

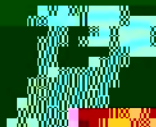


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# China Elections and Governance Review



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November 11, 2009

Dear Readers:

On October 1, 2009, China celebrated the 60-year anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic with a massive parade intended to showcase the country's military might, social stability, political unity and ethnic harmony. However, manifestations of social unrest have continued to hinder Chinese leaders in their efforts to project this image of a stable and unified society. Protests and riots highlight the public's frustration with official corruption, social injustice, and economic inequality in certain sectors of society. Massive riots in Xinjiang Autonomous Region, coming only a year after similar riots in Tibet, have diminished the image of harmonious coexistence between the Han and ethnic minority populations. Although the government response to these "mass incidents" has typically been to focus on the manifestations rather than the causes, central and local governments have begun to identify more holistic measures geared toward crisis prevention rather than crisis management. Such endeavors have been particularly evident in the efforts of the central and local governments to promote greater governmental transparency and openness with the media and its citizens.

In this quarter's *China Elections and Governance Review*, contributing authors Jennifer Grace Smith, Jason Kyriakides, Charlotte Milner-Barry, and Justine Zheng Ren explore impetuses for social unrest in China and the ways in which increased government openness, between the government and the people, in intra-governmental relations, and with the media can work to prevent outbreaks of social violence and strengthen China's international image. CEG editors have also included an article that is representative of many discussions taking







It is this last—“noise”—that is most important to this discussion of breakdowns in communication and lack of transparency in dealings between the center and local governments. Wedeman defines noise as “information that has been distorted in the process of collection and transmission” and argues that this noise “creates additional complications because well-intentioned agents may misunderstand the principal’s orders and do the wrong thing. Noise also makes it difficult for the principal to determine if her orders have been correctly carried out and, if not, whether the failure results from incompetence, bad luck, or willful disobedience.”<sup>10</sup> This ambiguity creates a certain amount of uncertainty for decision makers at the center, leading them to incorrectly label an act of willful disobedience as a product of bad luck or incompetence, to falsely accuse innocent parties, and to eventually become cautious when dealing with local officials. This atmosphere of ambiguity and central government caution “creates conditions in which cadres can take advantage of the center’s uncertainty to engage in willful disobedience” and, moreover, “create a situation in which automatic punishments may prove dysfunctional or impossible.”<sup>11</sup>

In this environment, which is structurally prone to a high level of noncompliance on the part of local officials and undergoing rapid transitions that blur the economic powers and responsibilities of local gov-

ernments, corruption has become a mounting problem and a constant threat to the regime’s legitimacy. The Peterson study observes that although level of corruption rose dramatically in China during the 1980s and 1990s, it seems to have become more of a persistent threat rather than a mounting crisis in recent years. According to international watchdogs such as Transparency International and the PRS Group, the corruption perception index, which measures experts’ evaluations of corruption in different countries, plateaued for China during the late 1990s and early 2000s. China’s perceived level of corruption is still very high. In 2008, it ranked 72nd out of 180 countries, with an index of 3.6 (0.1 higher than in 2007), with Denmark, New Zealand, and Sweden scoring highest with indices of 9.3.<sup>12</sup>

*China’s perceived level of corruption is still very high. In 2008, it ranked 72nd out of 180 countries, with an index of 3.6.*

### **Corruption and mass incidents**

In the same years in which the perception of corruption in China has remained at a high level, the number of what the Chinese government terms “mass incidents,” which encompasses mass protests, demonstrations, strikes, riots, and large outbreaks of violence, has risen sharply. In 2005, China’s Public Security Ministry reported 87,000 mass incidents, which was up 6% over the 2004 figure and up 50% over the 2003 figure.<sup>13</sup> In an article on People’s Daily Online, Dr. Yu Debao observes that, according to China’s 2005 *So-*

*ciety Blue Book*, between 1993 and 2003, the number of recorded mass incidents increased from 10,000 to 60,000, and the number of participants increased from 730,000 people to approximately 3,070,000. Yu also suggests that the participants come from diverse backgrounds, have different reasons for their protest, and direct their protests at different targets, depending on the situation.<sup>14</sup> After 2005, the government ceased to issue statistics on mass incidents, making further analysis of trend lines impossible.

A common line of thinking in the West suggests that these incidents are rooted in public dissatisfaction with authoritarian rule and agitation for political reform. Such a reading of the situation would lead observers to believe that the agitators will not be satisfied without regime change. However, evidence suggests that this is not the cause in the overwhelming majority of cases. According to Wang Erping of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Psychology, mass incidents should not be interpreted as attempts to "rebel against or overthrow the government," but rather as instances of "ordinary Chinese people wanting to put pressure on local governments to solve problems or improve situations."<sup>15</sup> Wang's research also reveals that protesting and rioting served as a last resort for most Chinese: "His team's survey of almost 10,000 ordinary Chinese carried out between 2004 and last year showed that if

*...the number of recorded mass incidents increased from 10,000 to 60,000...number of participants increased from 730,000 to 3,070,000*

faced with grievances, a majority said they preferred to settle the matter privately or through legal and 'proper' channels, rather than resort to violent means."<sup>16</sup>

Reasons for protest are highly related to social factors and injustices that directly affect protesters' lives, not least of which is corruption. Yu Debao and fellow social scientist at the China Academy of Social Sciences and expert in rural affairs, Yu Jianrong, agree that participants in mass incidents are motivated by several factors:

First, the gap between rich and poor is widening. The gap includes not only income inequality, but also other factors such as access to education. The mass incidents demonstrate a strong dissatisfaction with these inequalities. Second, bu-

reaucracy and corruption cause tension between cadres and the populace. Some local cadres don't listen to the voice of the masses and demonstrate an indifference to their plight. Little grievances gradually evolve into large ones, which then trigger mass incidents.<sup>17</sup>

The perception of local government corruption, along with a large equality gap and the perception that the government is either indifferent to the corrupt actions or is actively involved in covering them up to protect the corrupt at the expense of the victims, inflicts further psychological damage on victims and leads to deep distrust of local officials, the effects of which



could spill over to threaten the legitimacy of officials at the center. However, as corruption and the occurrence of mass incidents are very carefully covered (if they are covered at all) by Chinese traditional media, these factors would not be nearly as potent a challenge to government authority if not for one other, relatively new factor: the rise of new media and the government's resulting loss of control over the narrative.

### **New media and the loss of the “narrative”**

There is no way for the Chinese government to completely control the narrative any longer, as the limited pluralism that existed under the authoritarian state before the introduction of more sophisticated and ever-evolving information technology has been expanded in seemingly uncontrollable ways. The rise of the internet and web 2.0 ensures that local corruption and mass incidents that would have remained local knowledge ten years ago are now blogged about throughout the country and reported on throughout the world. However, in instances of attempted government cover-up, or in which the government offers as explanation only the official party line, which consumers of new media can see does not correspond with evidence from Youtube videos or eye-witness tweets, the government loses even more authority over the interpreta-

tion of events, both domestically and internationally. The spring 2008 mass unrest in Tibet, followed by government lockdown of the region and refusal to deviate from the party line, is one example of such a loss of authority.

Moreover, the internet and globalized media assure that information concerning sensitive events will be released to the public, regardless of the accuracy of the information. If the government guards its information when faced with such crises, it risks losing control of the narrative to inaccurate information, rumor, and state-

*There is no way for the Chinese government to completely control the narrative any longer*

ments from government rivals eager to fill the information vacuum. The release of sometimes limited information from non-official sources, and without any official story to corroborate or deny, will be much less likely to depict a positive image



*Media regulations and press management*

Certain cities, such as Chongqing, took an early lead in enacting media regulation to serve as a conflict resolution mechanism. In his analysis of the Chongqing municipal government's response to the 2008 Chongqing taxi driver strike within the context of the city's 2004 "Interim Measures of Chongqing Municipality on Open Government Affairs Information," Steve Hess discusses the government's attempts to manage media relations and provide more resources for the state media:

"The Chinese government has, when faced with serious domestic disturbances, adopted a more open media approach. This stance, first outlined by President Hu Jintao in a June 2008 speech, calls for official state media to seize the initiative by undertaking quick, on-the-spot reporting, allowing for Chinese state media, rather than commercial or foreign media outlets, to "actively set the agenda" and frame the developing story."<sup>20</sup>

The recently passed "Shenzhen Municipal People's Government Regulations on News Release Work," to go into effect December 1, 2009, is in line with the central government's public relations and message control strategies, calling for the establishment of a press office in the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government, which "shall be responsible for relevant institution building and for promoting, coordinating, guiding, and monitoring news releases."<sup>21</sup> This willingness on the part of local governments to experiment with different methods of press manage-

ment bodes well for the national implementation of similar measures in the future.

*Public engagement in the deliberative process*

Different localities are also experimenting with increasing government transparency through including the public in the deliberative process. In his discussion of the Chongqing government's methods of dealing with the striking taxi drivers, Hess describes the way in which the government took the lead not only in managing the press and promoting access to information, but also in dealing with incidents of social unrest in a more open fashion, by engaging openly in deliberations with protesters and airing the deliberations to the public. Hess describes the positive impact this more inclusive deliberative process might have on the resolution of conflicts before they devolve into mass incidents:

"Importantly, the public hearing system applied in this situation moved debates over public concerns from the streets to the boardroom, encouraging the use of formal rather than extra-legal channels for venting public grievances. It may well indicate that public deliberation between aggrieved parties and officials within formal deliberative institutions may become a frequent component of conflict resolution responses at various levels of government and in other areas of the PRC."<sup>22</sup>

The successful resolution of this conflict using these more open deliberative me-

thods suggests that inviting the public to engage in the deliberative process, and thereby giving frustrated citizens a channel through which to voice complaints about corruption, injustice, or economic issues, can serve to limit manifestations of social unrest and instill a greater sense of trust and respect between the public and government officials.

very forward-thinking measures, but other governments will not attempt to implement the measures in any serious way.

- 3) Although the government has established a sophisticated system of channels through which to disseminate government information to the public, the government has been less responsive to the public's requests for access to specific government information and in creating a channel for two-way dialogue between government officials and the public.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of these concerns, if the current steps toward government transparency succeed in creating a culture of increased openness and trust between the public and government, the government should become more willing to strengthen legislation to strengthen bidirectional channels of communication in order to root out corruption and resolve social issues before they develop into demonstrations of social unrest.



## Notes

1. "The People's Republic of China Open Government Information regulations" were enacted May 1, 2008. To see the full English translation of the Act, see [http://www.chinaelections.net/UploadFile/2008\\_5/mc\\_2723153857356.pdf](http://www.chinaelections.net/UploadFile/2008_5/mc_2723153857356.pdf)
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6. Peterson Institute for International Economics, "Corruption in China: Crisis or Constant?", *China's Rise*, p. 93.
7. Andrew Wedeman, "Incompetence, Noise, and Fear in Central-Local Relations in China," *Studies in International Development*. Winter 2001, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 59.
8. Ibid
9. Ibid, p. 80.
10. Ibid, p. 60.
11. Ibid
12. The corruption perception index is a composite index that draws on four-



# What is “Mass Incident”?

## The Categorization and Deconstruction of a Dangerous Concept

*By Justine Zheng Ren*



Whether the Chinese government is prepared to accept it or not, mass incidents (the official term for manifestations of civil unrest in China) have proved to be an inescapable social and political phenomenon. After a long period of economic boom with little investment in institutional change, the current conflict resolution mechanisms are no longer capable of sustaining the changing social structure and political relationships in contemporary China. This is not to say that the Chinese ruling party will crack down on the imminent challenges it faces, because none of the indicators of a revolution have been present thus far. However, the way in which the Chinese government deals with these so-called “mass incidents” will determine the future of the country and the fate of the regime. It is particularly important to disentangle the totalistic concept of the mass incident and introduce differentiating mechanisms to resolve social

conflicts represented in the phenomenon of civil unrest. This paper attempts to deconstruct the mass incident phenomenon, discusses current measures designed to prevent the occurrence of mass incidents, and makes suggestions for more impactful preventative strategies.

### **Statistics on Mass Incidents**

Yu Jianrong, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), indicates that the number of mass incidents was decupled from 8,709 in 1993 to 87,000 in 2005, among which 80% of the events were defined by Yu as rights activism while only 5.1% were influential riots. A further decomposition shows that mass incidents staged respectively by farmers, workers and urbanites take up 35%, 36% and 15% of rights movements.<sup>1</sup> In a collaborative paper, three scholars from Tsinghua University show that the growth of mass incidents soared from an annual average rate of increase of 10% between

1995 and 1996 to an incredible rate of 25.5% during the period from 1997 to 2004, with the number of participants dramatically climbing from around 730,000 to 3.76 million.<sup>2</sup> From the above data, it is obvious that riots only occupy a small portion of mass incidents. The fundamental reason for the proliferation of mass incidents is the frequent encroachment on the interests of the middle and lower classes, coupled with a lack of appropriate and effective conflict-resolving mechanisms.

It also remains rather problematic to equate a riot with a political attack on the regime; it is more helpful to understand riots as responses to the decreasing credi-



fair sense. This means that the escalation and diversification of collective actions are to some extent ineluctable unless institutional set-ups can be reshaped in a way to favor the disadvantaged group and restrict rent seeking and official dissipation.

The rights movements in contemporary China can be divided into three major categories, each defined by its distinctive group of participants. First, rights movements staged by farmers: Chen Xiwen, the Director of the Central Government Working Group on Rural Affairs, concludes in a briefing meeting in 2009 that mass incidents staged by farmers focus on four concrete issues: (1) land expropriation; (2) environmental pollution; (3) enforced migration; (4) disposition of collective property.<sup>3</sup>

Second, labor movements: This type of social disruption can be further classified into three sub-groups according to their specific trajectory of group formation. In this regard, the study of Ching Kwan Lee, professor of sociology at UCLA, is particularly illuminating. Lee identifies three transformation modes of the working class: the formation of migrant rural labor, the reshaping of socialist workers, and the unmaking of the laid-off workers.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, different characteristics and a myriad of tensions, brought into the transformation process by different sub-groups of the working class, will lead to diverse manifestations of mass inci-

dents. As Lee finds, workers in the “rust-belt” of socialist-heavy industries take part more often in street protests and public disruption. These workers are experts in venting their grievances in the language of social contract and their desperation mainly comes from downward social mobility

*The rights movements in contemporary China can be divided into three major categories, each defined by its distinctive group of participants.*



dent,” was created to describe an attendant social and political phenomenon. With the rapid growth of netizens, and due to strict censorship of the traditional media, the Internet has become the main avenue for Chinese citizens to express their concerns for public interests. This intangible force has successfully evolved into an interventionist power— influencing policy making by serving as a significant indicator of public opinion and fostering multi-regional, multi-group civil activities.<sup>11</sup>

The myriad causes of mass online incidents make categorization almost impossible. They range from public challenges to

ing,” and “expression of public interests” –into the mainstream media. The question is whether this filtering actually works. It all depends on whether the elimination of such words is possible in the vast spectrum of public discourse. However, the danger of such purposeful ambiguity is apparent—it blurs the boundaries within the term “mass incident” and blends different objectives and causes under an overarching structure. Consequently, this will lead parties involved in conflict resolution to favor a dangerously simplistic and mechanistic view in handling the so-called “mass incidents.”

If one were to input two terms in Chinese, “mass incident” (*quntixing shijian*) and “prevention measures” (*yu'an*), into the search engine Google, one would find more than 280,000 search results. Governments at all administrative levels—provincial, municipal, county, township, and even village—have formulated specific prevention measures for the potential outbreak of mass incidents. Many government agencies and publically-funded organizations have also adopted similar rules and regulations – including the bureau of intellectual property, organization for vocational training, and even kindergartens. Most of the measures only stress tactics to prevent the “masses” from attacking government agencies, organizing collective petitions, setting up road blocks, and intercepting the cadres’ sedans, and make no mention of solutions to the substantial problems hidden behind these bursts of unrest. The key mechanism of such preventative measures is to link the

number of mass incidents to the performance of local cadres, and to ready resources (material, manpower, information, violence) for use in repressing the incident. The core resource, by far, is the deployment of police and the armed police force (including all equipment, vehicles and weapons).

These plans may lead to a transient period of calm, at least on a superficial level, but the potential obstacles for the Chinese government in achieving long-term satisfaction are obvious: (1) By applying more pressure on local cadres’ to perform in a certain way in handling mass incidents, but failing to implement corresponding micro-institutional changes, how can local cadres be expected not to abuse their coercive power in order to quell dissent and secure their positions? (2) How can a complicated social and political phenomenon arising from structural disruption, dubbed “mass incident,” be prevented and repressed, while the definition of the phenomenon remains so ambiguous? Both of these questions must be answered directly if these measures are to have any hope of succeeding.

## Notes

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5. Lee, Ching Kwan, 2007. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
6. A recent journal article illustrates vividly the disempowered status of Chinese social elites excluded from institutionalized politics. "The Story of the Rich's Rights Activism" (Nanfang Daily, 28-Feb-2008) reports how the social elites in one of the most luxurious residence communities in Suzhou, accustomed to feeling superior and proud of their social status and wealth, realized their disempowerment and redefine themselves as a disadvantaged group in the process of rights activism.
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light-industrial economies. As such, workers in these provinces face fewer SOE layoffs. However, these areas often do not get the same level of investment from the central government that other areas do, so

*...mass incidents are forcing governments at the local, provincial and central levels to respond with legislation and action.*





“...adhering to people-based [journalism] ( ), increasing the affinity ( ), attractiveness ( ) and appeal ( ) of news reports...new news work must...accommodate new changes to the situation in and outside China, keep in tune with the new expectations of the people and doing our work well with a spirit of reform and renewal”. (Bandurski, “Propaganda Leaders”)

This language suggests that despite continuing its longtime media tactic of censoring content that goes against the Party line, the Party was looking for new ways to “guide public opinion” and to make the center more trusted in the wake of the Weng’an incident. Hu’s speech made journalists both wary and hopeful. Some interpreted it as an announcement of greater government intervention in the media, with a new government strategy of proffering a “first response” to news stories, ahead of any possible dissenting voices. Others interpreted the speech as pushing for a relaxation of censorship and coverage restrictions. While it is difficult to gather much from the vague language about “keeping in tune with the new expectations of the people,” Hu’s emphasis on the need to cater to the people’s need for information suggests that the government is willing to take a more open stance with the media, at least to a certain degree.

### **Case Study 2: Shishou Protests, June 2009**

Almost one year after the riots in Weng’an, a wave of protests took place in Shishou

in response to another mysterious death, with similarly significant effects on media coverage and government response to mass incidents. This time, however, the central government’s reaction to the protests reversed the forward trend in government transparency during mass incidents, prompting critical words from even state news sources.

On June 17, 2009, the body of a chef for the government-run Yonglong Hotel in Shishou, Hubei Province, fell from the building’s upper floors to the sidewalk below. The man was Tu Yuangao, a 24-year-old new hire who had been working at the hotel for four months. Tu’s parents were told that Tu had committed suicide and left behind a suicide note. The circumstances were suspicious, however – Tu had spoken with his parents just before his death, and they were unaware of any suicidal plans or feelings. Furthermore, there were no bloodstains where Tu fell, but his body was covered in bruises that suggested he had been beaten before falling (Ouyang).

The day after Tu’s death, the hotel offered his family a deal: if they would agree to label the death a suicide and keep quiet about it, they would receive 35,000 yuan for burial costs. The family refused and stayed with the body to protect it from being taken away. Two thousand residents of Shishou joined them in blocking



*...the Shishou riots*

ernment is beginning to publicly admit the pollution problem, and is taking action in a growing number of cases. After a Jiangsu firm known as Biaoxin Chemical Company poisoned a river in the city of Yangcheng in August, the company boss was sentenced to 11 years in prison for criminal negligence, in the first ever sentencing in China for environmental crimes (*Xinhua* “Chemical Company Boss”). But because such examples are still few and far between, government action regarding transparency is still meager, and protests of government inaction on environmental regulation are on the rise.

On July 29 and 30, protests broke out in the farming town of Zhentou, Hunan province, over the pollution of soil and groundwater with heavy metals from the nearby Xianghe Chemical Plant. The plant had been producing polluting materials for several years, but Xianghe had been concealing its produce from the villagers, telling them the factory was manufacturing food additives. When a government team was dispatched to check the health claims of the Zhentou villagers, 509 of them were found to have cadmium poisoning. The government did provide a small compensation for villagers affected by the poisoning. However, for most villagers, the compensation was not nearly enough to cover medical bills. The final straw came one week before the first protest, when a villager died suddenly and was found to have nearly nine times the maximum level of cadmium in his blood (*China Worker* “Pollution Protests”).

The protests featured more than 1,000 villagers (about a third of Zhentou’s

*Shaanxi*

When similar grievances over heavy metal poisoning arose in the central province of Shaanxi just a few weeks after the protests in Hunan, the local government took a more proactive stance in dealing with the causes of the crisis. The government's lack of openness with the media, however, suggests that officials were more concerned with saving face than with spreading awareness of the issue that could help in other areas with similar problems.

After a parent in the city of Baoji discovered her child had serious lead poisoning during a routine check-up, medical staff at Xi'an Central Hospital gave examinations to the children of Baoji. The results were grim: more than 300 children were found to have dangerous levels of lead in their blood, with the number reaching more than 800 a week later (*Xinhua*, "Smelter to Close"). The blame was put on the nearby Shaanxi Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Plant, whose massive metal refining accounted for a significant portion of the county's total GDP.

Though most of the plant was shut down immediately after the lead poisoning was discovered, one section (out of five) remained in operation. Believing there was an unspoken contract between the plant and the government, infuriated parents of the hospitalized children and hundreds of supporters took to the streets. They tore down the fences of the Dongling offices, attacked their vehicles with stones and broke their desks and windows. The violence stopped when the mayor of Baoji,

Dai Zhengshe, arrived on the scene to announce that the plant would be immediately and fully closed. The mayor's office also created a health program to educate children on how to protect themselves from lead poisoning that would run in all elementary schools. Furthermore, the Provincial Environmental Protection Department created a 500,000 RMB fund for the rehabilitation of families and lands harmed by the lead pollution (*Xinhua*, "Smelter to Close").

On the surface, the Shaanxi case is a better example than the Hunan case of the government properly addressing a case of groundwater poisoning. The 600 families in Baoji were moved from their poisoned area to a clean area, the factory was closed, and there have been free health programs set up to care for those who were poisoned. But while everything else was done right, when BBC reporters came to Shaanxi to interview villagers affected by the lead pollution, they were blocked by local police, and an official told them that they could not enter the village despite their special permits from the central government (Somerville). This is a reminder that while provincial and prefectural governments are improving their responses to major disasters, and although the central government seems willing to provide a more open atmosphere for foreign media, many local governments continue to hold the view that news coverage, especially from foreign journalists, is embarrassing, dangerous and should be prevented, slowing the transition to a more transparent presentation of policymaking in China.



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**September 4, 2008**

**Jishou, Hunan Province:** 10,000 people poured into the streets of the city to call for the restitution of money taken "fraudulently" by a fundraising company.

**September 4, 2008**

**Ningbo, Zhejiang Province:** 10,000 demonstrators attacked a factory, calling for justice for a young man who, according to witnesses, was thrown from one of its windows, suffering numerous injuries.

**November 7, 2008**

**Bao'an District, Shenzhen, Guangdong Province:** More than 2,000 people assembled outside the Shiyan Traffic Police Office, protesting with a corpse in tow. They smashed objects and set off firecrackers during an evening of disturbance.

**November 17, 2008**

**Longnan City, Gansu Province:** Up to 2,000 people attacked the local Communist Party headquarters in protest over a land dispute.

**November 25, 2008**

**Dongguan City, Guangdong Province:** An event that began as a pay dispute at a southern Chinese toy factory quickly turned into a riot as laid-off workers tapped into a network of friends and unemployed laborers, who flipped over a police car, stormed into the plant and smashed office computers.

**December 9, 2008**

**Shanghai:** Over 1,000 workers staged a rare sit-in protest outside a Shanghai factory Tuesday in the latest sign of strain in China's manufacturing industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis. The workers were protesting because managers at the computer and telecoms equipment factory had failed to fully pay at least six months' worth of overtime, bonuses and benefits, one of the organizers said.

**June 15, 2009**

**Nankang City, Jiangxi Province:** Thousands of people gathered in front of Nankang City Hall and the furniture mall on Highway 105. People refused to disperse when the police arrived, and ten police cars were overturned.

**June 17-20, 2009**

**Shishou County, Hubei Province:** A hotel chef's strange death caused tens of thousands of people to gather and block the road. Although local police claimed Tu's death was a suicide, foul play was believed to be involved and crowds were angered by what they alleged to be cronyism, illegal drug trafficking, and lack of transparency from the city's top officials. Protesters started gathering outside the hotel Friday and clashed with the police for two days. The incident later became a mass riot involving more than 10,000 people and 10,000 police officers.







or unclear events that occurred during the Tibet riots. The article states that eighteen civilians and one police officer were killed while 623 people, including 241 police and armed police, were injured. The article goes on to give an estimation of the damage costs and fatalities from each region where the protests occurred. The article also covers the exact origins of the riots, claiming, “The monks were invective and aggressive, and confronted with the security forces. In the Sera Monastery, ten monks held up flags of the so-called Tibetan exile government and shouted “Tibetan independence.””<sup>8</sup> The varying accounts of the number of deaths, the debate over which party is to be held accountable, and the origins of the riots

*...at the same time,  
this lack of international  
access led to rumors and misin-  
formation both do-  
mestically and abroad*

dent: “If you read the foreign media, the only message you can get is that China is very heavy-handed, and they are doing a lot of bad things in Tibet, and they are totally out of their minds...and [the foreign media] talk about the Dalai Lama as if he’s God.”<sup>14</sup>

The intervention and response to the Tibetan riots was not an unusual way for Beijing to deal with mass incidents. During the initial protests on March 10, many protesters were rounded up and arrested simply for picketing. Within the next two days monasteries had been shut down to prevent large gatherings. Despite these pre-





and a curfew was imposed. However,





## Notes

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<p><b>July 6<sup>th</sup></b></p> <p>Local official issues statement. Invitations sent to foreign media to come and cover the riots.</p>	<p><b>March 14<sup>th</sup></b></p> <p>Riots escalate; Chinese police force arrives.</p>
<p><b>July 7<sup>th</sup></b></p> <p>Government arranges hotel for International media where Internet works.</p>	<p><b>March 15<sup>th</sup></b></p> <p>Chinese authorities forbid foreigners from entering Tibet and coerce journalists to leave.</p>
<p><b>July 10<sup>th</sup></b></p> <p>Government facts and figures released.</p>	<p><b>March 18<sup>th</sup></b></p> <p>Last foreign journalist leaves Lhasa. Government facts not released until March 25<sup>th</sup></p>

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Day 6

## "Teach a Man How to Fish": the Solution to Mass Incidents

*By Yu Liu, translated by Kai Zhou*



*[About the author: Dr. Yu Liu is a lecturer at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests include Chinese revolution, political economy of post-communist transition, comparative democratization and globalization. Dr. Yu Liu received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in 2006.]*

"Mass incidents" have become an increasingly hot topic in China. From the beginning of this year, we have witnessed the Suqian demolition incident in Jiangsu Province, the Shishou riot in Hubei Province, and the Tong Gang incident in Jilin Province. Indeed, mass incidents are occurring one after another as social tensions continue to rise.

Mass incidents are not necessarily a bad thing. The public has demands to make and needs to express those demands. This is a very common phenomenon for a modern society and can even be considered a positive sign of the awakening awareness of civic rights. If we look at the world around us, we can see that mass incidents are unavoidable in an open society. For instance, in April of this year,

there was a massive demonstration during the G20 summit in London, which was a mass incident with tens of thousands of people involved. The French people are also loyal fans of mass incidents. Strikes, protests and demonstrations happen all the time. Mass incidents have almost become a regular feature of French culture. During a visit to France this March, I arrived just in time to find that the Versailles palace staff were on strike and we couldn't go in, meaning that my long journey had been in vain.

For this reason, there is no need to turn pale when mass incidents are discussed. As long as mass incidents are peaceful, they are just a way to express the demands of the public, such as in the taxi drivers' strike in Chongqing, or the private school teachers' petition in Zhengzhou. Just as a person needs a variety of bodily symptoms in order to assess her health, and thus adjust her diet and daily routine accordingly, governments also require that the public constantly update them with "symptoms," so that they can adjust policies accordingly. The occurrence of a mass incident is one of those symptoms.

However, the frequency, intensity and violence of recent mass incidents have led observers to worry about the extent to which these incidents involved citizens seeking dialogue, and the extent to which they involved people seeking merely to vent their anger.

One must understand that the public has never been monolithic. There are moderates and radicals—the former seeks a





and future development. As we all know, people tend to be reckless only when they can do so. People tend to be reckless only when they can do so. People tend to be reckless only when they can do so.

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