence that renders surreptitiousness of scandalous actions impossible, unlike, for instance, the case of a similar mishap in Jiangxi on 23rd May 2010 in which the similarly alleged immediate destruction of train wreckage with utter disregard for the victims trapped therein, whom the authorities had hurriedly presumed dead, had also been carried out both to avoid publicity and to speed up the return to normal operation. In the Jiangxi case, the efficient returning the rail segment where the mishap had occurred to operation took even a shorter space of time – merely 16 hours compared to Wenzhou's 34 hours'

duration which is already considered reckless by international standard in the handling of such disasters.¹¹⁹ Wen Jiabao's late appearance in Wenzhou six days after the mishap, while being jeered at by some disbelieving his illness excuse¹²⁰ and rationalized by others in terms of the power struggle between the Hu-Wen and Jiang Zemin 江泽民 factions¹²¹, had followed the now routine format of Wen showing on-site the caring, human face of the Party-State, while the latter began to clamp down on media coverage and social activism stemmed from the incident. Wen's pronouncements at the site of the disaster are apparently, as have become routine in the past calamities, to project the impression of a benevolent central court ruling an impossibly vast country, struggling to keep a rein on the sometimes wayward, corrupt and uncaring local officials.

Nevertheless, as a paramount figure within the gargantuan Party-military-industrial complex that has metamorphosed during the reform years into an incredible modern Leviathan¹²² whose State-capital-collusion reach has since permeated into every corner of the Chinese society, Wen's routine calamity-site pronouncements tend to sound hollow if not pseud. After all, while the perpetuation of one-party rule depends upon the monopoly of violence and ruthless suppression of dissent ever since the June 1989 massacre, the legitimacy of the rule ultimately lies in the ability to maintain the miraculous GDP growth that has brought the country from poverty to prosperity, catapulted the nation to the second place in the world in economic size and given back the Chinese people, whether they be the *Han-jen* 漢人 in the north, *T'ang-jen* 唐人 in the south or the worldwide Chinese diaspora, the long-lost pride, at least in material terms, in the nostalgia for the formidable Han and T'ang dynasties which have been reduced by the early part of the 20th Century to the shameful fate of the "sick man of Asia" and the *bainian guochi* 百年國耻 (hundred years of national humiliation), in a partial redemption for the unspeakable atrocities committed by the Party during the Mao years. Being a political seeder, while riding the waves of the miraculous economic performance that its reborn self has unleashed among the long-suffering Chinese people by lifting the Maoist yoke, the Party has demanded the same gratefulness and reverence long demanded by ancient imperial China's Sons of Heaven for the very economic prosperity that the newly freed, long-suppressed Chinese entrepreneurial spirit has brought to fruition with incredible speed and *geist*.

Nevertheless, a seeder as it is, the Party's ultimate concern is never disguised in the pronouncements of its leaders in party congresses, namely the perpetuation of the anachronistic one-party rule, while rejecting the "bourgeois liberal" practices of multi-party elections and *trias politica* separation of powers, supported by its continued ability to deliver on the economic front as well as to curb social ills resulted from economic

transformation including the rampant corruption and increasing income inequality before they lead to uncontrollable, large-scale system-threatening social protests. This is supported by the ruthless suppression of dissent and nipping any sign of “deviation-amplification” in the bud before it could take the first step to trigger systemic change, all under the façade of territorial unity, political stability and a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会), the key conceptual cornerstone since the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in October 2006 passed the “Resolution on Major Issues Regarding the Building of a Harmonious Socialist Society” (关于构建社会主义和谐社会若干重大问题的决定).

While rumours in cyberspace that the order for the alleged Wenzhou cover-up attempt immediately after the derailment had in fact come from the central State at a level beyond the Ministry of Railways could probably never be confirmed or refuted in a governing environment of lies and deceptions, the central Party-State’s paramount priority of maintaining a “harmonious society” and the “stability above all else” prime directive would have had a primary impact on local-tier decision-makers’ policy choices. Take the case of the famous Weng’an incident of 2008 that shocked the nation, when tens of thousands of people walked the streets of Weng’an, Guizhou Province, on 28th June 2008, attacking police and burning law enforcement vehicles and government offices after the suspicious death of a beautiful young schoolgirl Li Shufen 李树芬, discovered at 1 a.m. of 22nd June 2008 drowned at the Daan Bridge 大堰桥 of the Ximen River 西门河. Three persons were present at the scene: Li’s female schoolmate Wang Jiao 王娇 and two male brick factory workers Chen Guangquan 陈光权 and Liu Yanchao 刘言超. Li’s family members believed that she was brutally raped and murdered and Wang, Chen and Liu were the prime suspects. There were even rumours that thugs were hired to rape and murder Li to punish her for refusing to submit to plagiarism demands during school examination, and that the perpetrators of this hideous crime had kinship relations with the county’s party secretary Wang 王 and the provincial public security department head Jiang 姜. Official autopsy results, however, stated that Li had committed suicide and drowned, and Wang, Chen and Liu were released before the first autopsy even began. While it is a social fact that rapid economic transformation during the reform era has brought about overall concomitant rise in crime – the *2010 Blue Book of China’s Society* reported 12,000 cases of homicide (increase of 0.4 per cent from the previous year), 28,000 cases of rape (11.4 per cent increase), 6,064 cases of arson (26.4 per cent increase), 1,045 cases of planting of dangerous material (37.5 per cent increase) and 237,000 cases of robbery (6.7 per cent rise) in the first ten months of 2009 (Fan, Song and Yan, 2009: 86)¹²³ – and indeed acute social contradictions, deteriorating social order and State-civil society relations, out-of-control crime, worsening income and wealth disparity

Table 16 State's vs Society's Version of the Case of Li Shufen

	What the people believed	Government's version
Cause of death	Li Shufen was brutally raped and murdered	Li Shufen jumped into the river herself and drowned
Background of Wang Jiao, Chen Guangquan and Liu Yanchao who were present at Li Shufen's death	Kinship relations with party secretary Wang of the county, or related to Jiang, head of the provincial public security department	Parents of all three were peasants in the village, not relatives of the party secretary
How were Li Shufen's family members beaten up?	Li Shufen's uncle, grandfather and grandmother were beaten up, lying with critical injuries in the hospital; her aunt was locked up at the police station, with her hair cut off; her uncle was beaten up by public security (police) and injured during argument	Li Shufen's grandfather, grandmother and aunt were not beaten up, neither were they locked up at the police station; her uncle was not beaten up by the police – he was in fact beaten up by somebody in front of an insurance company and the case was being investigated
Who recovered Li Shufen's body from the river?	Li Xiuzhong 李秀忠, her uncle	Fire brigade
Autopsy on 25th June 2008	Public security and armed police had come to take the body away for autopsy but were disallowed by the people; public security finally took away Li Shufen's internal organs, hence Li's body in the coffin was without internal organs	Li Shufen's family members agreed to drowning as the cause of death but refused to let the body be buried; they were asking the public security department to order Wang Jiao, Liu Yanchao and Chen Guangquan to pay a compensation of 500,000 yuan

in Weng'an, a mining county with a highly-mixed ethnic minority and Han Chinese population of 460,000, has often been blamed for the June 2008 riots, the standard official “black box” approach, as in so many other cases throughout the country, had served to accentuate the people’s distrust of the government and fed further the rumour mill (Table 16¹²⁴) and pushed the situation to the boiling point.

Covering up and news blackout have become a routine and standard procedure. In the Li Shufen case, for instance, the government had moved swiftly to impose *si feng* 四封 (“four blockades”), i.e. *feng wang* 封网 (blocking the Internet), *feng cheng* 封城 (blocking the town), *feng tongxin* 封通信 (blocking mails) and *feng jizhe* 封记者 (blocking reporters). As a result, the mainstream media simply reflected the standardized version from the local government officials, Internet postings were severely cut, people involved were kept out of reach of the press, and many family members of the victim disappeared for many days before reappearing to tell the press about their full support for *hexie* 和谐¹²⁵ (“harmony”). In the parlance of the sarcastic Chinese netizens, they had already been “harmonized” (*bei hexie* 被和谐) while Li Shufen had been “suicided” (*bei zisha* 被自杀).¹²⁶ Just like in the case of the Wenzhou derailment and many other cases, while such State response can be blamed on the local governments and their officials, what lies behind is ultimately the central Party-State’s paramount concern over any perceived threat to a “harmonious society” and the “stability above all else” bottom line that it sees as a cornerstone, besides economic prosperity and the monopoly of violence, of the perpetuation of its one-party rule.

However, the ultimate question remains: Can social harmony be imposed top-down by State coercion and relentless suppression of dissent in a legal system devoid of judicial independence? Such a question is indeed futile as there has never been any pretension in the party leaders’ pronouncements that the fundamental concern represents anything other than the ultimate aim of perpetuating the one-party rule of the CCP which looks upon itself to be the only political organization in modern Chinese history that has been proven to be able to advance the livelihood of the Chinese people and make China a great and proud nation – a mentality described by China’s well-known writer Han Han 韩寒 recently in his weblog after the Wenzhou derailment as follows: “They feel that, from a larger perspective, ‘We’ve organized the Olympics, we’ve abolished the agricultural tax, yet you’re not applauding but instead always making a great fuss about trivialities – What are you up to? Originally we could be tighter in politics than North Korea, poorer in economy than Sudan, more ruthless in governing than the Khmer Rouge, because we have a much larger army than they do, but we aren’t. Yet you do not show your gratitude, but want us to apologize ...”¹²⁷

9. Middle Class, Trade Unionism and Dissent

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in the sociopolitical attitude of the country's rapidly growing middle class and the changing behaviour of the workers amidst the demise of the State monopsony of labour, the rapid development of marketization, the inflow of foreign investments and the growth of China into the "factory of the world".

9.1. Rise of the Middle Class and Extra-Party Activism

He bade me observe it, and I should always find, that the calamities of life were shared among the upper and lower part of mankind; but that the middle station had the fewest disasters.

– Daniel Defoe (1719), *Robinson Crusoe*, Ch. I

The existence of a middle class in the conventional sense of the term is still a debatable issue in China. For instance, according to Li (2008)¹²⁸, it may not be appropriate to identify the Chinese "middle class" before China enters the stage of late industrialization or post-industrialization, as the majority of the Chinese white-collar service-sector professionals are part of the upper classes of the cadres and the reborn bourgeoisie. The speed with which this presently illusive class is going to emerge unequivocally in the changing class pyramid depends of course on the dynamics of social mobility in the long process of modern Chinese industrialization. The impacts of China's economic reforms in the post-Mao period especially since the critical juncture of 1989 (a catalyst that led to Deng Xiaoping's reaffirmation of the path of reform in his *nanxun* in 1992) on social mobility have been tremendous, and their significance is outstanding especially in view of the barriers that existed just before the reforms began, viz. the *hukou* 户口/*huji* 户籍 system, administrative documentation system and political status (ideological) barrier.

Nevertheless, amidst the prevalent confusion over the definition and the characterization of China's urban middle class, some researchers have been trying to estimate its size. While Zhou Xiaohong claimed that 11.9 per cent of the urban residents of Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou and Wuhan belonged to the middle class as defined by occupation, educational background and income (Zhou (ed.), 2005: 45), Li Chunling estimated the middle classes of China to be 15.9 per cent by occupational definition, 24.6 per cent by the income definition, 35.0 per cent by consumption-level definition, and 46.8 per cent by respondent's identification (Li, 2005: 512). However, in an earlier paper Li identified just 4.1 per cent of total population in China who fulfilled the four definitions though the number increased to 8.7 per cent if the focus was just on the urban district (Li, 2004: 62).¹²⁹ On the other hand, according to data from the China General Social Survey (CGSS)

carried out by the Renmin University and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in 2006, China's middle class constituted about 22 per cent of the total population (see Yang, 2010: 438).

While Western journalists and social scientists tend to see the emergence of the Chinese urban middle class as conducive to political reforms and democratization, exemplified by American columnist Nicholas Kristof's comment that "Western investment in China would bring a desire for 'bourgeois' democratic freedom in China" (cited in Mann, 2007: 49), Chinese sociologists have focused more on the necessity to enlarge the urban middle class to attain sociopolitical stability – as in "buffering" social conflicts caused by the bipolarization of the poor and the rich (Zhang, 2004: 271).¹³⁰ According to Zhang Wanli, this "buffering function" is the first of the three functions of the Chinese middle class, the other two being the role model of the acquisition of social status in a just and fair manner and the "behavioural role model of the socialist market economy and modern social value" (Zhang, 2004: 271-272). Given the fact that unlike its Western counterpart, the Chinese middle class, besides the white-collar workers and well-educated professionals, also includes the reemerging bourgeoisie – the 2.6 per cent (2006 figure) of China's population comprising mostly owners of small- or medium-sized enterprises – according to Yang (2010), as long as "the majority of the middle class are able to maintain their current lifestyle despite the social policy reform, the force of democratization is unlikely to become strong" (Yang, 2010: 437), and with the majority of them hoping "to benefit from the economic growth and maintain their current lifestyle; they are therefore more prepared to be subservient to an authoritarian state for economic security and sociopolitical stability" (*ibid.*: 452, citing the findings of Li, 2009).

In spite of the fact that extra-Party activism remains disjointed today, Benton (2010: 323) pointed out two positive developments for the democracy movement, namely, the germination in the political sphere of a systematic alternative to the politics of the Chinese Communist Party and the growing trend towards an independent labour movement. Despite what has been said above regarding the middle class in contemporary China, it has to be admitted that the country's middle class is indeed a highly heterogeneous group. Yang (2010) noted the difference in sociopolitical outlook between the old middle class (mainly referring to the self-employed, small merchants and manufacturers whose emergence can be attributed to the early market liberalization in the 1980s) and the new middle class (emerged in the 1990s, mainly salaried professionals and technical and administrative employees who work in large corporations).¹³¹

In contrast to the democratic consciousness and sense of social justice of the new middle class and "marginal middle class" (the latter referring to the sales and service workers and the middle/lower-level clerical workers),

the old middle class tends to care more about its own financial situation and “hold relatively conservative political views and are more likely to support state authoritarianism and have the least consciousness of social inequality and justice” (*ibid.*: 452). The rapid transition from the command economy to free market with extensive economic decentralization has engendered an interdependent patron-client relationship between local government officials and the private entrepreneurs who have in turn also adopted a series of adaptive strategies and close ties with local government officials, which essentially prevent them from being a force for change, and since many of them rely heavily on government patronage for their success in profit-making, it is not a surprise that they are among CCP’s most important bases of support (*ibid.*: 452-454)¹³².

Nevertheless, the new middle class, who has emerged and expanded rapidly since the 1990s and soon overshadowed the old middle class in terms of status and prestige, is shown by the CGSS 2006 to exhibit the most democratic consciousness while the marginal middle class is shown to be comparatively more vulnerable and hence more sympathetic towards the lower class and exhibit a strong sense of social justice and democracy (*ibid.*: 437, 452-453, Table 9). Their existence and their sociopolitical outlook have definitely contributed to the birth of a coherent and organized political opposition culminating in the Charter 08 which called for liberal democracy, political federalism and an end to one-party rule, twenty years after the June Fourth Beijing-Tiananmen tragedy, three decades after Democracy Wall, and nine decades after the May Fourth Movement. Feng Chongyi 冯崇义, who called the Charter “the most important collective expression of Chinese liberal thought to emerge since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949”, pointed out that the imprisonment of Liu Xiaobo “has not succeeded in forcing one single signatory to withdraw, nor has it prevented more than ten thousand Chinese at home and abroad from adding their names to the document” although he conceded that it might have led “many more who share the values and aspirations of Charter 08 to remain silent” (Feng, 2010)¹³³.

9.2. Working Class and Trade Unionism

The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to gain.

– Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1872), *The Communist Manifesto*

Regarding the trade union movement, when electrician Wei Jingsheng put up his manifesto “The Fifth Modernization” (i.e. democracy, in addition to the pursuit of the “Four Modernizations” of China’s agricultural, industrial, national defense and science sectors declared by Deng Xiaoping) on the

“Democracy Wall” on the morning of 5th December 1978 at a busy city intersection not far from the Tiananmen Square – an action that landed him a 15-year jail term and continuous subsequent persecution – no independent trade union existed in the country and Wei did not brought about one like *Solidarność* which emerged after his Polish electrician counterpart Lech Wałęsa scaled the fence of Gdańsk’s Lenin Shipyard in 1980. When Han Dongfang 韩东方 convened the Autonomous Workers’ Federation in Beijing during the student-led demonstrations of 1989, independent trade unions had also not yet emerged.

Then during the first half of 2010 while the nation and indeed the world were shocked, transfixed by and perplexed with the spate of suicides and attempted suicides¹³⁴ at the Foxconn conglomerate’s factory in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, that resulted in the death or injury of more than a dozen workers within the short span of about 4 months from the first suicide on 23rd January 2010 to the end of May (which continued with the fatal thirteenth and fourteenth “jumps” at its factories in Foshan 佛山, Guangdong, and Kunshan 昆山, Jiangsu, respectively on 20th July and 4th August¹³⁵, and a 17th “jump” back in Shenzhen on 19th July 2011 bringing the total number of casualties to fifteen¹³⁶), workers in some other enterprises in the country, such as Honda’s plant in Foshan, were seen organizing strikes seeking higher wages and better working conditions – a phenomenon unseen before in this state of the dictatorship of the proletariat ostensibly heeding Marx and Engels’s call of “Workers of the world, unite!”¹³⁷ These striking Honda workers were observed to be “well organized, strategic and assertive, demanding sizeable wage increases, proposing a pay scale and a career ladder, electing their own representatives, re-electing office-bearers to their union branch and demonstrating solidarity and a determination to win”¹³⁸. Indeed, as Benton observed:

[...] collective bargaining by elected shop stewards is now a feature of industrial relations in some factories. More and more workers, emboldened by legislation designed to strengthen their contractual rights, are calling for greater rights, and a few are calling for trade unions separate from the state-controlled National Federation of Trade Unions.

(Benton, 2010: 323)

Indeed increasingly the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) – the only legal trade union in China, which in 2008 had a total of 212 million members and a union density (percentage of employees belonging to unions) of 73.7 per cent, making it the world’s largest union with more members than those of the rest of the world’s trade unions put together – has been criticized by Chinese and foreign labour activists and scholars for its inability to protect Chinese workers’ rights (Qi, 2010: 421-422). Unlike trade unions in the West

which represent autonomous labour organizations reflecting workers' interests, a Chinese trade union is in fact just one of the State apparatuses serving governmental goals through mediating labour relations in the country (see the relationship between ACFTU and the Party-State in Qi, 2010: 424, Figure 2), and together with the China Communist Youth League and the All-China Women's Federation, the ACFTU is defined by the CCP as an important social pillar for its regime stability:

[...] as one of the government agencies, the ACFTU and its local branches are able to protect labour rights only to the extent that the government allows. For most local governments, labour relation is of a much lower priority than developing local GDP. If they have to develop local economy at the expense of labour rights, they usually would not hesitate to do so. Therefore, the major role of the ACFTU and its local branches is to help the governments achieve economic goals through maintaining stable labour relations. The grassroots trade unions at the workplace level are supposedly under the jurisdiction of the ACFTU's local branches. Like ACFTU and its local branches, which are subordinated to the government at the same level, workplace unions are actually controlled by the workplace management. As a result, they also lack motivation and power to proactively protect workers' interests in their respective workplaces.

(*ibid.*: 422-423)

Referring to the worker suicides at Foxconn and the migrant worker strikes at the Honda automotive company, Anita Chan 陳佩華 noted that “at Foxconn, the union did not even come forward to make a statement. And at Honda, the union blatantly sided with the local government, which in turn was on the side of the employer”¹³⁹. In fact, Chan observed that the migrant workers were having a stereotypical image that the official trade unions are “useless” (*ibid.*).

In the process of maintaining a tight grip on political power in ensuring the CCP's perpetuation of its Party-State monopoly while delivering on the economic front and bringing prosperity and wellbeing to the long-suffering people of this giant country, the neo-authoritarian developmentalism followed since June Fourth could be leading the country on a path threaded before by various East Asian countries like Taiwan (Republic of China) and Singapore – a model sometimes termed “State corporatism”. When the enraged and desperate Beijing citizens yelled “fascists” at the rampaging PLA armoured vehicles on that murderous night of 3rd-4th June 1989, when Chai Ling in hiding screamed “fascists” in her taped condemnation of the massacre shortly following that night of terror, when that lone individual¹⁴⁰ stood in front of and blocked a column of tanks signifying terrifying State power in that poignant image reminiscent of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*¹⁴¹, when melancholy and despair descended upon and the tune of *Xueran de Fengcai*

血染的风采¹⁴² surrounded the hunger strikers in the Tiananmen Square, there was little telling of the course to come to pass in China's subsequent political evolution. "Fascism" could eventually prove to be an overstatement – other than that night's slaughter and subsequent arrests and executions, nothing that came in this one-party state in the aftermath of June Fourth remotely approached Franco's repression against the defeated Republicans and their supporters in the dictator's "no-party" state¹⁴³ immediately following the end of the civil war, though the term could still be in a certain way fitting if it is defined as the requirement for the faith in and unquestioning loyalty to the one-party State (or in the case of Franco's Spain, in particular to the *Caudillo*). The post-June Fourth State corporatism, or referred to by some observers as "Leninist corporatism"¹⁴⁴, could provide a closer resemblance to Franco's *Nuevo Estado* (New State), and the "harmonious society" vision declared in recent years does recall Franco's vision of social cohesion and harmonious relationship between employers and workers via corporatism that would promote a close collaboration between them under the direction of the State and his corporatist policies to regulate the economy by controlling the conditions of work, wages, prices, production and exchange.

On the other hand, illegal independent trade unions which have emerged sporadically in China since the 1980s were swiftly persecuted by the government which is obviously wary of the possible birth of a Chinese version of *Solidarność*. Being uncompromisingly against independent trade unions, the CCP regime has in fact not been seen to be soft towards strikers in State-owned enterprises but holds a double standard towards strikers in foreign-owned plants on whom it is not only less likely to crack down but whose industrial actions it may even try to use "to blow new life into the official unions, bring the activists under control, get a handle on foreign firms, and play up to nationalist sentiments" (Benton, 2010: 323).

Such double standard, nevertheless, could carry inherent risks because like Tarschys' law in public choice theories, demonstration effects might work if workers in foreign-owned factories were to have their way since "wages, rights, and conditions in Chinese-owned factories are usually even worse than in foreign-owned ones" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, nationalist sentiments have always been known to be a double-edged sword. The nationalistic *fenqing* 愤青 ("angry youths"), who form the backbone of what Yang and Lim (2010) called the third wave of Chinese nationalism, for instance are observed to be not only unhappy with the Western countries, but also with the domestic situation in China. The *fenqing*, being born out of the marginalized New Left after the mid-1990s due the Zhu Rongji 朱榕基 administration's radical reform policies of corporatization and privatization, besides being unhappy with the perceived unfair treatment of China by the West – a feeling manifested in the 2009 bestselling book *Zhongguo Bu Gaoxing* 中国不高兴

[unhappy China], are also unhappy with the perceived pro-Western orientation in the Chinese government's policymaking and China's rapid integration with the international economic order and its neo-liberal economic policy that causes over-marketization and commercialization that they are blaming for the country's increasing income disparities and social ills (*ibid.*: 477). "[W]hen the goals of the state and society are identical, the power of nationalism tends to be strong. But when their goals are different, the power of nationalism will be constrained", commented Yang and Lim, for nationalism does not always complement the interest of the government: "The government and social forces might perceive and define China's national interest differently. If the government does not control or guide various nationalistic forces with care, the greatest impact will be dealt on China's domestic policies rather than on the external front." (*ibid.*: 479) Top on the list of domestic challenges is of course none other than reform-era China's attention-grabbing retreat from equality, as discussed earlier in this paper.

10. Conclusion

And as imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown, the poet's
pen / Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing / A local habitation
and a name.

– William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, Scene I

We have it in our power to begin the world over again.

– Thomas Paine (1776), *Common Sense*, Appendix to the Third Edition

This paper began by purveying various key issues underlying China's social transition, such as poverty, inequality and social stratification, ethnoregional disparities and contradictions, rise of the middle class, development of trade unionism, and the relations between structure and agency within the overall political milieu in contemporary China where social change is moving apace amidst astounding economic transformation. Ironically, as pointed out in the paper, some factors which at first look seem to be system-threatening may instead work for the ruling regime's advantage. According to Perry (2002), for instance, social protests in today's China constitute one of the major components of social stability, as the protests serve as checks against the leaders' abuse of power and as mechanisms ensuring the accountability of the government, thereby "undergirding rather than undermining the political system" in China's authoritarian polity where multi-party competitive elections do not exist to provide an effective check on the misbehaviour of State authorities.¹⁴⁵ In addition, Tong and Lei (2010: 499-500) considered large-scale mass incidents driven by economic grievances, which were due to "the misconduct of local officials or the process of socioeconomic

transformation when there was a lack of experience in handling these problems or the lack of proper regulations”, as not regime-threatening because by asking the government to *zuozhu* (enforce justice), the protests had in fact endorsed the legitimacy of the regime, and as long as the regime had plenty of financial resources to satisfy the protesters’ demands – hence the significance of GDPism as a cornerstone of regime maintenance – it further consolidates its legitimacy. On the other hand, in the case of inequality, Friedman (2009) argued that the beneficiaries of economic growth were able to find their own individual solutions to their problems and resigned themselves to an authoritarian government as a defense against the threat from potentially vengeful losers in the market economy, thereby rendering social polarization inconducive to democratic sentiment among them.¹⁴⁶

Green (2008) showed the process of social change typically involving a combination of four different components: context (the environment within which changes take place, thus crucial in determining the nature and direction of change), institutions (the organizations and rules, both formal and informal, that establish the “rules of the game” governing the behaviour of agents – including culture, family structure, civil service, private sector, governmental system, patron-client network, etc.), agents (organizations and individuals actively involved in promoting or blocking change, e.g. ruling party, social movements, political and business élite, military and police, inspirational leaders, social entrepreneurs) and events (one-off events triggering wider change and being key catalysts for social and political changes, e.g. wars, pandemics like AIDS, SARS, A(H1N1), civil conflicts such as “mass incidents”, ethnic or ethnoregional riots, demonstrations and crackdowns, natural disasters, economic crises).¹⁴⁷ As mentioned earlier, Archer’s double morphogenesis sees both structure and human agency as cojoint products of interaction. Upon the praxis between operating structures and purposely acting human agents, agency is constantly shaped by structure which in turn is being reshaped in the process. Hence, finally, it needs to be noted that amidst the dynamic interplay of such an array of critical socioeconomic factors that underlie the surging currents of social change, be they the overt or subliminal emergent changes that tend to act to subvert the stability of well laid-out projectable changes envisaged by the ruling regime (Yeoh, 2010a) or an illusive transformative change biding its time prior to a critical point of bifurcation as pointed out by the chaos theory (*ibid.*; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984), the role of the individual as a catalyst for change cannot be underestimated, even if the long-term impact of the individual’s action is not immediately explicit and the lone crusade involved does not receive adequate sympathy of the wider public. Such is the tragedy of the commons (*à la* Hardin, 1968) resulted from incomplete feedback loops, among others.

On the other hand, the duality of structure and agency pointed out by the structuration theory implies that there exists a symbiotic relationship between structures that shape agencies' motives into practices and agencies whose routine practices in turn create structures. None can exist without the other. For instance, the brutal crushing of the democracy movement of 1989 "were of such magnitude that they continue to reverberate in people's imagination and the collective memory – and in the sleep of party leaders and officials, as a nightmare", commented Benton (2010: 322), "The experience of facing down the government created a generation no longer prepared to act as an off-stage army for party factions, an attitude passed on to the protestors' children. Although most of the 1989 generation have stopped being active, some continue to work for political and social change. The Chinese democracy movement in exile has survived in the current harsh environment and there have been many attempts to organize a political opposition in China, for example, the establishment of the China Democracy Party in 1998." After all, individuals, who together form social movements, are at the very foundations of all socioeconomic and sociopolitical changes.

Notes

- * Dr Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh 楊國慶 is Director and Associate Professor of the Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Emile graduated with a PhD from the University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, England (1998), and his research interests include institutional economics, China studies, decentralization and fiscal federalism, and socioracial diversity and the role of the State in economic development. His works have been published in journals and occasional paper series such as *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, *GeoJournal: An International Journal on Human Geography and Environmental Sciences*, *International Journal of China Studies*, *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies* and the *Copenhagen Discussion Paper* series, and his recent books, as both editor and contributor, include *Ethnic Interaction and Segregation on Campus and at the Workplace* (2004), *Economic Kaleidoscope* (2005), *China and Malaysia in a Globalizing World* (2006), *Emerging Trading Nation in an Integrating World* (2007), *Facets of a Transforming China* (2008), *China in the World* (2008), *CJAS Special Issue (26(2)): Transforming China* (2008), *Regional Political Economy of China Ascendant* (2009), *China-ASEAN Relation* (2009), *Towards Pax Sinica?* (2009), *IJCS Special Issue (1(1)): Changing China* (2010), *East Asian Regional Integration* (2010) and *IJCS Special Issue (1(2)): Social Change in the Age of Reform* (2010). <Email: emileyeo@correo.nu, emileyeo@gmail.com>
1. <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/227029.htm>>
 2. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) totaled 18. They are (1) Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day; (2) Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who

suffer from hunger; (3) By 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling; (4) Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015; (5) Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate; (6) Reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015; (7) Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS; (8) Have halted by 2015, and begun to reverse, the incidence of malaria and other major diseases; (9) Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources; (10) Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water; (11) Have achieved, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers; (12) Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system; (13) Address the special needs of the least developed countries (... enhanced program of debt relief for and cancellation of official bilateral debt ...); (14) Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states ...; (15) Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures; (16) In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth; (17) In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries; and (18) In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications (summarized by Woo *et al.*, 2004).

3. Bert Hoffman, "Access to Opportunity Eases Income Inequality", *The Star* (Malaysian daily), 21st January 2006.
4. Or more officially, the "Communist Party of China" (CPC).
5. Yan (2010: 179), based on data from *China Statistical Yearbook 2008*.
6. In general, though not totally without ambiguity, "private entrepreneurs" or "private enterprise owners" (*siying qiyezhǔ* 私营企业主 / *minyǐng qiyejiā* 民营企业企业家) here refer mainly to owners of domestic individually owned, family-based or shareholding firms with eight or more employees though joint ventures and wholly foreign-owned firms are not by definition excluded, while individual entrepreneurs who employ fewer than eight employees are referred to as "self-employed" / *getihu* 个体户. For more details on the ten major social strata, see Li and Chen (2004: 13), Figure 1-3, and Yeoh (2010a: 270), Figure 18.
7. Referring to the 22 *sheng* 省 (i.e. provinces), 5 *zìzhìqū* 自治区 (i.e. "autonomous regions" – each a first-level administrative subdivision having its own local government, and a minority entity that has a higher population of a particular minority ethnic group – of Guangxi of the Zhuang, Nei Monggol/Inner Mongolia of the Mongols, Ningxia of the Hui, Xizang/Tibet of the Tibetans and Xinjiang of the Uyghurs) and 4 *zhíxiáshì* 直辖市 (municipalities with province status, directly under the central government – Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing).
8. The largest denomination of China's renminbi 人民币 ("people's currency", Rmb) is yuan 元 / 圆 (Latinized symbol ¥ or ¥), a term with cognates in the

- Japanese yen or en 円 (from 圓; Latinized symbol ¥) and Korean wŏn 원 / 圓 (Latinized symbol ₩). A yuan is equivalent to about US\$0.146.
9. The ethnic fractionalization index (EFI, see Yeoh, 2003: 28) used to show provincial ethnic diversity is constructed through the computational procedure of Rae and Taylor's index of fragmentation (F), defined as the probability that a randomly selected pair of individuals in a society will belong to different groups (Rae and Taylor, 1970: 22-3). The index varies from 0 to 1. The value is zero for a completely homogeneous country (the probability of belonging to different groups is nil). The value 1 occurs in the hypothetical society where each individual belongs to a different group. The fragmentation index is identical to Rae's measure of party system fractionalization (Rae, 1967: 55-8) and Greenberg's measure of linguistic diversity (Greenberg, 1956).
 10. The official population figures for Tibet which was used to compute EFI in Figure 11 differ much from certain unofficial ones. The official figures have been disputed by the Tibetan government-in-exile who claims that "accelerating Han population transfer into Tibet ... has reduced the Tibetan people to a minority in their own land ... [and today] there are over 7.5 million non-Tibetan settlers in Tibet including Chinese and Hui Muslims, compared to six million Tibetans" (Cook and Murray, 2001: 141). However, such allegations of population transfer is rebutted by the Beijing government, who argues that "the only Han Chinese living in Tibet are specialists who have gone there voluntarily to help in the region's development ... [and they] make up less than five per cent of the population and many of the people are there for only a few years before returning home" (*ibid.*).
 11. As the applicant of poverty relief fund and the last user of the funds, the county (*xian*) is the most important and basic unit in the work of poverty alleviation (Chai *et al.*, 2004: 16).
 12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (1886), translated by R.J. Hollingdale as *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1973), reprinted with revisions and an introduction by Michael Tanner (1990), London: Penguin Books.
 13. 1 *mu* 亩 = 0.0667 hectares.
 14. 东方日报 (*Oriental Daily News/ODN*, Malaysian daily), 26th July 2011.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. *ODN*, 31st May 2011.
 17. Due to the abnormal size of China's population and in particular the size of China's citizens of the Han ethnicity, a distortion or misrepresentation emerges in the application of the term "multiethnic" to China as the country's large populations of minorities – about 110 million in total, including the 16 million Zhuang, 10 million Manchu, 9 million Hui, 8 million Uyghurs, 5 million Mongols and 5 million Tibetans – are practically dwarfed almost to invisibility by the sheer size of the Han population (about 92 per cent of the total population of China). In fact, based on the "critical mass" theory (advanced, among others, by Semyonov and Tyree [1981]), societies are considered multiethnic only if minorities constitute more than ten per cent of their population.
 18. *ODN*, 29th May 2011.

19. *ODN*, 29th May 2011.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Or the “Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party” (“Dotoyadu Mongyol-un Arad-un Qubisqal-un Nam” in Mongolian) which was founded in 1925, allied to the CCP. The party was dissolved in 1946.
22. Such harsh landscape has been the object of lamentation since ancient days, as the Tang 唐 dynasty poet Li Bai 李白 grieved in his immortal poem *Shu Dao Nan* 蜀道难 [Hard Roads in Sichuan]: “Yiyu! Xi! / Wei hu gao zai! / Shu dao zhi nan nan yu shang qingtian ... Huanghe zhi fei shang bude guo / Yuanrou yu du chou panyuan ... Qi xian ye ruo chi / Jie er yuandao zhi ren hu wei hu lai zai? ...” [Oh / but it is high and very dangerous! / Such traveling on the roads of Sichuan is harder than scaling the blue sky ... Such height would be hard going even for a yellow crane / So pity the poor monkeys who have only paws to use ... With all this danger upon danger / Why are you people from far away still coming here? ...]
23. *ODN*, 4th March 2008.
24. Opening words of Thomas Paine’s *The American Crisis*, pamphlet I, 23rd December 1776 (first appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, 19th December 1776).
25. Cited by Tong and Lei (2010: 488), the 2008 figure being from an estimate reported by Andrew Jacobs, “Dragons, Dancing Ones, Set-off a Riot in China”, *New York Times*, 10th February 2009, and an estimate of 90,000 such incidents annually for 2007, 2008, and 2009 being quoted from a Chinese insider by John Garnaut, “China Insider Sees Revolution Brewing”, *Sidney Morning Herald*, 2nd March 2010.
26. The term “xiagang” refers to redundant workers mainly at State enterprises, without directly describing them as “unemployed”. Still officially attached to their work units or enterprises, the *xiagang* workers continue to receive basic minimum subsidies for their living and medical expenses, and are encouraged to change job, probably through State-run job and re-employment centres, or go into small businesses. In line with State enterprise reforms, the number of *xiagang* workers has been on the rise: 4 million in 1995, 8 million in 1996, 12 million in 1997, 16 million in 1998, 20 million in 1999, though dropping to 11 million in 2001. (Zhou, 2006: 289)
27. See Chen (2004: 32), cited in Tong and Lei (2010: 488-489).
28. *ODN*, 13th June 2011, 18th June 2011.
29. *ODN*, 12th June 2011, 18th June 2011.
30. *ODN*, 14th June 2011.
31. In contrast with “free-floating aggression”, the more general concept of “scapegoating” is reserved for the transfer of hostility towards any object (Turner and Killian, 1957:19).
32. Or paraphrasing *Yazhou Zhoukan*, “the hundred days of People Power that made one proud to be a Chinese” (“Preface”, *Yazhou Zhoukan*, 1989: 4).
33. Unlike the Prague Spring of 1968 – which lent its name to the analogous Beijing counterpart a decade later and here again to foreign observers to describe the hundred-day Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989 – that was cut short by invading

foreign troops, the crushing of the 1989 “Beijing Spring” was entirely a domestic affair, described by the Western journalists as the Rape of Peking (Beijing) in an insinuated analogy with the infamous Rape of Nanking (Nanjing 南京) by the Japanese troops in World War II.

34. “The Rape of Peking” (editorial), *Asiaweek*, 16th June 1989.
35. *ODN*, 19th August 2011.
36. See, for instance, Örkesh Dölet’s 8th July 2009 *The Guardian* article “A Declaration of Oppression” <<http://wuerkaixi.com/>>.
37. 世界維吾爾代表大會.
38. “China’s Despair and China’s Hope”, originally appeared in *The New York Review of Books* on 2nd February 1989, translated by Perry Link.
39. See, e.g. Bo (2010). In an interesting attempt at refutation of Minxin Pei’s (2006) claim of CCP’s illegitimacy, Bo set out to repudiate point by point Pei’s arguments which were based upon a series of international indexes which the former listed in details: “China is one of the most authoritarian political systems in the world according to the Polity IV Project, is almost completely ‘unfree’ according to the Freedom House; and is one of the most corrupt countries according to Transparency International. China was ranked in the bottom third of the eighty countries surveyed in terms of ‘quality of governance ranking’ according to one group of the World Bank and was considered a weak state according to another group of the World Bank. China found itself next to the legion of failed states and most repressive countries in terms of ‘voice and accountability’ and also in the company of weak states such as Nicaragua, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Egypt, and Mali in terms of ‘regulatory quality’. China was no better than Namibia, Croatia, Kuwait, and Mexico in terms of ‘government effectiveness’, was comparable to Belarus, Mexico, Tunisia, and Cuba in terms of ‘political stability’, and was in the company of Mexico, Madagascar, and Lebanon in terms of ‘rule of law’.” (Bo, 2010: 102-103, citing Pei, 2006: 5-6)
40. *ODN*, 20th July 2009.
41. After a storm of protest from Chinese intellectuals and academics against the arrest, Ilham Tohti was finally released on 23rd August 2009 (*ODN*, 11th September 2009).
42. *ODN*, 10th July 2009, 15th July 2009, 17th July 2009.
43. *ODN*, 24th April 2011.
44. Such suggestions for China, which vary in arrangement details, include a prominent confederation proposal of a *Chunghua Lienpang Kunghekuo* 中華聯邦共和國 (“Federal Republic of China”), a “Third Republic” – the first republic being the *Chunghua Minkuo* 中華民國 (Republic of China) and the second, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo* 中华人民共和国 (People’s Republic of China) – proposed by Yan Jiaqi 嚴家其 (1992) encompassing the “loose republics” of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang (in an arrangement like that of the European Union) and “close republics” consisting of the rest of present-day China (in an arrangement akin to the US’s). Yan obviously had in mind some sort of coexistence of federal and confederal systems within a single country.

45. Following Professor Zhou Tianyong from the Central Party School, China's authoritarian one-party political system will and should remain unchanged until at least 2037 (Zhou, Wang and Wang (eds), 2007: 2, 6, 45-46).
46. For federal sustainability, see Yeoh (2010b: 616-618).
47. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 9) opined that a transition from authoritarian rule could produce a democracy, but it could also terminate with a liberalized authoritarian regime (*dictablanda*) or a restrictive, illiberal democracy (*democradura*) (see Diamond, 2002: 24).
48. Bo Yibo, the former Chinese vice-premier, was in fact expressing the reformers' feeling towards the lessons of the multiple cycles of administrative decentralization and recentralization in China: "A [more] important and fundamental lesson of the [1958] attempt to improve the economic management system is: We only saw the vices of overcentralization of power, and sought to remedy the situation by decentralizing powers to the lower levels. When we felt too much power had been decentralized, we recentralized them. We did not then recognize the inadequacies of putting sole emphasis on central planning (and in particular a system dominated by mandatory planning) and totally neglecting and denying the role of the market [...] As a result over a long period of time (after the 1958 decentralization) we were trapped within the planned economy model. Adjustments and improvements could only work around the cycles of decentralization and recentralization. Moreover the recipients of more powers are invariably the local governments, rather than enterprises." (Bo Yibo 薄一波, *Ruogan Zhongda Juece yu Shijian de Huigu* 若干重大决策与事件的回顾 [Looking back at some important decisions and events], 1993, p. 804, cited in Li, 2003: 1.)
49. Such as the bloody Han-Hui ethnic conflicts in 2004 and 2007.
50. *ODN*, 23rd March 2009.
51. Thomas Paine's "To My Fellow-Citizens of the United States of American", signed 27th January 1794, that began *The Age of Reason, Part First*.
52. *ODN*, 4th August 2011.
53. *ODN*, 10th September 2011.
54. *ODN*, 11th August 2011.
55. *ODN*, 21st August 2011.
56. *ODN*, 27th June 2011.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *ODN*, 18th August 2011, 19th August 2011.
59. *ODN*, 14th March 2009.
60. *ODN*, 25th June 2009.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefang Jun* 中国人民解放军.
63. *ODN*, 17th March 2009, 22nd March 2009.
64. *ODN*, 19th July 2009.
65. The military junta that rules Burma has officially changed the name of the country in the English language to "Myanmar". Nevertheless, the change has not been endorsed by the National League for Democracy (NLD) that won a landslide victory (80 per cent of parliamentary seats) in the 1990 People's Assembly elections, yet prevented from governing the country to date by

SLORC, or the State Law and Order Restoration Council. SLORC was formed when the Burmese armed forces seized power following the 8888 (8th August 1988) massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators. SLORC was reconstituted, essentially renamed, as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) on 15th November 1997. On 7th November 2010, the junta held Burma's first elections in two decades which it blatantly controlled, restricted and manipulated to retain military domination.

66. "Hong Kong Reporter Being Held By China", *Washington Post* Foreign Service, 30th May 2005. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/29/AR2005052900986.html>>
67. *ODN*, 14th February 2009.
68. Incidentally, both Malaysia and Singapore were recognized as without press freedom, ranked 143rd and 150th respectively, in a year that witnessed world population enjoying press freedom dropping to the nadir of the decade, with only one-sixth of the total world population of 6.7 billion enjoying the basic human right of press freedom (*ODN*, 4th May 2011).
69. *ODN*, 4th May 2011.
70. *ODN*, 9th August 2009.
71. *ODN*, 20th July 2011.
72. *ODN*, 27th June 2011.
73. *ODN*, 4th May 2011.
74. Dubbed "*liiba* 滤霸" [filtering bully], this software was originally scheduled for compulsory installation by 1st July 2009 on all personal computers entering the Chinese market. The attempt was later temporarily postponed following domestic and international outcry, and finally declared on 13th August to be abandoned except for those computers for public access in schools, cybercafés and other public places. (*ODN*, 10th June 2009, 15th August 2009)
75. *ODN*, 2nd July 2009.
76. *ODN*, 24th June 2011.
77. *ODN*, 3rd September 2009.
78. *ODN*, 2nd May 2011.
79. *ODN*, 18th June 2011.
80. *ODN*, 5th September 2011.
81. *ODN*, 2nd May 2011, 6th May 2011.
82. The devastating earthquake that hit the Sichuan Province's Wenchuan 汶川 County, Ngawa 阿坝 *Zizhizhou* 自治州 ("autonomous prefecture") of the Tibetan/Zang 藏 and Qiang 羌 nationalities, and surrounding areas on 12th May 2008 which killed at least 68,000 people and left long-lingering socioeconomic and even political fallout, especially those involving the "tofu-dregs schoolhouses" (*doufuzha xiaoshe* 豆腐渣校舍) scandal, on the country.
83. *ODN*, 23rd June 2011, 24th June 2011, 13th August 2011.
84. Born Francisco Paulino Hermenegildo Teóduo Franco Bahamonde in 1892 in the northwestern Iberian coastal town of El Ferrol.
85. "*Atado, y bien atado* [Tied-up, well tied-up]," ruminated Generalísimo Francisco Franco (*El Caudillo*), prior to his death on 20th November 1975 (cited in Gunther, 1980: 285).

86. See Buckley (1967).
87. “The Rape of Peking” (editorial), *Asiaweek*, 16th June 1989.
88. The structure of political party systems and more specifically their level of internal centralization have been argued to be the determinants of the fiscal structure of the State, i.e. the *degree* of decentralization, in the studies on decentralization as a means for democratizing political regimes and enhancing the efficiency of public policy, its implications for service delivery and democracy, and the political determinants of the process of devolving resources and policy responsibilities to subnational governments (Montero, 2001: 43). In her paper on the case of Latin America, Escobar-Lemmon (2001: 28) noted that at least there “the process of decentralization has come about in parallel to the process of democratization” and the “rationale is that strong subnational power centers will check the national government, consequently preventing the re-emergence of a strong, authoritarian leader nationally.” Thus, according to Escobar-Lemmon, “decentralization becomes a way to avoid political crises and/or democratic breakdown. Given that political decentralization could increase opportunities for democratic participation, there is reason to believe that there is a systematic relationship between decentralization and democratization.” Elaborating on his second fundamental characteristic of a federal system – democratic pluralism both between and within the territorial components – Duchacek (1988: 16-17) drew attention to federalism being a territorial twin of the open democratic society: “Federalism is not compatible with authoritarian socialist and fascist one-party systems and military juntas. If a single party delegates some minor parts of its central power to the territorial components in which single-party rule also prevails, the result is a unitary and centralist system or, at best, an association or league of territorial dictatorships [...] a spatially sectorized unitary system or a confederation of [...] single-party territorial components [...] a territorial dimension of Lenin’s “democratic centralism” – inter-territorial and inter-factional consociationalism of a special kind, but not a federal democracy.”
89. The twice-purged pragmatist and reformist Deng Xiaoping is today one of the most enigmatic figures in the history of China who would both be remembered as the pragmatist saviour of modern China who dealt the *coup de grâce* to Mao’s failed autarkic collectivist utopia in 1978 and the butcher of Beijing who unleashed his deadly wrath upon the “ungrateful” students and other denizens of the ancient capital in 1989.
90. “Beijing” or “Beijing-Tiananmen” is a more appropriate appellation for the massacre than just “Tiananmen”, as most civilian casualties occurred not in the Tiananmen Square but on Beijing streets leading to the square, especially Chang’an Avenue 长安街, when the People’s Liberation Army clashed with Beijing residents and workers trying to protect the student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square during that fateful night of 3rd-4th June 1989.
91. In a way analogous to the French Revolution being hijacked by Maximilien Robespierre’s Reign of Terror. Chen Tu-hsiu’s socialism was but one of the twin manifestations of the May Fourth spirit, the other being liberalism represented by Hu Shih 胡適.

92. While still rudimentary, the rehabilitation and other *de facto* de-Mao programmes, or even the liquidation of the research office of the central Secretariat, and the closing down of left-wing magazines such as *Red Flag*, led the way to further internal structural reform of the CCP in coming days (MacFarquhar, 2009: xxi).
93. Began airing on 16th June 1988, *He Shang*, a six-part television documentary produced by the China Central Television (CCTV), is characterized by its condemnation of China's isolation and admiration of and longing for the openness of Western civilization and modern democracy (Zhao, 2009b: 72, editors' notes # 81). After the June Fourth massacre, CCP denounced the documentary, blamed it for helping to inspire the demonstrations, and according to Zhao Ziyang, attacked him with the claim that he had supported its production, distribution and suppressed criticism against it (Zhao, 2009a: 267-268).
94. The 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations being the first uprising in a the whole series of similar events that led to the demise of authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe countries and Mongolia, the fact that most of these countries were Soviet satellite states with Communist Party rule virtually planted by the USSR rather the result of in the main part homegrown – though foreign-inspired – mass revolutionary movement, and that their 1989-1990 protest movements came after the shocking Beijing massacre all apparently played their roles in the diverse State responses between China and these states, perhaps with the exception of Romania which took a popularly supported palace and army coop to overthrow the hated Communist dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu.
95. Translated from Bao Tong's introduction in Zhao (2009c), pp. 33-34.
96. Spontaneous as the 1989 Tiananmen protests, the "demonstrations that erupted on 4th May 1919 developed into a loose nationalist political movement that was one of the antecedents of the Communist Party's own official foundation in 1921" (Hutton, 2006: 7).
97. Notably too, this was just hardly a year after the anniversary of the posting by Wei Jingsheng, the earlier vanguard of China's democracy movement and an electrician like the Polish labour union activist Lech Walesa who was later elected president of Poland after the fall of the Communist Party dictatorship, of his manifesto "The Fifth Modernization" on the "Democracy Wall" on the morning of 5th December 1978. The State responded by sentencing him to 15 years in prison.
98. *ODN*, 5th May 2011.
99. "Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one [... man] finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property to furnish means for the protection of the rest; and this he is induced to do by the same prudence which in every other case advises him out of two evils to choose the least", said Thomas Paine in the beginning paragraphs of *Common Sense* (1776).
100. According to a report published on China's National Bureau of Statistics website on 14th January 2009, the confirmed 2007 GDP of China at current prices amounted to 25.7306 trillion yuan, an increase of 13 per cent from the previous year (*ODN*, 16th January 2009). While observed to be still short of a third of

US's GDP, analysts had predicted China's GDP to overtake Japan's in three to four years, just as it overtook the United Kingdom and France in 2005 and Germany in 2008. Nevertheless, according to an announcement by Yi Gang 易纲, the director of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange and the deputy governor of China's central bank, the People's Bank of China, on 30th July 2010, China had already superseded Japan to become the world's second largest economy in 2010. However, in terms of GDP per capita, Japan's (US\$37800) was more than 10 times that of China (US\$3600) in year 2009, and Japan's GDP per capita ranking, while having dropped from world's number 2 in 1993 to number 23 by 2008, was still far ahead of China's which ranked beyond 100 (ODN, 9th August 2010).

101. ODN, 1st July 2011.
102. *Ibid.*
103. *Ibid.*
104. ODN, 11th June 2011.
105. *Weiquan* refers to the quest for protecting and defending the civil rights of the citizenry by non-State actors. *Shangfang*, a centuries-old tradition in China, refers to the action of people with grievances who take the last resort of going to Beijing, the capital, to attempt to get their complaints heard against local injustice.
106. *Ibid.*
107. From Fang Lizhi's letter accepting the Peace Prize jointly sponsored by the newspapers *Politiken* of Denmark and *Dagens Nyheter* of Sweden. Fang received the award in absentia in September 1989.
108. Cited in Bertrand Russell (1934), "The Fate of Thomas Paine", in Bertrand Russel (1957), *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, London: George Allen & Unwin, published in Unwin Paperbacks 1975, re-issued 1979, p. 97.
109. Cited in Tilly (1985: 171).
110. Citing Lewis and Xue (2003: 933); Ma (2007); Xu (1999: 1, 168).
111. Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason, Part First* (1794).
112. See Steven Poole's *Unspeak™* (2006) which begins with a description of Confucius' "Rectification of Names".
113. For instance, see Yu (2010) and Lin Chuo-shui 林濁水, "Liu Xiaopo he Wen Chiapao te Minchu Lu 劉曉波和溫家寶的民主路" <<http://gb.udn.com/gb/blog.udn.com/baogon/4499978>>. Lin is a former legislator of Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) (民主進步黨 (民進黨)).
114. Referring to Deng's well-known gradualist dictum "Cross the river by groping the stones" (*Mo zhe shitou guo he* 摸着石头过河).
115. See, e.g. the interview of the exiled dissident Yan Jiaqi 严家其, Zhao's advisor when he was premier, in 2005 <<http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/5/1/30/n798431.htm>>
116. Bertrand Russell (1934), "The Fate of Thomas Paine", in Bertrand Russel (1957), *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, London: George Allen & Unwin, published in Unwin Paperbacks 1975, re-issued 1979, pp. 97. While the epitaph remained unpublished, a long,

bitter letter written by Paine to Washington was published in 1796, ending in these words: “And as to you, Sir, treacherous in private friendship (for so you have been to me, and that in the day of danger) and a hypocrite in public life, the world will be puzzled to decide whether you are an apostate or an imposter; whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you ever had any.” (*ibid.*)

117. *Mencius*, edited and translated with an introduction by D.C. Lau, London: Penguin Books, 2005 (Penguin Classics first published 1970).
118. See, e.g., Qi (2010: 420).
119. *ODN*, 27th July 2011 and 1st August 2011.
120. *ODN*, 30th July 2011.
121. “鐵道部已病入膏肓 溫家寶被迫“以病明志”, 蘋果日報 (*Apple Daily*, Hong Kong), 1st August 2011.
122. The June 1989 tragedy can be observed to be the catalyst of the subsequent authoritarian corporatist evolution and reaffirmation of the path of economic reform (after Deng's *nanxun*) and economic success as realization of the root causes of the tragedy had served to spur the CCP into attempting to reinvent itself as a strong, benevolent and enlightened ruler (i.e. a *dictablanda*), or as Thomas Hobbes referred to in his 1651 treatise, “the generation of that great Leviathan”. “The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another [...] is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will [...] This is the generation of that great Leviathan [...]”, said Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651).
123. On the current crime trend in China, see also Yeoh (2010a: 246-249).
124. *Yazhou Zhoukan* 亞洲週刊, Vol. 22, Issue 27, 13th July 2008, p. 26. The rumours about Li's missing organs, while being perceived as part of the suspected cover-up by the authorities, could be seen as an extension of the long-running allegation of illegal organ harvest from executed prisoners by the State apparatus and the grisly rumours of such harvest from imprisoned Falungong 法輪功 followers.
125. Often ridiculed by the Chinese netizens with its homonym *hexie* 河蟹 (river crab).
126. *Yazhou Zhoukan* 亞洲週刊, Vol. 22, Issue 27, 13th July 2008, p. 4; see also Liu (2009).
127. *ODN*, 28th July 2011.
128. Citing Gilbert (2003: 17).
129. Cited in Sonoda (2010: 352).
130. Cited in Sonoda (2010: 352).
131. China's detailed class structure is represented in Yang (2010: 436, Table 1) as follows (2006 figures): leading cadres and government officials (2.3% of total population), managerial personnel (1.3%), private entrepreneurs (2.6%, in general referring to individually owned, family based or shareholding firms with eight or more employees, plus joint ventures and wholly foreign-owned firms, but the focus is on Chinese domestic, private entrepreneurs), professionals (6.3%), clerical workers (7.0%), self-employed (9.5%, *getihu* – in general referring to

- individual entrepreneurs who employ fewer than eight employees), sales and service workers (10.1%), manual workers (14.7%), agricultural labour (50.4%), semi-employed/unemployed (5.9%).
132. Citing Dickson (2007).
 133. Cited in Benton (2010: 324).
 134. Despite rumoured allegation that some cases could be murders linked to the factory security office (大纪元时报 (*The Epoch Times* (Malaysia)), Issue 93, June 2010).
 135. *ODN*, 21st July 2010 and 6th August 2010.
 136. *ODN*, 20th July 2011.
 137. Or “WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!”, this rallying cry forms the final sentence of *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, German edition, 1872 (translated by Samuel Moore, 1888, Penguin Books, London, 1967, 1985, p. 121).
 138. Anita Chan, “Labor Unrest and Role of Unions”, *China Daily*, 18th June 2010 (cited in Benton, 2010: 327).
 139. Anita Chan, “Labor Unrest and Role of Unions”, *China Daily*, 18th June 2010 (cited in Hannan, 2010: 406).
 140. Later identified as a young man named Wang Weilin 王维林, whose fate remains unknown to date.
 141. Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Ruiz y Picasso (25th October 1881 – 8th April 1973). *Guernica* (1937), arguably Picasso’s most famous work, is his portrayal of the German bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War.
 142. Usually translated as “Blood-stained Glory” but literally “blood-stained elegance”, a song written in 1987 originally to commemorate those who died during the Sino-Vietnamese War, the melancholic tune came to be a hymn to the determined but forlorn struggle of the hunger strikers during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.
 143. Describing Franquist Spain, Gunther (1980: 2) stated, “The ultimate source of political authority was the Caudillo, himself. Officially a single-party authoritarian state, it can best be regarded as a no-party regime.”
 144. See, e.g., Hutton (2006: 8, 98, 144-148).
 145. Cited in Tong and Lei (2010: 499).
 146. Cited in Benton (2010: 321).
 147. For the application Green’s model to the China context, see Yeoh (2010a: 271), Figure 19.

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