
MOUNTING CHALLENGES TO GOVERNANCE IN CHINA: SURVEYING COLLECTIVE PROTESTORS, RELIGIOUS SECTS AND CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Social discontents and public disorder are not new to post-1978 China. The Tiananmen tragedy of June 1989 demonstrates how social forces can pose a formidable challenge, both spontaneous and organized, to the Leninist state. With the further intensification of transitional reforms, the level of social instability in China has been rising unabated ever since. The state of affairs since the late 1990s in particular points to a situation that calls overall governance into serious question.¹ The failed attempt to establish the Democratic Party as an organized

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¹ For Chinese publications on this theme, see Li Liangdong and Hou Shaowen, *Wending: yadao yiqie de daju* (Stability: The Foremost Goal that Overrides Everything Else) (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1999); Guojia jihua weiyuanhui (State Planning Commission), *Woguo shehui wending zhuangkuang genzong fenxi* (Detailed Analysis of Social Stability in China) (Beijing: The Macroeconomic Research Institute, March 1999); Han Mingmo, *Shehui fazhan yu wending* (Social Development and Stability) (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 2001); Ma Jianzhong, *Zhengzhi wendinglun* (On Political Stability) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehuikexue Chubanshe, 2003); Zhang Xianglin, *Wendinglun* (Theory of Stability) (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxuan Chubanshe, 2004); and Lai Hongyi, *Hu Wen quan toudi* (Hu-Wen under Full Scrutiny) (Hong Kong: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 2005). Pertinent English materials include Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds), *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2000); David Shambaugh (ed.), *Is China Unstable?* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2000); Greg Austin, "China's Power: Searching for Stable Domestic Foundations", in Yongjin Zhang and Greg Austin (eds), *Power and Responsibility in Chinese Foreign Policy* (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2001),

opposition to the Communist Party, intermittent efforts to set up independent labor unions, the blitzkrieg challenge by Falun Gong, the quiet spread of criminal organizations, and the ever-increasing frequency and size of collective protests nationwide jointly challenge the authority and legitimacy of the Communist regime.

While there is a fast-growing literature on this theme, much of it ends up echoing the same argument that societal challenges are becoming increasingly serious to the extent that not only effective governance but even regime survival may be at risk. Problematic is the fact that many of these assessments are made on the basis of fragmented and anecdotal evidence without providing systematic and empirical grounds for their claims.² This article seeks to fill the void by tackling the descriptive questions concerning where social instability originates and how it has evolved over time, particularly since the 1990s.

This study focuses upon three dimensions of social instability in China: (1) intensifying popular—both rural and urban—protests as a manifest challenge to state authority; (2) the rise of “unofficial” religious groups that continue to flourish despite the government’s conscious efforts to curtail them; and (3) the expanding criminal networks that defy the law and undermine the state’s governance capacity. While each of these three dimensions is crucial in itself, they may also jointly threaten political and social stability—with religious sects providing “spiritual guidance” and criminal organizations offering grass-roots collusion and logistics to intensify the impact of large-scale collective protests.

Chinese history is replete with cases where religious sects became rallying points and even platforms for organized forces to confront the state. Religious sects—often combined with secret societies and criminal organizations—were the main driving force for the Yellow Eyebrow Rebellion that seriously undermined the Former Han, the Red Turban Rebellion that toppled the Yuan, and the White Lotus and Taiping Rebellions that shook up the Qing Imperial Court. Secret societies—often consisting of criminal elements—also took on a crucial role as social protestors.³

ch. 4; Murray Scot Tanner, “China Rethinks Unrest”, *The Washington Quarterly*, No. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 137-56; Jude Howell (ed.), *Governance in China* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Peter Gries and Stanley Rosen (eds), *State and Society in 21st Century China: Crisis, Contention and Legitimation* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); and Jae Ho Chung (ed.), *Charting China’s Future: Political, Social and International Dimensions* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

² See, for instance, Kang Xiaoguang, “Weilai 3-5 nian Zhongguo dalu zhengzhi wending fenxi” (Analysis of Political Stability in Mainland China for the Coming Three to Five Years), *Zhanlue yu guanli* (Strategy and Management), No. 3 (2002), pp. 1-15.

³ See Qin Baoqi and Tan Songlin, *Zhongguo mimi shehui* (Secret Societies in China) (Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 2002), Vol. 1, pp. 123-35. For an overview of rebellions involving religious sects in imperial China, refer to relevant chapters in Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (eds), *Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), Vols. 1-13; Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China* (New Haven: Yale

Despite repeated crackdowns and restrictions, autonomous Catholic and Christian churches and sects of all types have survived state suppression for centuries, including the total ban on all religions during the Cultural Revolution.⁴ It can be argued that religious sects are among the best-organized groups and pose one of the most enduring challenges to the Chinese state. China has also undergone a significant increase of criminality in both the state and society. It may be under the double curse of both the Leninist ideological legacies that led to Russian-style *Mafiyas* and the more traditional “black gold politics” (*heijin zhengzhi*) that exist in Taiwan.⁵

In addition to religious movements and criminal activities, socially motivated urban and rural protests have steadily increased in frequency, expanded in size, diversified in terms of their participants’ backgrounds, enlarged in geographical coverage, lasted longer and displayed higher levels of violence. Furthermore, collective protests are forming lateral linkages among different localities, religious sects and criminal organizations. For these reasons, surveying the horizon of social instability along the three dimensions is both timely and worthwhile.

As Ted R. Gurr and his associates pointed out almost three decades ago in their analysis of the “crime-conflict nexus”, the three dimensions do interact.⁶ Organized crime and collective protests share common structural causes, reflect many similar social ills and create the same challenge to and therefore often elicit common response from the state.⁷ To a considerable extent, collective protestors are contending with the ruling Party and the regime for moral authority; the religious sects for spiritual guidance; and the organized crime groups for supremacy within a community or an industry. They take advantage of and foster tensions between the Chinese political superstructure and the social infrastructure.

University Press, 1976); and David Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁴ For resilient local religious practices under Mao, see Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). For a historical survey of China’s religion at large, refer to Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1993).

⁵ See Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia’s New Mafiya* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Russian Organized Crime: Global Organized Crime Project* (Washington: CSIS, 1997); *Russian Organized Crime and Corruption: Putin’s Challenge* (Washington: CSIS, 2000); Phil Williams, *Russian Organized Crime: The New Threat?* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); and Ko-lin Chin, *Heijin: Organized Crime, Business, and Politics in Taiwan* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2003).

⁶ Ted Robert Gurr, Peter N. Grabosky, and Richard C. Hula, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), pp. 10-11, 666-67.

⁷ Elizabeth Perry puts all under the category of “contentious politics”. See “Crime, Corruption, and Contentious Politics” in Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar (eds), *The Paradox of China’s Post-Mao Reforms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 308-29.

Managing all these three contentions thus constitutes an essential step to maintain social and political stability.⁸

The remainder of this article consists of six sections. The first surveys the major trends of social instability by focusing on empirical indicators and statistics of popular protest in China. The second traces the growth of “unlawful” sects and their challenges to the state. The third provides discussion of expanding criminal organizations and their impact on governance in China. The fourth deals with the regional distribution of social instability. The fifth examines the formation of horizontal linkages and *interconnectedness* among these three sources of societal challenges. The last section explores some crucial implications for legitimacy and governance in China.

A brief discussion of data problems is necessary. While a few excellent micro-studies have revealed grass-roots dynamics at villages and townships,⁹ it is difficult to get a hold of systematic data on organized protests at the national or even provincial level. One key reason rests with the fact that much of the necessary data—at the national and local levels—belongs to a non-accessible realm of “secrets”.¹⁰ This secrecy might reflect that societal challenges are so prevalent and serious that all relevant data need to be fully contained. Despite this secrecy, various published documents and online materials are very useful—if not wholly satisfactory—in reconstructing the overall trend of organized protests.

The data on religious sects have similar problems. Much of the data published in China focuses on officially-accepted religions. A number of existing academic studies focus on localized and folk religions which have won acquiescence and even support from local officials. These religions, however, fall outside the purview of this article. Some overseas news reports and publications in China refer to localized mystic sects and even considerably larger sects

⁸ Listed in *The Criminal Law of China* (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xingfa, 1979, revised in 1997) are offenses of disturbing public and social order; assembling a crowd to disturb public order; illegal demonstration and parade; offenses against public security; organizing and joining in terrorist groups; organizing, leading and joining organized criminal groups; organizing and using evil cults and superstitious sects to undermine law enforcement and public order, and so on.

⁹ See Li Changping, *Wo xiang zongli shuo shihua* (Honest Words to Our Premier) (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 2002); and Yu Jianrong, *Yuecun zhengzhi—zhuanxingqi Zhongguo xiangcun zhengzhi jiegou de bianqian* (Politics in Yue Village: The Transformation of Village Political Structures in the Era of Transition) (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2001).

¹⁰ For the severe difficulties associated with accessing data on rural instability, see Cheng Tongxun, *Dangdai Zhongguo nongcun zhengzhi fazhan yanjiu* (Study of Rural Political Development in Contemporary China) (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 2000), pp. 57-60.

outlawed by the state, but little information is provided on their active time framework, location and the size of followings.¹¹

Data on religious sects in this study includes two primary types. First are the data published in China on the religious sects that are regarded as heretical, dangerous, disruptive and suppressed or outlawed by the Chinese government. Second are overseas reports on underground Christian and Catholic churches and large and organized Buddhist, Daoist and folk religious sects that defy the state's control. These data and reports contain specific and useful information on the variety, scale, influence, and operation of various religions and sects that pose serious challenges to the state.¹²

The Chinese government has released more data on crimes based on the assumption that crimes are less political and, therefore, the revelation of crime data poses less direct a challenge to its authority and legitimacy. The Ministry of Public Security is the primary source for the data on crime. The public security apparatus has nevertheless been carefully concealing several key pieces of information, preventing outside observers from reconstructing longitudinal trends and national-level data. The best alternatives have been cross-examining national data with provincial data and comparing accumulated data with yearly figures.

Popular Protests

The indicator for popular protest used here is that of “collective public security incidents” (*quntixing zhian shijian*). According to the official definition, “collective public security incidents” (hereafter CoPSI) refer to incidents in which “a group of people illegally gather to disrupt public order and destroy public properties”. Generally, the term denotes incidents involving more than five protesters. When more than 500 people are involved in an incident it is called a “large-scale CoPSI” (*daguimo quntixing shijian*).¹³

The data on the frequency of CoPSI are available for a period of twelve years (1993–2005), with the exception of 2001. Table 1 offers the nationwide occurrences of CoPSI. The overall trend suggests that the incidents of collective protest have dramatically increased in the past twelve years. The rate of increase has accelerated since the late 1990s. More importantly, despite Beijing's

¹¹ A notable example is “The Persecution of Other Faiths” in Maria Hsia Chang, *Falun Gong: The End of Day* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), ch. 5. Other shorter reports are too numerous to list here.

¹² Those sects that live peacefully with the state and, therefore, are not regarded as threats to the state fall outside the purview of this analysis.

¹³ Information from interviews in China; and Chen Jinsheng, *Quntixing shijian yanjiu baogao* (A Research Report on Collective Incidents) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2004), pp. 11, 32.

conscious efforts to contain them, the frequency of CoPSI clearly has not decreased.¹⁴

Table 1: The Frequency of CoPSI during 1993–2005

1993	8,700
1994	10,000
1995	11,000
1996	12,000
1997	15,000
1998	25,000
1999	32,000
2000*	40,000
2002	50,400
2003	58,000
2004	74,000
2005	87,000

Sources: Chen Jinsheng, *Quntixing shijian yanjiu baogao* (A Research Report on Collective Incidents) (Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 2004), pp. 62, 170; Murray Scot Tanner, “China Rethinks Unrest”, p. 139; Robert Marquand, “In China, Stresses Spill over into Riots”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 November 2004; Howard W. French, “Alarm and Disarray on Rise in China”, *International Herald Tribune*, 24 August 2005; and Richard McGregor, “Data Show Social Unrest on the Rise in China”, *Financial Times*, 19 January 2006.

Notes: *an estimate based on the nine-month (January-September) data.

The 2005 figure of 87,000 CoPSI meant that each province experienced an average of nearly eight incidents per day. Whether this data should be deemed important depends on what these incidents actually entailed in terms of participation, level of violence and geographical concentration. National-level

¹⁴ Some provinces declared CoPSI as the most important obstacle to social stability. See Jiangxi Political Legal Affairs Commission, “Luoshi zeren jiquan gongguan qianghua fangzhi quntixing shijian de cuoshi” (Measures on Grasping and Strengthening the Responsibility of Preventing CoPSI), in Zhongyang zhengfa weiyuanhui (ed.), *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji* (Collected Materials on Maintaining Social Stability) (Beijing: Falü Chubanshe, 2001), p. 188.

statistics, though limited, suggest that average number of participants in CoPSI has been expanding rapidly. During the first quarter of 1998, the total number of CoPSI participants was 202,000. During the first quarter of 1999, however, the figure rose to 354,000, marking a 75.3 per cent increase. In 2003, CoPSI participants reached 3.1 million, averaging 767,500 quarterly.¹⁵ In 1999, the number of CoPSI in which more than 1,000 people participated was 125. In May 2004 alone, the number of CoPSI in which more than 500 people took part was 2,180, constituting 68 per cent of all CoPSI.¹⁶

The increased frequency and size of CoPSI have much to do with the widening (occupational) base of social instability. Contrary to the general belief that discontents are confined to a few specific social strata, CoPSI have involved increasingly large sections of the population. National-level data for 2000 indicate that half of the CoPSI participants lived in the countryside while urban residents made up 34 per cent.¹⁷ Urban CoPSI participants were not limited to workers; intellectuals, private entrepreneurs, taxi drivers, former PLA soldiers, and even civil servants joined CoPSI.¹⁸ Even when we focus solely on urban workers, the CoPSI participants were not confined to dismissed or retired workers: an increasingly large number of “laid-off workers” (*xiagang gongren*) have also joined in.¹⁹

¹⁵ See Wu Zhongmin, “Zhongguo shehui gongzheng de xianzhuang yu qushi” (Current Conditions and Trends in Social Justice in China), in Ru Xin, Lu Xueyi and Li Peilin (eds), *2005 nian: Zhongguo shehui xingshi fenxi yu yuce* (The Year of 2005: Analyses and Predictions of Social Conditions in China) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2004), pp. 227-36.

¹⁶ <http://www.renminbao.com/rmb/articles/2004/6/21/3157.html> (last accessed on 7 July 2004). Recent large-scale protests include a riot in Wanzhou (Chongqing) in October 2004, involving over 8,000 people who vandalized the government offices. In November 2004, as many as 100,000 disgruntled peasants clashed with the police in Hanyuan (Sichuan). See “Zhongguo shiyuefen shiliuge chengshi baofa kangzheng shijian” (Events of Resistance Broke Out in Sixteen Cities in October), *Zhengming* (Contention), November 2004; “Guanbi minfan, chuanmin da kangzheng” (Officials Force People to Rebel: Sichuan People’s Great Struggle), *Dongxiang* (Trend), December 2004, pp. 55-56.

¹⁷ The remaining 16 per cent is made up of members of religious organizations and ethnic minorities. See “Woguo dangqian quntixing shijian de xianzhuang yu duice” (The Current Situation and Measures against CoPSI), in *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji*, pp. 46-48. For the urban Chinese sympathy toward CoPSI, see the survey conducted in 2002 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on 11,000 urban residents in Li Peilin, Zhang Yi, Zhao Yandong and Liang Dong, *Shehui chongtu yu jieji yishi* (Social Conflict and Class Consciousness) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2005), pp. 94-99, 107-108.

¹⁸ For a report on a CoPSI in Shenzhen staged by 1,000 former PLA soldiers, see *South China Morning Post*, 7 November 2005.

¹⁹ Of 37,513 workers who participated in CoPSI in Fujian during 2000–02, laid-off workers (namely, workers who have lost their jobs but maintain their link with their work units for welfare claims) marked 49 per cent, while fired and retired workers made up 33 and 4 per cent respectively. See Chen Youfang, “Quntixing shijian sudao xu bawo sange guanxi”

CoPSI have also become more violent in recent years. While peaceful protests in the forms of “sit-ins” (*jingzuo*), “petitions” (*qingyuan*) and “rallies” (*jihui*) still take place, these types of protests have become increasingly rare. Crucial challenges are posed by those CoPSI that turn violent by (1) blocking and destroying public transportation facilities (*zusai jiaotong*); (2) encircling and attacking government buildings and officials (*chongji weigong*); and (3) fasting and committing suicides in public.²⁰

These violent incidents appear to be growing nationwide. The incidents classified as “encircling and attacking” governmental offices increased from 2,700 in 2000 to 3,700 in 2003. In 2003, there were over 3,100 blockages of public roads and railways.²¹ Local data also suggest that CoPSI are becoming increasingly more violent. During 1998–99 in Hubei, 43 per cent of the large-scale CoPSI entailed violent measures against public transportation and government buildings and personnel. In Jilin, the number of CoPSI that involved attacks on public transportation and government buildings and personnel rose by 2.3 times from 2000 to 2001.²² Even direct attacks on the police have not been rare. Recent statistics for Henan, for example, reveal that the injuries and deaths of police officers in CoPSI there accounted for 25 per cent of the total injuries and deaths of all parties involved.²³

Urban workers have participated in CoPSI for at least four different reasons, including economic difficulties caused by unemployment or bankruptcy, delayed salary payments, excessive taxation and surcharges, and illegal financial scams. For rural participants in CoPSI, the most important reasons have been disputes over land division and appropriation, followed by excessive taxation and irrigation rights.²⁴ It should be noted that as many as 90 per cent of CoPSI were considered “rightful resistance”, which were triggered by the mishandling of reasonable demands. For instance, in 2001, even Zhu Rongji, then Premier,

(Resolving CoPSI Requires the Grasp of the Three Relationships), *Lingdao canyue* (Leadership References), No. 10 (14 March 2003), p. 25.

²⁰ Hebei Provincial Party Committee, “Jizhong paicha diaochu yufang quntixing shijian” (Grasp the Work of Researching and Preventing CoPSI) in Zhongyang zhengfa weiyuanhui (ed.), *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji*, p. 78; and Chen Jinsheng, *Quntixing shijian yanjiu baogao*, pp. 42-44.

²¹ Wu Zhongmin, “Zhongguo shehui gongzheng de xianzhuang yu qushi”, pp. 227-36.

²² Hubei Provincial Party Committee, “Guanyu yufang he chuzhuo quntixing shijian de diaoyan baogao” (Research Report on Preventing and Countering CoPSI) in Zhongyang zhengfa weiyuanhui (ed.), *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji*, p. 221.

²³ Yan Junjie, *Gongan jiceng jichu gongzuo lunwenji* (Collected Essays on the Public Security Work at Grassroots) (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Gong’an Daxue Chubanshe, 2003), p. 259.

²⁴ See Research Office of the Ministry of Public Security, “Woguo dangqian quntixing shijian de xianzhuang yu duice”, in Zhongyang zhengfa weiyuanhui (ed.), *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji*, pp. 47-48; and Gang Lin, Jean C. Oi, Xiaobo Lu and Yawei Liu, *Crisis in the Hinterland: Rural Discontent in China* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, March 2003), p. 4.

admitted that 80 per cent of mass complaints were well-grounded and unresponsive local officials were to be blamed for the protests.²⁵

Ill-conceived responses or even a complete lack of response to reasonable demands convinced protestors that only rough action would gain government attention and prompt immediate solution. Collective action based on such reasoning enhances the overall level of violence involved in CoPSI. Popular slogans illustrating such thinking include: “no trouble, no solution; small trouble, small solution; big trouble, generous solution” (*bunao bu jieju*; *xiaonao xiao jieju*; *danao da jieju*); and “it’s better to mess with the government than with the enterprise, but it’s better to block the railway than mess with the government” (*zhao qiye buru zhao zhengfu*, *zhao zhengfu buru du tielu*).²⁶

It should be noted that, as a matter of fact, many CoPSI seemed to have more limited and locally-based grudges and directed their demands to local or grass-roots governments and cadres rather than to the central government. In some cases, the central government was viewed by CoPSI participants as a potential mediator.²⁷ In other cases, the discrepancy between central and local authorities in their respective view of CoPSI created room for disruptive collective action.²⁸ Yet, as the frequency of CoPSI has increased sharply and their geographical coverage has expanded, the overall perception of social instability has also risen.

Religious Protests

With Beijing relaxing its control over religious activities, rising socio-economic uncertainties and popular disillusionment with the Communist ideology, China has experienced a revival of religious faith, churches and sects independent of the state, especially since the late 1980s.²⁹ The principal political challenges have

²⁵ Kevin O’Brien, “Rightful Resistance”, *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (October 1996), pp. 31-55; Yang Hede, *Qunti shijian yanjiu* (A Study of Collective Incidents) (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Gong’an Daxue Chubanshe, 2002), p. 7; Yang Zewan, *Sannong wenti yu nongcun jingwu* (The Issues of Peasants, Countryside and Agriculture and Rural Policing) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 72-73; and Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁶ See Zhongyang zhengfa weiyuanhui (ed.), *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji*, pp. 3, 11.

²⁷ See Kevin O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, “Villages and Popular Resistance in Contemporary China”, *Modern China*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1996), pp. 28-61; and Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu, *Taxation without Representation in Contemporary Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 139-40.

²⁸ See, for instance, Cai Yongshun, “Managed Participation in China”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 119, No. 3 (2004), pp. 425-52.

²⁹ Refer to Donald MacInnis, *Religions in China Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989); Hongyi Lai, “Religious Revival in China”, *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, No. 18 (2003), pp. 56-59. On the revival of individual religions, see Alan Hunter and Kim-kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China*

come from unofficial and assertive religions including the so-called Christian sects, Buddhist, Daoist and folk religious groups that are blacklisted by the state as “evil cults” (*xiejiao*), and the denominations of the underground Christian and Catholic church. The state tends to view these religions as rivals, as a type of independent, well-organized and assertive mass organization.³⁰

Since the late 1980s, popular yearning for spiritual solace has increased as both local and overseas clerics have enjoyed greater leeway for missionary work inside China. As a result, the number of such independent religious organizations has increased from 12 in 1986 to 29 in the mid-1990s, peaking at 31 in 1999. Because of increased state suppression since the 1999 Falun Gong protests, the number declined to 24 or less between 2000 and 2005. Independent Buddhist, Daoist and folk religious organizations were the primary targets of the post-1999 suppression and, therefore, the number of these groups suffered the steepest decline. “Heretical Christian sects” witnessed a moderate drop from 12 to 10. The number of underground Christian churches has remained at 9 (see Figure 1).³¹

Underground Catholic and house Christian churches survived state crackdowns in previous decades by operating secretly. They readily revived and expanded after the reinstatement of religious freedom in 1979. The number of underground Catholics (not included in Figure 1) ranges from five to ten million, compared to the five million members of the official Catholic church. In such areas as Baoding in Hebei and Wenzhou in Zhejiang, the independent Catholic church attracts hundreds of thousands of followers.³² Membership of the house Christian church is estimated to be 32 million and some of these Christian groups—such as the China Fangcheng Church, the Chinese Gospels Fellowship,

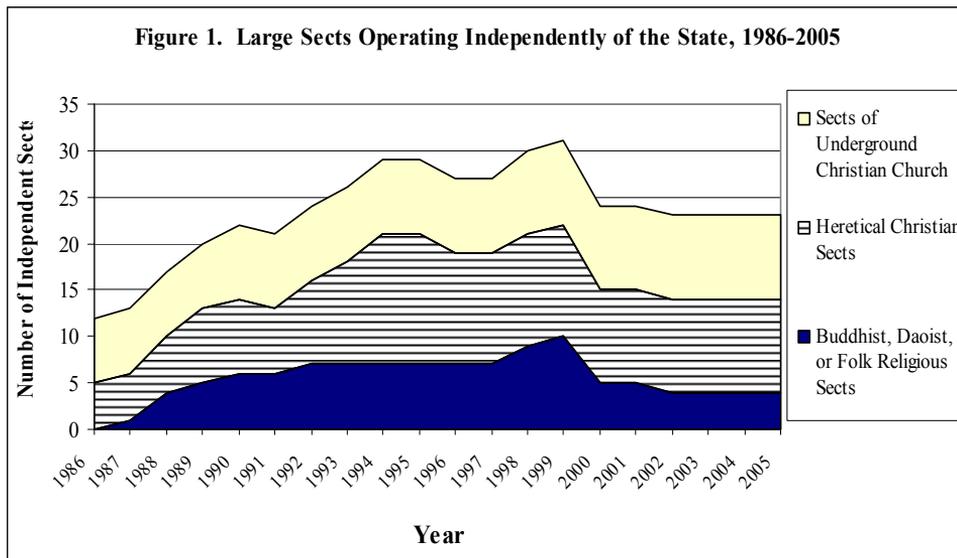
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and chapters by Lai Chi-Tim, Raoul Birnbaum, Dru Gladney, Richard Madsen, Daniel Bays and Nancy Chen in *The China Quarterly*, No. 174 (June 2003). For China’s governmental policies toward religion, see Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin (eds), *God and Caesar in China* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

³⁰ For the political logic of the state’s differentiated treatments of official, independent and unorganized religions, refer to Hongyi H. Lai, “Religious Policies in Post-Totalitarian China: Maintaining Political Monopoly over a Reviving Society”, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2006), pp. 55-57.

³¹ Some religious groups no longer exist after they were banned by the state, their top leaders arrested or placed on the state’s wanted list, and their organizations dismantled.

³² Data on Catholics at official and underground churches and Christians at house churches are based on Chinese government estimates cited by the US State Department in its “International Religious Freedom Report on China in 2004”, posted at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/ris/irf/2004/35396.htm>, accessed on 1 August 2005; “Hebeisheng Zhengding qu zhujiao Jia Zhiguo mengxi zaodao dabu” (Bishop Jia Zhiguo in the Zhengding Diocese, Hebei Province, China Were Arrested) in <http://www.asianews.it>, 7 April 2005.

the family church in Henan and the Wenzhou church in Zhejiang—have memberships ranging from a quarter of a million to millions.³³



Sources: Meng Qingwei and Su Pei, *Wei yu zui* (Fallacy and Crimes) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehuikexue Chubanshe, 2003); Jiang Jiasen, *Duliu* (Tumor) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2001); He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishahui* (Terrorism, Cult, and Secret Societies) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2001); “Documents on Religious Issues by the Ministry of Public Security of Communist China”, posted at <http://www.chinaaffairs.org> on 29 May 2005; reports on Falun Gong, Xiang Gong, and *qigong*-based sects at the website for Voice for Hong Kong Democracy in <http://www.democracy.org.hk>, 14 August and 14 November, 1999; news reports on religions, state crackdowns, and religious protests in China at <http://www.boxun.com> between 3 May 2002 and 19 August 2004.

Notes: Given a lack of precise information on years when they are active, a number of sects are not included in this figure. The underground Catholic church, which has 46 dioceses, is also not included.

³³ For estimates of size of these churches, see “Henan liuming ‘jiating jiaohui’ lingxiu beipan laojiao” (Six ‘Family House’ Leaders in Henan Sentenced to Reform through Labor), in <http://bjzc.org/bjs/bc/81/102> on 1 September 2003; “100 duoming jiating jiaohui lingxiu bei zhuabu; zhonggong zhongyang zhengzhiju zhaokai zongjiao gongzuo huiyi” (Over 100 Leaders of Family Churches Are Arrested; the Politburo of the Central Committee Holds a Religious Work Meeting), at <http://www.boxun.com>, 14 June 2004. For the indigenization and globalization of and political conflict over Christianity in China, see Richard Madsen, “Chinese Christianity: Indigenization and Conflict”, in Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds), *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 2nd ed., pp. 271-88.

The Chinese government has repeatedly cracked down on independent Catholic and Christian churches. News on the arrest of Catholic bishops, house church leaders and Christian activists are frequent. About fifty underground Catholic bishops and priests were either detained or placed under house arrest in China in early 2003.³⁴ According to a report on police crackdowns in 2004, public security officers stormed a religious retreat of the Chinese Gospels Fellowship in Wuhan and arrested 100 leaders. In Anhui, 100 church leaders from Yingshang Family Church were arrested for training clerics to serve in Xinjiang.

In comparison, “heretical Christian sects” are generally smaller in size and their fate has varied widely. The Shouters Faction (*Huhan Pai*) already had about 200,000 followers in 1983, and retained over 50,000 followers in 1996 despite the state crackdowns.³⁵ The Disciples Association (*Mentu Hui*) had 350,000 followers during the mid-1990s.³⁶ Other prominent sects of the 1990s included the Established King Faction (*Beili Wang*) with an estimated 30,000 followers, the Spirit Church (*Lingling Jiao*) with 20,000 followers. Other smaller sects included the Dami Mission, the World Elijah Evangelical Mission, Children of God and the Blood and Water of Jesus Christ (*Xueshui Shenling*).

Some of these sects, including the Lord God Sect (*Zhushen Jiao*), the Established King, the Spirit Church and the Resurrection Way (*Fuhuo Dao*), suffered severe crackdowns and have not recovered. Others managed to survive by re-emerging as splinter groups or growing back in later years. The Shouters Faction, for example, had spread to 360 counties and cities in 20 provinces and gained 200,000 followers by 1983. After a state crackdown, it splintered into two groups, the Established King and Lord God Sects. In the mid-1990s, the Shouters Faction itself re-emerged. In Fujian alone, the sect expanded from 264 meeting sites and 16,000 followers in 1983 to 420 sites and 50,000 followers in 1996.³⁷

Folk religions were even more popular. Zhong Gong had 20 million followers, while Xiang Gong boasted 30 million. There were also smaller sects such as the Goddess of Mercy Dharma Sect (*Guanyin Famen*), the Sudden Enlightenment Dharma Sect (*Yuandun Famen*) and the Immortal Real Buddha Sect (*Lingxianzhenfo Zong*). *Qigong*-based sects such as Ziran Zhong Gong, Guo

³⁴ See information from the Vatican cited in “A Report Claims that China Detains an Underground Catholic Priest”, posted at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/chinese/simp/hi/> on 12 February 2003.

³⁵ See He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishehui* (Terrorism, Heretical Cults and Secret Societies) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 244-45.

³⁶ “Dangdai Zhongguo xiejiao yanbian de guiji” (A Track Record of the Evolution of Evil Cults in Contemporary China), at <http://www.anticult.sh.cn>, accessed on 10 March 2005.

³⁷ He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishehui*, p. 245. Different tactics for evading the state’s attention help explain the resilience of some factions and the perishing of others.

Gong, and Cibi (Compassion) Gong also flourished during this period, worrying the Chinese state.³⁸

The state's effort to suppress Falun Gong has revealed the sect's strengths as well as its limits. No other sect had the audacity and organizational capacity to confront the state as Falun Gong did with its 10,000 protesters outside Zhongnanhai in April 1999. The Chinese leaders quickly learned of Falun Gong's deep infiltration into the ranks and files of the Party and government. The authorities also worried about the sect's large following, with estimates ranging from 2.1 million to as many as 100 million, according to the sect's founder.³⁹ Some may have feared that Falun Gong could repeat the history of the centuries-old White Lotus Sect and the Taiping Heavenly Movement during the Qing. In July 1999, the state declared Falun Gong an evil cult and banned it.⁴⁰

Falun Gong became the Chinese government's biggest headache.⁴¹ According to official sources, from April 25 to August 1999, Falun Gong organizations arranged 307 protests in which its members besieged government buildings and news agencies.⁴² In spite of the stepped-up crackdown, over thirty protests took place in Beijing in 2000, involving 7,500 protesters.⁴³ The central

³⁸ “Zhonggong xia yi mubiao zhixiang xiang gong” (The Next Target of the Chinese Communists Moved to Xiang Gong), at <http://www.mybuddhist.com>, 1 September 2003; “Zhongguo zongjiao xiaoxi” (News on Religion in China in 1999), at <http://www.cmi.org.tw>, 1 September 2003. Data on Xiang Gong come from “Zhonggong xia yi mubiao zhixiang xiang gong” and data on Falun Gong in He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishehui*, p. 260. For a discussion on the birth of prominent folk religious sects and their use of the internet, refer to Patricia M. Thornton, “The New Cybersects: Resistance and Repression in the Reform”, in Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds), *Chinese Society*, pp. 247-70.

³⁹ For an official estimate, see He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishehui*, p. 260. For Li Hongzhi's claim about the number of his followers, refer to Zhang Weiqing and Qiao Gong, *Falun Gong chuangshiren Li Hongzhi pingzhuan* (Li Hongzhi: The Founder of Falun Gong) (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 1999), pp. 12-14. Some experts estimated that the pre-suppression followers of the sect in China were in the tens of millions. See Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the US State Department, *International Religious Freedom—China* (2002), posted at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/13870.htm> on 7 October 2002.

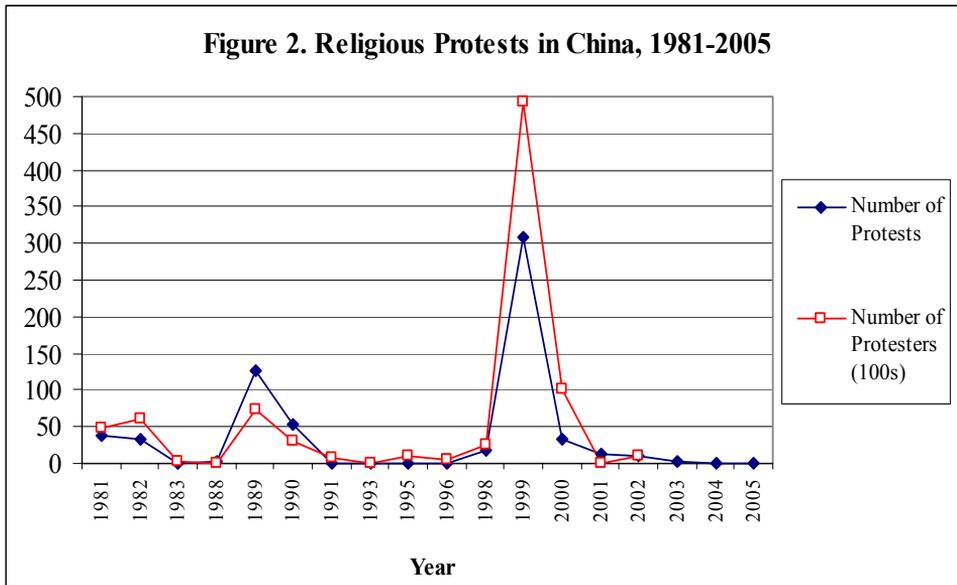
⁴⁰ For an inside look at the Chinese leaders' crackdown on Falun Gong, see Zong Hairen, *Zhu Rongji zai 1999* (Zhu Rongji in 1999) (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2001), pp. 47-70.

⁴¹ See Ronald Keith and Zhiqiu Lin, “The ‘Falun Gong Problem’: Politics and the Struggle for the Rule of Law in China”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 175 (September 2003), pp. 623-42; and Benjamin Penny, “The Life and Times of Li Hongzhi: Falun Gong and Religious Biography”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 175 (September 2003), pp. 643-62.

⁴² *People's Daily* commentary, “The Political Motive Behind the More Than Three Hundred Sieges”, translated in Ming Xia and Shiping Hua (eds), *The Battle between the Chinese Government and the Falun Gong* (special issue of *Chinese Law and Government*, Vol. 32, No. 5 [September/October 1999]), pp. 87-90.

⁴³ He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishehui*, pp. 273-75.

government's suppression was also compromised by local authority's expedient truce with the sect. Short of the necessary resources and coercive capabilities and yet eager to prevent local sect followers from protesting in Beijing, some localities struck deals with the sect's activists. Sect followers were allowed to practice at non-public places in exchange for the promise that they would not go to Beijing and other visible public places to protest.⁴⁴



Source: Same as Figure 1.

Notes: The figures do not include the data on Tibet and Xinjiang. Data on protesters after 2002 are unavailable.

In the decades of reform, religious protests have persisted although their frequency has fluctuated dramatically and perhaps cyclically (Figure 2). These protests largely reflect discontent with state restrictions or crackdowns and the state's atheist stance. Ups and downs in religious protests appear to coincide with surges in inflation and unemployment. While 1981 and 1982 saw 38 and 34 protests, religious protests evaporated during the 1983–87 period of rapid economic growth and rising living standards. They heated up again after 1988 when inflation took off, registering a record high of 126 and 52 protests in 1989

⁴⁴ Conversation with a Chinese scholar in China, October 2004, and with a Chinese analyst at a government think tank in April 2001.

and 1990. The number of protests again plummeted during 1991–95. Religious protests resurfaced between 1998 and 2002, riding on urban discontent with high unemployment and peasants' discontent with heavy fiscal burdens. They peaked in 1999 and registered 10 to 33 protests for each of the remaining years. They again dwindled to a near-bottom level between 2003 and 2005.

Criminal Organizations and Instability

The criminal underworld (*heishehui*) disappeared almost completely from the consciousness of the Chinese people during three decades of radical Maoism. In the post-Mao era, street gangs and criminal groups gradually resurged. During the 1980s, the number of criminal groups began to multiply and many evolved into criminal syndicates.⁴⁵ The years 1989–90 were a turning point when the Central Committee on Political and Legal Affairs explicitly warned about the strong comeback of criminal organizations. During the mid-1990s, many of these syndicates actively sought political protection and, subsequently, they formed criminal nexuses with many state agencies, including the police.⁴⁶

Despite the alleged uprooting of thousands of criminal groups since 2000, knowledgeable observers with inside information appear to be pessimistic as to the future situation. He Bingsong, for instance, commented that “[I]n the coming decade, criminal groups will continue to emerge voluminously. Many of them will transform themselves into criminal syndicates ... Many will expand their activities across cities and provinces. Even cross-border alliances may be formed”.⁴⁷ Many in-house experts for the public security apparatus have also testified that what is known is only a tip of the iceberg.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ To qualify as a criminal group, at least three people need to band together for collaborative criminal activities. See Ye Gaofeng and Liu Defa, *Jituan fazui duice yanjiu* (A Study on Group Crime and Counter Policies) (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 34–51.

⁴⁶ Zeng Huafeng, *Anfang heibang* (Investigating Gangs in Secret) (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 2002), pp. 51–63, 144–50, 336–40; Xiao Chong (ed.), *Zhonggong yu heishehui* (The Chinese Communist Party and Underworld Society) (Hong Kong: Xiafeier, 2002); and Ming Xia, “The Criminal–Political Nexus in China”, in *Active Society in Formation: Environmentalism, Labor, and the Underworld in China*, Woodrow Wilson Center Asia Program Special Report, No. 124 (September 2004).

⁴⁷ He Bingsong, *You zuzhi fazui yanjiu: Zhongguo dalu heishehui (xingzhi) fazui yanjiu* (A Study of Organized Crime and Group Crime with Mafia-style Characteristics in the Mainland) (Beijing: Zhongguo Fazhi Chubanshe, 2002), pp. 187–88. The Ministry of Justice in Taiwan warned that “the collusion of criminal gangs in three places (the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) is inevitable”. See The Investigation Bureau, the Ministry of Justice, *Dalu tai gang heibang diaocha yanjiu* (Investigations and Research on the Organized Crime Gangs in the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) (Taipei: Ministry of Justice, 1998), p. 386.

⁴⁸ Guangdong Jingcha Xuehui, *Guangdong heishehui fazui wenti yanjiu* (Studies on Organized Crimes in Guangdong) (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Gong’an Daxue Chubanshe, 2002), pp. 39–40; Chong Gang and Pu Yu, *Dangdai zhongguo shaohei jishi* (Reports on

Through expansion and merger, many criminal groups have become larger. Syndicates with over 100 members are quite common.⁴⁹ In addition, many criminal groups also adopt the rituals of the traditional secret societies and, through elaborate rules and codes, built hierarchical organizations.⁵⁰ The overall level of violence involved has also increased. Punishments such as chopping off fingers, cutting the Achilles tendon and burying hostages alive are more common. The magnitude of the damage inflicted by criminal groups has been further enhanced by their acquisition of machine guns and other modern weapons. More than 2,600 police officers died on duty from 1995 to 2000.⁵¹

Since the 1990s, many criminal groups have evolved into syndicates that seek political protection from Party and government officials. Structural changes in the economic system introduced after Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992 were utilized by these crime syndicates to take advantage of the lucrative opportunities, rent-seeking and corruption available to officials. A political-criminal nexus has become a key feature of much Chinese criminal activity.⁵² Through offering bribes, recruiting relatives of local officials, sponsoring activities of local state agencies, and manipulating local elections and blackmailing, criminal organizations often buy off local officials (especially in

Campaigns against the Criminal Underworld in Contemporary China) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 1997), p. 10; and Liu Fuhai, *Zhujiao heishehui* (Exterminating the Criminal Underworld) (Guangzhou: Nangfang Ribao Chubanshe, 2004), pp. 247, 336, 357.

⁴⁹ Zhou Xintong, *Yiwang dajin: chanchu heibang anli jishi* (Take All with One Haul of Dragnet: Cases of Eradicating Criminal Gangs) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2001), p. 265; and Yang Yujuan, *Youzuzhi fazui zhencha* (Investigations of Organized Crime) (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Gong'an Daxue, 2003), p. 178.

⁵⁰ Li Wenyan and Tian Hongjie, "*Dahei chue*" *xingshi falu shiyong jieshuo* (Interpretations and Applications of Criminal Law Clauses for "Striking Organized Crimes and Eradicating Evil Forces") (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2001), p. 61.

⁵¹ *Yangcheng wanbao* (Yangcheng Evening News), 5 December 1999 at <http://www.sina.com.cn> (last accessed 6 December 1999); Li Bing, "Dahei yao dachu heihoutai" (To Combat Organized Crime Should Strike out Black Backstage Supporters), 22 December 2000, at: <http://www.sina.com.cn> (last accessed on 23 December 2000); and <http://bj.netsh.com/bbs/86359/messages/40.html>.

⁵² Economic activities controlled by the criminal underworld constitute a big chunk of the "hidden economy" (*yinxing jingji*). Every year in the late 1990s, incomes from drug sales allegedly reached 100 billion yuan. See Cui Min (ed.), *Dupin fazui: fazhan qushi yu ezhi duice* (The Crime of Drugs: Trends and Containment Policies) (Beijing: Jingguan Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1999), p. 239. It is also estimated that the sex industry controlled largely by criminal groups generated revenues of 500 billion yuan a year. See Liu Ning and Tian Huiming (eds), *Heise youhuan* (The Black Malaise) (Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 2001), p. 20. Furthermore, smuggling syndicates cause a loss of 30 billion yuan per year to the nation. See He Qinglian, *Zhongguo xiandaihua de xianjing* (Hong Kong: Broad Press, 2004), p. 314; and Duwei news report, "Zhongguo siqian guanyuan juan 500 yi waitao" (Four Thousand Officials Fled out of the Country with More than 50 Billion), www.chinesenewsnet.com, accessed on 11 March 2005.

law-enforcement and judicial agencies) or embed their bosses in state organs.⁵³ Law enforcement agencies in many provinces have lost their capacity and incentive to put down criminal activities by these syndicates.

From 1974 to 2000, the reported number of crimes per annum jumped from half a million to more than four million.⁵⁴ The last two decades have seen a number of “strike hard” (*yanda*) campaigns.⁵⁵ Between 1992 and 1999, public security agencies carried out numerous large-scale anti-crime operations and destroyed more than a million criminal groups with 3.76 million members nationwide.⁵⁶ According to Table 2, the state’s case-cracking rate declined from 75 per cent in 1993 to 42 per cent in 2004. In early 2004, this rate even went down to about 30 per cent. Although the size of the security forces expanded from 650,000 in 1986 to over 1.7 million in 2003, the number of filed criminal cases increased by 7.9 times during the same period.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ming Xia, “The Criminal–Political Nexus in China”; Lin Zhe, *Fubai fanzuxue yanjiu* (Criminology of Corruption) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2002), p. 97; and Kong Simeng and Chang Qing, *Zhongguo tiaozhan heishehui* (China: Challenges of Crime Underworld) (Nanning: Guangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2004), pp. 23-52.

⁵⁴ Cao Feng, *Diwuci Gaochao* (The Fifth Wave: Crimes in Contemporary China) (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1997), pp. 3-14; and Michael Dutton, “The Basic Character of Crime in Contemporary China”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 149 (March 1997), pp. 160-77.

⁵⁵ Susan Trevaskes, “Courts on the Campaign Path in China”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 5 (2002), pp. 673-93; and Murray Scot Tanner, “Campaign-style Policing in China and Its Critics”, in Børge Bakken (ed.), *Crime, Punishment, and Policing in China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 171-88.

⁵⁶ Qin Liqiang, *Shehui wending de anquanfa: Zhongguo fazui yujing yu shehui zhian pingjia* (Safety Valves for Social Stability: An Evaluation of Early Warnings of Crime and Social Order in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo Gong’an Daxue Chubanshe, 2004), p. 101. According to He Bingsong, 197,000 criminal groups were uncovered and destroyed, including 876,000 group members. See He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishehui*, p. 302.

⁵⁷ Although China still compares favorably with the world average crime rate in the UN survey, its trend is moving in a dangerous direction. See Børge Bakken, “Comparative Perspectives on Crime in China”, in Børge Bakken (ed.), *Crime, Punishment, and Policing in China*, pp. 64-99; and US Department of Justice (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/4meastab.htm>), accessed on 8 May 2006.

Table 2: Clear-Up Rate (Criminal Cases) in China

Year	1981	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Rate(%)	73.1	78.8	57.1	79.9	45.2	42.9	44.4	41.9	42.3

Sources: *Zhongguo falü nianjian* (The Law Yearbook of China), (various volumes from 1988 to 2003); 2003 figure from <http://bbs.cctv.com>, posted on 15 June 2004, accessed on 8 May 2006; 2004 figure from www.sd110.gov.cn, posted on 5 January 2005, accessed on 8 May 2006.

Group crimes have gained prominence and pose a serious threat to China's public order. According to 1995 statistics, crimes committed by groups (rather than by individuals) accounted for 26 per cent of all solved cases, and the number of group members arrested amounted to 37 per cent of all captured criminals. The percentage was much higher in the coastal provinces where 70–80 per cent of all serious crimes were committed by gangs.⁵⁸

Table 3 shows how both the number of dismantled criminal groups and that of arrested group members grew until 1996. Since 1996, when a new round of “strike-hard campaigns” was carried out, the national figures on the destroyed organized criminal groups declined. Considering that the crime rate per one hundred thousand people jumped from 135 in 1997 to 338 in 2002 and that the total filed criminal cases increased from 1.6 million to 4.3 million, the declining numbers of destroyed criminal groups may not necessarily reflect an improvement in law and order. This suspicion is supported by statistics from Beijing and Shanghai where police forces are the most staffed and best equipped but the figures on the destroyed organized criminal groups have sustained an upward trend during the same period.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Sichuan nianjian 1991* (The Provincial Yearbook of Sichuan 1991) (Chengdu: Sichuan Nianjian Chubanshe, 1991), p. 167; and Zhang Xiaoqin and Zhao Guoling (eds), *Dangdai Zhongguo de fazui yu zhili* (Crime and Its Management in Contemporary China) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2001), p. 18.

⁵⁹ See Børge Bakken, *The Exemplary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 378; Xiao Yang, *Zhongguo xingshi zhengce he celue wenti* (Policies and Tactics of Criminal Justice in China) (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 1996), p. 124; and Michael Dutton, “Toward a Government of the Contract: Policing in the Era of Reform”, in Børge Bakken (ed.), *Crime, Punishment, and Policing in China*, p. 207.

Table 3. Numbers of Uncovered Criminal Groups and Their Members

Year	Uncovered Criminal Groups	Number of Members
1985	27,000	106,000
1990	100,527	368,885
1995	140,000	540,000
1996	136,225	670,000
1997	105,915	N/A
1998	102,314	361,927
1999	95,000	N/A
2000	82,000	N/A
2001	73,000	N/A
2002	56,000	N/A

Sources: Kang Shuhua (ed.), *Dangdai youzuzhi ganzui yu gangzhi fujice* (Contemporary Organized Crime and Responses) (Beijing: Zhongguo fangzheng, 1998), p. 94; Huang Weiting, *Zhongguo de yinxing jingji* (The Hidden Economy in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shanye, 1996), p. 52; *Zhongguo falü nianjian 1993*, p. 26; *Zhongguo falü nianjian 1996*, pp. 164, 166; *Zhongguo falü nianjian 1999*, p. 157; the 1985 figure is from Michael Dutton, “The Basic Character of Crime in Contemporary China”, p. 175; figures from 1986 to 1995 are from: Li Wenyan and Tian Hongjie, “*Da heichue*” *xingshi falü shiyong jieshuo* (Interpretations and Applications of Criminal Laws for Striking against Organized Crime and Eradicating Dark Forces) (Beijing: Qunzhong, 2001), pp. 34, 40.

Note: The figures of 2000 and 2002 were estimated by the authors based upon the available numbers from 15 and 18 provinces respectively.

Criminal groups have been able to weather the state’s repeated crackdowns through the recruitment of new members. The number of new recruits is estimated to have grown from 100,000 in 1986 to more than half a million in 1994.⁶⁰ Despite the draconian campaigns in 1996 and 2000, Cai Shaoqing estimated that the overall membership of criminal gangs in China was close to a million.⁶¹ Considering that at least one-third of criminal acts are never reported, we believe that even this estimate is too low.⁶²

⁶⁰ Mark S. Gaylord, “China”, in Gregg Barak (ed.), *Crime and Crime Control: A Global View* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000), p. 22.

⁶¹ Cai Shaoqing, “Dangdai Zhongguo de heishehui” (Criminal Gangs in Contemporary China), paper delivered at the University of California, Berkeley, China Colloquium, 18 April 1996, p. 1; Elizabeth J. Perry, “Crime, Corruption, and Contention”, p. 323; and “Shaohei bixian

Regional Distribution of Public Security Incidents

CoPSI occur in a wide range of places in China. According to the statistics released by the Central Commission on the Comprehensive Management of Social Stability (*Zhongyang shehui zhian zonghe zhili weiyuanhui*)⁶³ in 2004, CoPSI have occurred in 257 (99.2 per cent) out of 259 prefecture-level cities and in 792 counties (53 per cent of all counties).⁶⁴ It appears that poverty is not the sole motive that propels participation in CoPSI. As a matter of fact, transitional reforms are so complex and overarching that different people with varying backgrounds have their own reasons to partake in organized protests.⁶⁵

As Table 4 demonstrates, many provinces experience a high level of CoPSI. In terms of large-scale CoPSI (the far-right column), four categories of region seem particularly vulnerable.⁶⁶ The first category includes the northeastern provinces—Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang—with a heavy concentration of state-owned enterprises and commonly mentioned in government and media reports on CoPSI.⁶⁷ The second refers to those industrial bases with low levels of growth (*chuantong bufada laogongye jidi*) along the “Third Front” (*di san xian*), most notably Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan and Chongqing. The third denotes such advanced regions as Zhejiang and Jiangsu (that is, Sunan). The fourth refers to Henan, Anhui and Jiangxi with a stagnant rural economy.⁶⁸ Central provinces

fanfu” (To sweep over gangs we must first combat corruption), in Liu Ning and Tian Huiming (eds), *Zhongguo zhi tong* (Pains of China) (Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 2001), p. 105.

⁶² This assessment is based on an internal investigation by the Ministry of Public Security. See Shuliang Feng, “Crime and Crime Control in a Changing China”, in Liu Jianhong, Lening Zhang and Steven F. Messner (eds), *Crime and Social Control* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001), pp. 123-24.

⁶³ The Central Commission on the Comprehensive Management of Social Stability was established in March 1991 as a permanent organization to assist the Party Center and the State Council to lead the national work on maintaining social stability. The commission, currently headed by Luo Gan, consists of twenty-plus members who are leading officials from the National People’s Congress, the State Council, the Supreme Court, the Supreme Protectorate, and Ministries of Justice, Public Security, State Security, Finance and so on, with its secretariat housed in the Central Political and Legal Commission.

⁶⁴ <http://www.renminbao.com/rmb/articles/2004/6/21/3157.html> (last accessed on 7 July 2004). A publication released by the Central Commission of Political and Legal Affairs—*Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji* (2001)—also has relevant chapters on all provinces in China.

⁶⁵ See Guojia jihua weiyuanhui hongguan jingji yanjiuyuan, *Woguo shehui xingshi genzong fenxi yu duice yanjiu* (In-depth Analysis of China’s Social Conditions and Measures) (Beijing: Macro-economic Research Institute, December 2000), pp. 97-99.

⁶⁶ *Woguo shehui xingshi genzong fenxi yu duice yanjiu*, p. 97.

⁶⁷ Viewed in this light, the policy focus of the Hu Jintao–Wen Jiabao administration on the “Revival of the Northeast” (*zhenxing dongbei*) is easily comprehensible.

⁶⁸ See *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji*, p. 10; and “Nongmin lingxiu”, pp. 8-31.

with poor agricultural economies and the Northeastern rust belt are particularly prominent.

Table 4: High-Risk Areas for CoPSI

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Participants per protest</u>
1	Henan	Henan	Hubei
2	Shandong	Hubei	Heilongjiang
3	Shanxi	Anhui	Henan
4	Hunan	Hunan	Anhui
5	Anhui	Sichuan	Hunan
6	Shaanxi	Liaoning	Liaoning
7	Hubei	Shaanxi	Sichuan
8	Sichuan	Heilongjiang	Chongqing
9	Jiangsu	Hebei	Zhejiang
10	Guangdong	Jiangsu	Jilin

Source: <http://www.renminbao.com/rmb/articles/2004/6/21/3157.html> (last accessed 7 July 2004).

Table 5: Provincial Distribution of Outlawed Religious Groups and Religious Protests, 1981–2005

	Number of outlawed groups	Number of protests
National Total	31	656
Shaanxi	5	177
Zhejiang	10	71
Beijing	10	41
Shandong	11	9
Hebei	9	6
Hunan	7	5
Henan	20	4
Jiangsu	10	4
Anhui	14	3

Source: Same as Figure 1.

Note: Due to limits on data, only protests and sects with information on the places of occurrence are coded by provinces.

Regional variations are found with regard to religious protest as well. A few provinces accounted for the major part of religious protests that took place during 1981–2005 (see Table 5). Shaanxi alone witnessed 177 protests, more than the rest of the country combined, mostly by the followers of the Disciples Association.⁶⁹ Zhejiang and Beijing ranked second (71) and third (41), mostly because of followers of the Shouters Faction and Falun Gong, respectively.⁷⁰ The provinces with a moderate number of protests include Shandong, Hebei, Hunan, and Henan. As the government tightened its leash on Falun Gong in Beijing, members in Hebei and Shandong became most active. Along with Shandong, Henan was also a strong base for underground Christianity and Hunan was a hotbed for “heretical sects”.⁷¹

As with CoPSI, criminal groups have been active in almost every province. Nevertheless, organized crime has plagued some provinces more than others, creating zones of vulnerability that run from the southeast coast (Guangdong and Guangxi), radiates to the southwest (Yunnan and Sichuan) and the central China (Hunan, Hubei and Henan), and finally reaches the northeast (Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang). The notable variations in terms of the number of dismantled criminal groups and of political–criminal nexus suggest the following two observations.⁷²

First, the central government’s level of political penetration may determine the latitude and strength of criminal groups in a particular province. The strategic and economic importance of Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Shanghai necessitates more attention and resources for containing crimes, and the geographical proximity to Beijing makes it easier for the central government to control Tianjin and Hebei. Second, extensive overseas connections with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and the Golden Triangle may make it difficult for the

⁶⁹ Shaanxi does not figure very highly in the overall ranking of CoPSI, probably because it does not have such a prominent yet severely stagnant agricultural sector as central China. Nor does it enjoy as easy transportation in the countryside as in central China, which could facilitate collective action by peasants. Further, it also does not face as severe a “rusting” of industrial bases as does the Northeast.

⁷⁰ Numerous protests in Shaanxi are attributed to the Disciples Association with strong bases in Ankang and Yunyang. Religious protests in Zhejiang were instigated largely by the Shouters Faction. Beijing’s religious protests were mostly staged by Falun Gong. The data came from the same sources as in Figure 1.

⁷¹ Both Henan and Hunan have a large rural population that has suffered from agricultural stagnation for years. This large discontented rural population is fertile soil for the revival of Christianity in Henan where it was propagated by Western Christian missionaries several centuries ago. It has also catalyzed the birth of numerous unofficial religious groups in Hunan where local sects have a long history.

⁷² While Hunan and the three northeast provinces are ranked very high in terms of official–gangster collusion, Guangdong and Sichuan’s ranking with regard to a political–criminal nexus is relatively low. In contrast, Henan is ranked high in terms of both the number of criminal groups and official–gangster collusion.

center to keep Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and Yunnan from colluding with international criminal groups. Third, such giant provinces as Henan, Hunan, Hubei and Sichuan with prevalent governance crises tend to create more space for criminal groups to infiltrate.

Table 6. Provincial Susceptibility to Criminal Groups

Rank	Method 1	Method 2	Method 3	MPS List (2002)	MPS List (2004)
1	Guangdong	Guangdong	Hunan	Guangdong	Guangdong
2	Sichuan	Sichuan	Liaoning	Henan	Guangxi
3	Henan	Hubei	Heilongjiang	Liaoning	Hunan
4	Hubei	Hunan	Henan	Hunan	Hubei
5	Hunan	Zhejiang	Guangxi	Hubei	Henan
6	Zhejiang	Henan	Zhejiang	Hebei	Shanxi
7	Yunnan	Liaoning	Guangdong	Shanxi	Anhui
8	Guangxi	Guangxi	Jilin	Guangxi	Liaoning
9	Liaoning	Yunnan	Jiangxi	Heilongjiang	Shaanxi
10	Heilongjiang	Shandong	Sichuan	Anhui	Hebei

Notes:

Method 1: Based on the number of criminal groups destroyed in each province for various years.

Method 2: Based on the number of destroyed criminal groups for six years (1993–98) when data are most complete.

Method 3: By using the cases of political–criminal nexus revealed by the official news agencies (from 1990 to 2003), this rank is made based upon 124 cases collected by the authors.

MPS List: Based on the list released by the Ministry of Public Security that criticized those provinces for the high level of organized crime.

On the basis of Table 6, a total of eight provinces can be identified as those listed in at least three of the five rankings on criminal groups. They are Guangdong (5), Henan (5), Hunan (5), Liaoning (5), Hubei (4), Sichuan (3), Guangxi (3) and Heilongjiang (3). Comparing these eight provinces with the provincial ranks in terms of CoPSI and religious protests provided in Tables 4 and 5, three provinces overlap in all of the three dimensions: Henan, Hubei and Hunan. These provinces are potentially the most explosive of all in terms of political disorder.⁷³

⁷³ It is perhaps not coincidental that the first riot-police units were established in the provincial capital of Henan, Zhengzhou.

Horizontal Linkages and Interconnectedness: A Fatal Recipe?

The discussion so far suggests that collective protests have increased in frequency, expanded in size and geographical coverage, lasted longer and involved higher levels of violence. Furthermore, collective protests are often concomitant with the activity of religious and criminal groups. The upward trend of social instability is further confirmed by other indicators such as the frequency of complaint-filing and the number of labor disputes.⁷⁴ If history is any guide, this upward trend appears ominous as China's past is replete with instances of peasant insurgencies.⁷⁵ Yet it should be noted that isolated cases of protest are unlikely to generate serious impact on the regime. The issues of intra-organizational tightness, inter-regional (lateral) linkages and interconnectedness among collective protests, religious groups and criminal organizations are crucial.

CoPSI are becoming more tightly organized. Many CoPSI are led by assembly-line managers, unionists, labor activists, former cadres, teachers or clan leaders. In the well-known case of Hunan's Daolin Incident in 1999, forty-six leaders organized over 5,000 peasants.⁷⁶ Participants of CoPSI often utilize such titles as "peasant delegations for complaint-filing" (*nongmin shangfangtuan*), "associations for retired workers' complaint-filing" (*tuixiu gongren shangfang xiehui*) and "anti-corruption brigades" (*fan fubai dadui*).⁷⁷ The enhanced level of organization accounts for the durability of some CoPSI: many recent CoPSI have lasted for several days despite armed suppression by the public security forces.⁷⁸

In the past, CoPSI had been largely fragmented and isolated incidents devoid of common platforms and lateral networks. While there might have been some "contagion effects" in operation among small towns within a county, cross-

⁷⁴ See Ching Kwan Lee, "Pathways of Labor Insurgency", in Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds), *Chinese Society*, pp. 41-61. Labor dispute statistics also reflect a similar pattern, since not only did the total number of disputes rise sharply from 8,150 in 1992 to 184,000 in 2002 but the share of unresolved disputes also increased from 3.2 to 9 per cent for the same period. See *Laodong he shehui baozhang fazhan shiye tongji gongbao* (Circular on the Statistics of the Development of Labor and Social Security) at http://www.molss.gov.cn/index_tongji.htm, last accessed on 24 June 2004.

⁷⁵ See Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Fall of Imperial China* (New York: Free Press, 1975). For an interesting study that contends that the People's Republic of China will fare better than most of the short-lived dynasties in Chinese history, see Hongyi Harry Lai, "The Life Span of Unified Regimes in China", *The China Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 93-124.

⁷⁶ For urban cases in this regard, see Ching Kwan Lee, "Pathways of Labor Insurgency", pp. 51-57. For rural cases, see "Nongmin lingxiu" (Peasant Ring-Leaders), *Banyuetian*, No. 2 (2000), pp. 8-21; and Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu, *Taxation without Representation*, pp. 147-48.

⁷⁷ "Quntixing shijian de tedian chengyin ji chuzhi duice", in Zhongyang zhengfa weiyuanhui (ed.), *Weihu shehui wending diaoyan wenji*, p. 211; and Cheng Tongxun, *Zhongguo nongmin zuzhihua yanjiu chutan* (Preliminary Discussions of Peasant Organizations in China) (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 37-39.

⁷⁸ Chen Jinsheng, *Quntixing shijian yanjiu baogao*, pp. 74-75.

provincial spread of disorder was virtually non-existent.⁷⁹ Recently, however, increased concerns have been voiced about lateral linkages among CoPSI. According to a 1999 report, inter-regional connections (*kua diqu huanlian*) and inter-sectoral correspondences were detected in many recent cases. The presence of inter-regional protests in some ethnic minority regions was also suspected.⁸⁰

Religious organizations exhibit a similar trend. The underground Catholic church, some family churches and large “heretical sects” such as the Disciples Association and the Established King Faction have maintained hierarchical organizations across geographical boundaries, independent of state control. The underground Catholic church has the oldest and best organized nationwide networks. In 1989, for instance, archbishops of the underground church in different regions met in Shaanxi to form a national conference for pro-Vatican archbishops.⁸¹ Major Buddhist, Daoist and folk religious sects also maintain hierarchical organizations. The Shouters Faction, the Lord God Sect, the Spirit Church, Falun Gong, Zhong Gong and Xiang Gong developed hierarchical linkages between their provincial and local branches. Ziran Zhong Gong was active in nine provinces and Cibe (Compassion) Gong stretched across three. The Shouters Faction maintained four tiers by setting up regional and local branches, enabling it to expand to 360 cities in 20 provinces at its peak.⁸²

After years of concerted efforts, sects of the Christian house church have finally come together to forge horizontal linkages and coordinate their activities. Due to the initiatives of Xu Yongze, the founder of the All Sphere Church (*quanfanwei jiaohui*), leaders of four of the largest underground denominations in Anhui and Henan published two joint statements in Hong Kong in December 1998. They clarified their belief in orthodox Christianity and criticized the state’s restrictions on evangelical activities.⁸³ In August 2002, forty leaders of six major

⁷⁹ See Gang Lin, Jean C. Oi, Xiaobo Lu and Yawei Liu, *Crisis in the Hinterland*, pp. 5, 10.

⁸⁰ “Woguo fasheng quntixing shijian de diaocha yu sikao” (Survey and Thoughts on Collective Public Security Incidents in China), *Lingdao canyue*, No. 31 (August 10, 2001), p. 18; and Yu Jianrong, “Dangqian bufen diqu nongcun quntixing shijian de zhuyao tedian” (Major Characteristics of CoPSI in the Rural Areas), *Lingdao canyue*, No. 21 (25 July 2002), pp. 14-15.

⁸¹ Mainland Affairs Commission of the Executive Yuan, *Dalu zongjiao xianzhuang jianjie* (A Concise Introduction to the Current Situation of Religion in Mainland) (Taipei: Dalu Weiyuanhui, 1996), p. 87.

⁸² Jiang Jiasen, *Duliu*; and Wu Dongsheng, *Xiejiao de mimi: dangdai Zhongguo xiejiao juhe jizhi yanjiu* (The Secrecy of Evil Cult: A Study on the Regime of Evil Cult Assembly in Today’s China) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2004), pp. 102-12.

⁸³ “China’s Four Large Family Churches Issue Statements, Demanding Release of Followers and Freedom in Beliefs”, posted at <http://www.democracy.org.hk> on 1 December 1998.

underground denominations in Henan met to achieve a common theological understanding and build ties with the overseas church.⁸⁴

The case of Falun Gong demonstrates how much of a challenge a determined sect with horizontal linkages can pose to the state.⁸⁵ With a four-tiered and nationwide organization, Falun Gong has launched numerous protests. Even after it was outlawed, the sect's faithful staged at least two dozen protests between 1999 and 2000.⁸⁶ Even now Falun Gong operates underground. It clandestinely recruits new members and maintains nationwide networks. In 2003, public security authorities cracked 570 cases related to Falun Gong and dismantled over 120 groups in Hebei Province, 100 cases and 11 groups in Shanxi, 83 cases and 31 groups in Jiangxi, and 84 cases and 9 groups in Guizhou.⁸⁷

Many independent religious organizations, including the Shouters Faction, the Established King, the Lord God Sect and the Disciples Association, hold views hostile to the state for not allowing them to express their faith and view official religious associations as mere puppets. Reportedly, in 1995, the Chinese Mainland Administrative Knowledge Station (*zhonghua dalu xingzheng zhishizhan*) printed 9 million leaflets calling for an overthrow of the existing "Satanic authority" (that is, the Communist regime) in China. It mobilized over 1,000 members to distribute the leaflets in 69 cities of 20 provinces. In 1999, two evangelists of the Lord God Sect also organized peasants to resist the collection

⁸⁴ In July 2004, a family church in Anhui organized a meeting which 100 church leaders from Xinjiang, Anhui and Zhejiang attended. In August, a Henan family church organized a retreat in Kaifeng, which was attended by over 100 leaders from Henan, Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang. See "100 duoming jiating jiaohui lingxiu bei zhuabu"; "100 duoming jiating jiaohui lingxiu Xinjiang bei zhuabu" (Over 100 Leaders of the Family Church Arrested in Xinjiang), at <http://www.boxun.com>, 21 June 2004; "100 duoming jiating jiaohui lingxiu Henan Kaifeng bei zhuabu" (Over 100 Leaders of the Family Church Were Arrested in Kaifeng, Henan), at <http://www.boxun.com>, 7 August 2004; and "Six Family Church Leaders in Henan Were Sentenced to Labor Reform", posted at <http://bjzc.org/bjs/bc/81/102>, accessed on 1 August 2005.

⁸⁵ See Jae Ho Chung, "Challenging the State: Falun Gong and Regulatory Dilemmas in China", in John D. Montgomery and Nathan Glaser (eds), *Sovereignty under Challenge: How Governments Respond* (New Brunswick: Transactions, 2002), pp. 87-89; James Tong, "An Organizational Analysis of the Falun Gong: Structure, Communications, Financing", *The China Quarterly*, No. 171 (September 2002), pp. 636-60; and Hongyi Lai, "The Rise, Spread, and Radicalization of Falun Gong", presented at the Conference on "Religion, Transnationalism and Radicalism", in Leiden and Amsterdam, 20-21 June 2003.

⁸⁶ He Bingsong, *Kongbuzhuyi, xiejiao, heishehui*, pp. 273-75.

⁸⁷ Ying Guang and Su Wenyun, "Dangqian 'Falun Gong' xiejiao huodong de xin tedian ji fangzhi duice" (New Characteristics in Current Activities of the Evil Cult Falun Gong and Remedial Measures), *Beijing renmin jingcha xueyuan xuebao* (Academic Journal of Beijing People's Police College), Vol. 75, No. 1 (2002), pp. 1-5; *Zhongguo falü nianjian 2004* (The Law Yearbook of China, 2004), pp. 610, 657, 666, 707; news report from *Ming Pao*, Xinhua Net and *Asia Times*.

of grain and taxes in Hunan.⁸⁸ The cross-regional organization of independent sects and churches is a concern for the state and prompts the authorities to crack down on them frequently and harshly.⁸⁹

Criminal organizations have also increasingly created lateral networks. During 1999–2002, more than 227 criminal groups were dismantled in Kaifeng alone, most of which were associated with the dominant Liang Shengli group that provided protection for them.⁹⁰ Although a national criminal syndicate does not seem to have yet been forged, efforts to coordinate criminal activities across regions have not been rare. In Sichuan, for instance, members of one criminal group in Yibin were able to obtain help from another group in Chengdu to get a safe haven for hiding.⁹¹ There are some indications that ringleaders are seeking to form a national syndicate.⁹²

While collective protestors, religious sects and criminal organizations are all forming lateral networks, a more critical—and perhaps fatal—variable is the “interconnectedness” among these three sources of instability. Popular protest may get entangled with religious beliefs and anti-state rituals, as in the cases of the White Lotus and the Taiping Rebellions. Given that CoPSI frequency seems connected with the prevalence of intense religious activities in Henan, Hunan, Hubei and Zhejiang, such entanglement may be a crucial factor in facilitating provincial variations in organized protest.⁹³

When coupled with the hollowing out of the local state apparatus in the stagnant countryside, the collusion of religious and criminal forces generates great danger for the regime. Surveys in the countryside of Henan, for instance, suggest that religion is competing with and in few areas even gradually replacing township and village governments as an institution with legitimacy, popular support, and the reputation of helping those in need. In these areas, an increasing number of peasants and even cadres have turned away from local governments.

⁸⁸ Jiang Jiasen, *Duliu*, pp. 57-73, 138-139; and “1999 Zhongguo zongjiao xiaoxi”, pp. 2-14.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), pp. xxiv, xvi-xx; Vivienne Shue, “Legitimacy Crisis in China?” in Peter Gries and Stanley Rosen (eds), *State and Society in 21st Century China*, pp. 24-49; and Hongyi H. Lai, “Religious Policies in Post-Totalitarian China”.

⁹⁰ Li Houjian, *Jiaomie zhongyuan heibang* (Exterminate Criminal Groups in the Central Plain) (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha Chubanshe, 2002).

⁹¹ Zhang Chenggong, *Tianfu zhiguo mo yu dao* (Monster and Rule in the State of Heaven) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 1998).

⁹² See He Ping and Wang Zhaojun, *Zhongguo dalu heishehui* (The Criminal Underworld in Mainland China) (Taiwan: Shibao wenhua, 1993), p. 43; and Kang Shuhua and Wen Xinwen, *You zuzhi fanzui toushi* (Perspectives of Organized Crime) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 143-44.

⁹³ Stephen Feuchtwang, “Religion and Resistance”, in Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds), *Chinese Society*, pp. 161-77; and Elizabeth Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven*, pp. 293-97.

Once converted, they have often resisted the procurement of state grains, tax collection and birth control.⁹⁴

In a few places religious sects, criminal forces and kinship networks at the grassroots level *interconnect*.⁹⁵ In the border region of Henan, Anhui and northern Jiangsu, shamanism and religious cults, revived kinship organizations and flourishing criminal groups appear to be converging to resist central state power on one hand and to capture local state authority on the other.⁹⁶ Some evidence suggests that “heretical sects” have engaged in criminal activities. Activists of Zhong Gong, the Disciples Association, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Faction, Oriental Lightning, Children of God and the Dami Mission have been accused of one or more of the following crimes—embezzling donations by their followers, gaining followers through coercion, sex, or blackmail, torturing believers, engaging in polygamy and inducing suicides.⁹⁷

Criminal gangs involve themselves in collective protests as both supporters and suppressors. Where such groups have captured the local state, they sometimes enforce a corrupt order that erodes state legitimacy. In other cases, they organize mobs to resist law enforcement (such as tax collection and birth control) and to stop the reach of legitimate state power.⁹⁸ The armed standoff and the eventual downfall of Pingyuan (Yunnan) in 1992 and Daqiu (Tianjin) in 1993

⁹⁴ Xi Shengyang, Ma Ling, Song Qinghua and Chen Xuezhi, “Henan nongcun zongjiao huodong dui jiceng zhengquan de yingxiang ji duice yanjiu” (An Analysis of the Effects of Religious Activities in Rural Henan on Grass-root Authorities and Counter Measures), *Luoyang gongxueyuan xuebao* (Journal of Luoyang Institute of Technology), Vol. 20, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 42-47; and “Henan Nanyang ezhi xiejiao ji feifa zongjiao huodong” (Nanyang in Henan Contains Evil Cults and Illegal Religious Activities), *Liaowang xinwen zhoukan* (Outlook News Weekly), No. 32 (6 August 2001), pp. 32-33.

⁹⁵ For the Chinese leadership’s view on this possibility of “collusion”, see *Renmin ribao*, 14 December 2000.

⁹⁶ Chen Guidi and Chun Tao, *Zhongguo nongmin diaocha* (Investigations of Peasants in China) (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2004); and Ye Zhaoqing, Zhu Dayin and Geng Changjun, *Laizi zhongguo shehui diceng de baogao* (Reports from the Lower Strata of China) (Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 2004). For the expanding role of clan organizations in rural China, see Xiao Tangbiao and Shi Tianjian (eds), *Dangdai zhongguo nongcun zongzu yu xiangcun zhili* (Clans and Rural Governance in Contemporary China) (Xian: Xibei Daxue Chubanshe, 2002). For the involvement of crime organizations, see Yu Jianrong, “Heie shili qinru nongcun jiceng zhengquan de fangshi ji shouduan” (The Methods and Means of Crime Organizations’ Infiltration into Rural Political Units), *Lingdao canyue*, No. 7 (5 March 2002), pp. 10-12.

⁹⁷ Li Zhao, Kong Xiangtao and Peng Bangfu, *Xiejiao, huidaomen, hei shehui* (Evil Cults, Superstitious Sects, and Secret Societies) (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2000), pp. 184-213.

⁹⁸ Yang Zewan, *Sannong wenti yu nongcun jingwu*, pp. 252-53, 261-65, 296-97.

illustrated how “local dark forces” take over grass-roots communities and turned them into “mud fortresses” to challenge state power.⁹⁹

Legitimacy, Conflict and Governance Crisis

The debate on China’s “(in)stability” has attracted the attention of many China specialists for over a decade.¹⁰⁰ The collapse of the Soviet Union offers a sobering case of failed governance in the face of communal resistance. In fact, the demise of the Soviet empire was foreseen by a few as the gap between its external strength and internal weakness widened.¹⁰¹ Much research has been done by Chinese scholars in their desperate efforts to avoid repeating the mistakes that Moscow made. Since the mid-1990s, Beijing has sought to raise its regulatory and governance capacity in order to maintain both growth and stability. Efforts have been made to milk more out of the provincial purses, to tighten control over the regions, to fight corruption and grass-roots crimes and to limit the spread of unorthodox ideas and beliefs.¹⁰²

Despite these efforts, all three forms of resistance have flourished recently. For the weak and the lost in China, CoPSI is their groaning, religious sects their

⁹⁹ In the former case, via controlling local political and religious institutions, criminals turned the mountainous township into a gangland. It took three months for three thousand armed police officers to recapture the area of 325 square kilometers in 1992. In the latter case, Yu Zuomin, a peasant-turned-entrepreneur, cultivated a personality cult and ran the village as his own “manor”. Relying on a gang of roughs, he attacked, detained and injured state officials. When the Tianjin municipal government dispatched 400 policemen to catch him, Yu mobilized villagers for armed resistance. The standoff lasted for two days. See Ming Xia, “The Criminal–Political Nexus in China”; Bruce Gilley, *Model Rebels: The Rise and Fall of China’s Richest Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Li Yan, *Hongse “Zhuangzhu”* (Red Masters of Manor) (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Wenyi Chubanshe, 1999), section 3.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, David Shambaugh (ed.), *Is China Unstable?*; special issue on “China’s Changing of the Guard”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 2003); and Yang Zaiping and Xiang Dong, *Zhongguo chang bu shuai* (China Will Not Perish) (Beijing: Jingji Kexue Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 37-55.

¹⁰¹ See Seweryn Bialer, *The Soviet Paradox: External Expansion and Internal Decline* (New York: Vintage, 1987); and Z, “To the Stalin Mausoleum”, *Daedalus*, Vol. 199, No. 1 (Winter 1990), pp. 295-344.

¹⁰² On China’s conscious learning from the failures of the Soviet Union, see Lu Nanquan, *Sulian xingwang shilun* (History of the Rise and Collapse of the Soviet Union), 2nd ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehuikexue Chubanshe, 2004); and Cao Changsheng, Zhang Tie and Fan Jianxin (eds), *Sulian yanbian jincheng zhongde yishixingtai yanjiu* (Study of Consciousness in the Process of Changes in the Soviet Union) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2004), ch. 6.

opium, and organized crime “a stepladder of social ascent”.¹⁰³ In reaction, the Party can depict localized rebellions as a threat to the common good. In efforts to defend its claims to sovereignty, the Chinese government often tolerates some protests over explosive events and issues, such as the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in 1999 and Japan’s whitewashing of war crimes in 2005. On the other hand, it also discourages demonstrations over more delicate issues (such as the EP-3 incident in 2001) or when the movement is about to spin out of control and get tangled up with social grievances (as in the case of anti-Japanese protests after mid-April 2005).¹⁰⁴

Granted that discontents alone would not fundamentally alter the political landscape, they can still serve as a strong catalyst to prod the Chinese state to search for effective solutions. City-based democracy movements may provide hitherto impossible bridges between rural and urban protests, thereby crossing the regional and stratum-based boundaries.¹⁰⁵ What remains unclear at this point concerns the question of whether the frequency and intensity of CoPSI occurrences are in any way connected to the particular provinces’ historical proclivities for uprising and instability.¹⁰⁶

Will learning save the Communist state from a blighted future? A wide range of measures that Beijing has been implementing to sustain stability—from canceling agricultural taxes to centralizing the control of public security forces (*gongan jizhonghua*)—have thus far been fairly successful in containing collective protests.¹⁰⁷ However, while the state is not in immediate danger of collapse, continuing instability is highly likely, particularly in such high-risk provinces as Henan, Hubei, Hunan and Sichuan.

Overall, the current regime remains quite strong, as demonstrated by its effective dismantling of Falun Gong. As the Leviathan state has become equipped with better means of control, however, peasants and workers have also come to

¹⁰³ Adapted from Daniel Bell, “Crime as an American Way of Life”, *The Antioch Review*, No. 13 (1953), pp. 131-54, quoted in Nikos Passas, *Organized Crime* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995), p. 101.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven*, p. xiv; Peter H. Gries, *China’s New Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 134; and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “Student Protests in Fin-de-Siecle China”, *New Left Review*, No. 237 (September–October 1999), pp. 52-76.

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, Jae Ho Chung, “Assessing the Odds against the Mandate of Heaven: Do the Numbers on Popular Protest Really Matter?”, in Jae Ho Chung (ed.), *Charting China’s Future*, ch. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Quite a few provinces with high levels of disturbances in terms of frequency during the first half of the 20th century (Henan, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shaanxi) overlap with those with frequent CoPSI occurrences. See Lucien Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party: Grass-Roots Movements in Twentieth-Century China* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), p. 58.

¹⁰⁷ Li Changping, *Wo xiang zongli shuo shihua*, chs. 9–11; Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lu, *Taxation Without Representation*, chs. 2–3.

enjoy more advanced weapons of the weak—most recently, the Internet and mobile phones.¹⁰⁸ The strategy of “going global” adopted by protesters, as well as criminals, has socialized the conflicts into the international community and further complicated the situation. To what extent the measures currently used will continue to contain unrest remains to be seen.

¹⁰⁸ See John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), chapters 4 and 5; and Eric Harwit, “Spreading Telecommunications to Developing Areas in China: Telephones, the Internet and the Digital Divide”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 180 (December 2004), pp. 1010-30.

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