



Journal of Current Chinese Affairs

China aktuell

Trevaskes, Susan (2013),
Rationalising Stability Preservation through Mao's Not So Invisible Hand, in:
Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 42, 2, 51–77.

ISSN: 1868-4874 (online), ISSN: 1868-1026 (print)

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Published by

GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Institute of Asian Studies
in cooperation with the National Institute of Chinese Studies, White Rose East Asia
Centre at the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield and Hamburg University Press.

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Rationalising Stability Preservation through Mao's Not So Invisible Hand

Susan TREVASKES

Abstract: This paper considers the process of constructing the official discourse of *weimen* (维稳, stability preservation) in the policing arena in the first decade of the 21st century. It focuses on the pivotal period after 2003 when policing priorities were shifted from “striking hard” at serious crime to pursuing *weimen* to contain burgeoning protests and civil dissent, as a move to maintain stability in the early to mid years of the Hu Jintao–Wen Jiabao harmonious society era. We observe how Mao has been central in this process. Stability preservation operations have been rationalised through Maoist ideology using some staples of Maoist discourse, particularly “social contradictions”, and policing authorities have adopted key methodological aspects of Maoist campaign-style policing to embed this new *weimen* focus in the everyday agendas of policing, while ever more “mass incidents” disrupt the maintenance of stability in China.

■ Manuscript received 9 January 2012; accepted 15 July 2012

Keywords: China, *weimen*, stability preservation, policing, social contradictions

Dr. Susan Trevaskes is an Australian Research Council (ARC) QEII Research Fellow at Griffith University, Australia. She is also currently an Associate Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS) and an Adjunct Director of the Centre for China in the World (CIW) at the Australian National University (ANU). She researches in the areas of Chinese policing and punishment and has recently published *The Death Penalty in Contemporary China* (Palgrave/Macmillan 2012).

E-mail: <s.trevaskes@griffith.edu.au>

Introduction

The post-Mao Chinese Party-state has demonstrated considerable ability to innovate and adapt to enormous social and economic challenges. We see this in the approach to policing through 维稳 (*weiwēn*, stability preservation), China's policy response to burgeoning expressions of dissent and public disorder nationwide over the past decade. Essays in Heilmann and Perry's edited volume *Mao's Invisible Hand* (2011) demonstrate how the post-Mao regime has been made resilient through a governance mode of continually changing and adapting policy, a *modus operandi* first developed in the revolutionary years of the pre-1949 era and the early years of the People's Republic in the 1950s (Heilmann and Perry 2011: 3). Like the areas examined in that book, the *weiwēn* approach to policing is one of the many policies in China today that not only use an adaptive governance mode in the style of Mao, but also resuscitate aspects of Maoist ideology. In this article¹ I consider the process of constructing the official discourse of *weiwēn* in the policing arena in the years 2000 to 2009, since it is in this discourse that we see how concepts and practices of policing have been adapted from Mao's era for contemporary times. This approach to policing keeps Mao's invisible hand on the steering wheel of policing policy conceptually and in the daily practices of the policing policy toolkit, while pursuing practices with a more visible Mao stamp upon them, particularly through "managed" campaigning.

Weiwēn, an abbreviation of *weihu shehui wending* (维护社会稳定), is a slippery catch-all that refers to the pursuit of social stability through a range of policing methods. These are to manage social dissent and social disorder, particularly "mass incidents", using policing practices that include coercion, persuasion and education. Mass incidents include the protest activities that have festered among aggrieved segments of Chinese society, particularly in the new century: large-scale collective petitions, illegal gatherings, protests, demonstrations, illegal strikes, groups surrounding government or party office sites, collective obstruction of construction projects, blockages of transportation lines and group attacks on civil servants (Ma 2008/2009: 33). Coercion, persuasion and education are terms familiar to students of Maoist ideology, particularly Mao's theory on handling social contradictions (Mao 1977). While the

1 I would like to acknowledge funding from the Australian Research Council and from the Australian National University's Centre on China in the World that supported the preparation of this paper.

Maoist language employed in *weiwén* policing literature is decades-old and while the policing of mass incidents first became prominent in the mid to late 1990s, the term *weiwén* itself is only one decade old in policing discourse. *Weiwén* discourse first appeared on the policing scene in late 2003 in a forum now regarded in Chinese policing circles as a “historic” national policing conference, the Twentieth National Public Security Work Conference (第二十次全国公安会议, *Diershici quanguo gong’an huiyi*).

This paper examines the process of constructing the discourse of *weiwén* in the policing arena in the first decade of the 21st century, with particular reference to Mao’s social contradictions that feature in this discourse. It focuses on the pivotal time after 2003 when policing priorities were shifted from “striking hard” at serious crime, through anti-crime campaigns, to managing protests and civil dissent through *weiwén* policing. This shift in policing priorities began in the early years of the Hu Jintao–Wen Jiabao harmonious society program. Like all major shifts in social control agendas in post-Mao China, discursive legitimisation of policing practices through the construction of a validating ideology has been crucial to the development of *weiwén* policing.

We may assume that any government needs to rationalise its actions. The move enables those who are governed, the people, to be informed about how they are governed and why, in order for the state to best position them to cooperate. In the context of *weiwén* in China, we see that providing the Chinese people, the masses, with an understanding about the why and how of this policy was an important part of the rationalisation. But as the discussion below reveals, the reports first prepared to inform *weiwén* were kept closely within the inner policy circles of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and Party authorities, and were used to inform the police forces that conduct *weiwén* operations with an understanding of why and how to perform their new policing approach. Since this shift to a focus on *weiwén* did not address the core reason for the new policing approach beyond the rhetorical levels of stability preservation and harmonious society, we may recognise that the official rationalisation served other informative purposes. It would aim to keep the police forces in tune with the official rationale to unify the police in their *weiwén* efforts and, as Party sanctioned national policy, it would legitimise the absence of action to address the corruption and related crime that actually inspired the mass incidents.

Looking from the vantage point of the closing days of the Hu–Wen era, we can observe that over the last decade or so, policing authorities

have employed not only Maoist rhetoric in constructing *weimen* discourse, but also key methodological aspects of Maoist campaign-style policy-making and implementation that were used earlier in the framework of the anti-crime campaigns from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. We briefly review this anti-crime campaign template in the first part of the paper, drawing on observations about the format of rationalising earlier anti-crime campaigns that are directly relevant to the rationalising of *weimen* in policing circles from 2003. We find that with *weimen* policing, managing social change and tensions has indeed required the familiar flexible mode of governance that extends beyond bureaucratic rationalisations of politico-legal institution-building, one in which policy-makers have favoured “flexible” and adaptive work styles to enable *weimen* policy-making to “shape itself in the making” (Heilmann and Perry 2011: 12). We find that the shaping of *weimen* discourse is informed by policy rationalisation grounded in the Maoist theory of first identifying and discriminating between the “people” and their “enemies”, and then identifying the source of tensions in “social contradictions” that are handled through coercion, persuasion and education.

The Template of a “Managed Campaign”

The professionalisation of police organisation and reform in China today (Wong 2012) has made impressive advancements side-by-side with continued implementation of what Heilmann and Perry describe in *Mao’s Invisible Hand* as Maoist “guerrilla policy style”. Guerrilla policy style involves:

a distinctive methodology of policy generation that enabled success in the unpredictable military-combat settings of revolutionary time, and that bequeathed a dynamic means of navigating the treacherous rapids of transformative governance during both the Mao era [...] and the post-Mao era [...] (Heilmann and Perry 2011: 12).

Three central understandings guiding the methodology of this guerrilla policy style are particularly relevant to the ideological arena of policing in post-Mao China. First is that ceaseless change and flux require a political model of governance that extends beyond politico-legal institution-building; second, that policy-making requires flexibility and fluidity to retain a “political initiative” and leave space for review and adjustment; and third, that “policy-making is a process of continual improvisation

and adjustment that “shapes itself in the making” (Heilmann and Perry 2011: 12).

These elements were present in the rationalisation of *yanda* (严打, strike hard), the Party-state’s key agenda for policing serious crime over two decades from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. This agenda entailed three main *yanda* campaigns (1983–1986, 1996 and 2001–2003) and many dozens of smaller scale “specialised campaigns” (Trevaskes 2010: 43) implemented nationwide. Anti-crime campaigns can be classed as a type of “managed campaign” which, according to Perry, are post-Mao era campaigns “that adopt and adapt revolutionary campaign methods to current reformist agendas” (Perry 2011: 32). While the last *yanda* campaign in 2001–2003 was certainly more sophisticated and less brutal than the first conducted 20 years earlier, its broad strategies did not differ substantially. All three main *yanda* campaigns were preceded by a strategic rationalisation process immediately before the campaigns were begun in order to justify this severe state response to dramatic change in the landscape of social order. All three campaigns used a model of “political struggle” (斗争, *douzhen*) that would operate alongside (and in some cases, outside) the existing framework of politico-legal institutions. Delivering justice through *yanda* campaigns, rather than through the institutionalised rule of law, was rationalised as a political necessity; flexible policing and repressive action were required to “attack” the enemies of China’s modernisation drive. Rationalising *yanda* necessarily drew from Mao to validate identifying “enemies” and isolating them from the majority of the people in order to punish them by striking hard. Rationalisation was itself a process and through it, strike hard “shaped itself in the making” through three pre-campaign stages:

- Stage 1: Rationalising the necessity of the campaign: protecting stability as a key to national development;
- Stage 2: Assessing the “current situation” of crime and the need to target particular “enemies” to address that situation;
- Stage 3: Launching a national conference involving key political figures to demonstrate political support and give the campaign political legitimacy.

Understanding how campaigns were rationalised through stages in the late 20th century can help us to understand how *weiwun* has been rationalised in the 21st century. In China today, policing academies across the nation offer “system reform” analysis as a key course in the police train-

ing curriculum. Within this program of study, police cadets can choose stability preservation as a major in their studies. An entire industry of *weiben* curriculum materials, textbooks and training manuals for police now focuses on strategies to prevent and handle mass incidents (cf. Mei 2009). These texts invariably argue for the ideological imperative of *weiben* to counter mass incidents. For instance, one police training manual teaches cadets how the social effects of mass incidents compound negatively on society: they disturb the social order (扰乱社会秩序, *raoluan shehui zhibixu*), cause people in the community to feel isolated from the Party, promote crime and violence, and have a negative impact on the stability of the political regime itself (政权的稳定, *zhengquan de wending*) (Shen and Fan 2009: 201–221). Another of these manuals similarly positions mass incidents as a grave threat to both national security (严重危害国家安全, *yanzhong weihai guojia anquan*) and the stability of society as a whole (严重危害整体社会稳定, *yanzhong weihai zhenzhi shehui wending*); they gravely damage the image of the Party and the state, and threaten both the development of the reform agenda and the dictatorship of the ruling party (Qiu 2008: 14). This verbal casting of mass incidents, and by extension the people who participate in them, is extraordinary when we consider that, only a few years earlier, rhetoric of this intensity was preserved for violent criminals, organised crime bosses and terrorists.

At every turn in its discursive expansion in the first decade of the 21st century, *weiben* has been linked to the “social contradictions” and “political struggle” that featured in Maoist discourse. Since the mid-2000s, dozens of new policing manuals have been produced, rationalising *weiben* and providing recommendations in training security forces on how to handle physical conflict between police and protesters. These texts use terms recognised as Mao’s own, such as “political struggle” (斗争/ 奋斗, *douzhen/ fendou*) to frame explanations of how to “win over and reform the great majority while isolating and punishing the minority” through punishing principal offenders severely and dealing with non-principal offenders relatively lightly (Wang and Luo 2005: 148–158). This ideological justification has parallels in the adaptive governance policing techniques of the preceding anti-crime campaigns.

As policing agendas, both *weiben* operations and anti-crime campaigns require ideological justification because of the political nature of their objectives, targets and anticipated outcomes. Party literature identifies three overall tasks of the Party in the contemporary period: enabling reform, encouraging development, and maintaining social stability (Lin

2004: 177). Social stability is the collective responsibility of the Party and the government leadership, and is carried out under the combined leadership of the Party and government at all levels. Below we examine the three stages of the process to rationalise the anti-crime campaigns to better understand the *weiwèn* rationalisation process.

Stage 1: Rationalising the Necessity of the Campaign: Social Stability

Heralding a dramatically new direction in economic development did not compel the Party-state to reinterpret the socialist nature of law in China at the outset of the post-Mao period in the 1980s. In fact, far from reversing the tenets of political philosophy behind punishment and policing practice in the Mao era to fit more comfortably with the development of a market economy, the People's Republic of China's first Criminal Law in 1979 affirmed that this law existed to defend the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to maintain order and to safeguard the smooth progress of the socialist revolution and socialist construction. It thus reaffirmed the political imperative of policing crime. This political imperative to fight crime that was newly grounded in the ideological foundations of socialist law predisposed the legal system to relying heavily on Party policies. The Deng Xiaoping dictum that "social stability overrides everything" (稳定压倒一切, *wending yadao yiqie*) created an enduring justice mindset that criminal law and criminal justice organs exist to protect the interests not just of society or the individual, but also or even foremost, of the Party-state.

Preserving social stability took on a ubiquitous presence in the post-Mao period in both criminal law and policing practice. The political aspiration to "guarantee" social stability as a precondition for economic prosperity privileged this agenda above all other political aspirations bar the Party's continued hold on power. The PRC's first Criminal Law established the political importance of criminal punishment as paramount to the success of China's reform agenda (Dutton 1992). In this way, the political imperative of policing and judicial decision-making, to fight crime for the benefit of the reform agenda, tied the police and the judiciary's interpretation of criminal legislation firmly to Party policies. Criminal law, therefore, developed with the understanding that the specific criteria for determining whether or not a suspect or defendant would be treated leniently or severely necessarily relied on the policing and judicial authority's politically informed assessment of what kinds of criminal acts

fell within the realm of “common”, “serious” or “extremely serious” crime (Trevaskes 2007; 2010).

Policing and judicial decisions about which criminals to target for punishment relied on an assessment of the nature and extent of the crime’s “social harm”, which included not only the harm done to an individual victim but also to society and state, that is, aggregate harm. A rapidly transforming social and economic landscape meant that considerations of serious crime and of extremely harmful social behaviour depended on judicial and police discretion tipped heavily in favour of “striking hard” at social order crime, such as theft and robbery. Crimes that threatened the smooth progress of economic reform were punished heavily, given their threat to social stability.

Party policy input expanded the interpretative borders within which suspects and offenders could be deemed to have committed “serious” and “extremely serious” crimes. This encouraged the severe punishment of many. Ongoing anti-crime campaigns that “severely punished” criminals were supported through the placement of Party committees within courts to provide structural leadership and guidance through the leadership role played by the Central Party Committee’s Politico-legal Affairs Committee (Trevaskes 2011; Lam 2009). Regardless of whether the policy emphasis at various times from the 1980s to the 2000s was to “strike hard” or to “comprehensively manage public order” through less brutal options such as re-education through labour, the guidance that Party policy imposed on policing and judicial decision-making in the 1980s and 1990s ensured that policing and punishment were inevitably rationalised as part of the wider agenda of protecting social stability.

Stage 2: Targeting Enemies

The new political space of policing and criminal justice operations that emerged in the 1980s from Deng Xiaoping’s new call to establish a socialist rule of law in China was characterised by a crossbreeding of Maoist and Dengist rhetoric and practice (Trevaskes 2010: 9). “Targeting enemies” drew directly from Mao as rhetoric and as practice. The PRC’s first Criminal Law in 1979 recommitted policing and judicial authorities to the Maoist idea of tempering the severe punishment of a minority of criminals with comparatively lenient punishment of those whose crimes were deemed less threatening to the stability of society. The Party-state placed a heavy burden on criminal justice agencies to act on Deng’s maxim that “social stability overrides everything”. Criminal justice agencies

were, however, profoundly incapable of fulfilling this task given their fundamental lack of resources, experience, and professional training (Tanner 2000: 94). The then prevailing rhetoric of mass-line justice and comprehensive support from the people derived from what the authorities perceived as the need to restore what Tanner calls “the balance of awe”. It was a bid to recapture the “social mood” and community confidence in criminal justice agencies by “striking hard” at serious crime (Tanner 2000: 97). Yet in this political context there was an obvious problem in applying harsh punishment for social order crimes. State responses to targeted social order crimes such as robbery, drug trafficking and homicide took on a uniformity that encouraged across-the-board heavy punishment for social order crimes. The continuous application of the “strike hard” policy justified a blanket “harsh punishment” response for crimes such as homicide, robbery and drug trafficking, often regardless of the individual conditions of the crime (Trevaskes 2010: 24–78, 2012: 8).

While stability replaced the revolutionary line as the order of the day post-Mao, policing and punishing serious offenders continued to be understood and practiced as a type of “political struggle” against enemies in the format known as the anti-crime campaign. Policing crime, therefore, continued to be not only a political tool, but also a distinct expression of the political. Fighting crime through “struggle” was the aim, and the campaign was the organisational shell within which it operated (Trevaskes 2010: 5). Even today campaigns are officially called “struggles” (斗争, *douzhen*) because they have many of the hallmarks of the political struggles that characterised Mao’s China, even if now meted by a different political hand. The ideology of struggle has lived on in the post-Mao period through the culture of campaign justice, which is essentially an ideology of policing and punishment with the notion of political struggle cultivated during the Mao period and translated into a legal “struggle” against a specific crime target or targets (effectively, enemies) for a specific time period.

Official perceptions of which crime types to target for “harsh” or “lenient” punishment also reached for the Maoist language of contradiction. “Combining punishment with leniency” (惩办与宽大相结合, *chengban yu kuanda xiangjiehe*), an invention of Maoist dialectics, is enshrined in Article 1 of the 1979 Criminal Law. In the Mao era, policy sought to “win over and reform the great majority of criminals while isolating and punishing the minority” through a variety of means. These included

severely punishing principal offenders, recidivists and those who refused to confess to their crimes, and punishing leniently non-principal offenders, first-time offenders, and those who surrendered to police or performed meritorious service (Keith 1994: 154–155). “Combining punishment with leniency” in the Criminal Law also draws from Maoist dialectics: “the people” versus the people’s enemies; the “majority” versus the minority; and “general enemies” versus “immediate enemies”. The dialectical balance here between severity and relative leniency reflects the flexibility that was and still is a hallmark of the Chinese criminal justice system (Keith 1994: 154–155).

Stage 3: Launching a National Conference

This pre-campaign stage involved organising a group of experts to appear at a conference to evaluate the crime situation and inform the government, local Party committees and the public of the unacceptably high rates of crime. Such proclamations would be followed by announcements of the intended targets of the campaign as enemies of the masses and saboteurs of socialist modernisation (Trevaskes 2010: 81). The first Strike Hard campaign in 1983, for instance, began with a group of Party leaders declaring that, although crime rates had decreased in the preceding year, public order in post-Mao China needed to be restored to the levels enjoyed in the 1950s. The Party leaders criticised the police for being too soft on crime in recent years, and declared that a policy of dealing “severe and swift” blows to criminals would be required to turn the situation around. Strike Hard 2001 began in the same way as the 1983 campaign: it was launched by Party leaders at a national conference in Beijing on public order (Trevaskes 2010: 81).

For the first time in any Strike Hard campaign, the entire membership of the national Politburo attended the conference that launched the 2001 drive, giving crime control instant status as the state’s top domestic policy priority for the year. An address by President Jiang Zemin officially launched the campaign, declaring Strike Hard as a key mechanism for preserving the future of both the economic reforms and, crucially, the stability of Party rule. After Jiang’s speech, campaign policy was disseminated swiftly through provincial Party committees and national criminal justice agencies. The campaign aim was to “attack” (打击, *daji*) serious criminal elements to procure a sharp decline in crime rates through the judicial practice of applying “severe and swift” punishment to predetermined categories of criminals as a means of both deterrence and retribu-

tion. The campaign's targeted "enemies" were members of mafia-style gangs and other organised criminal groups, violent offenders, and corrupt government and Party officials.

From the above three stages preceding the anti-crime campaigns: progressing from rationalising need to targeting enemies through to launching a national conference, we see that preparations for policing agendas in China follow a familiar path. Turning now to *weiben*, we see that *weiben* and *yanda* share more than the Maoist language of enemy and friend; "attacking" and "preventing". They also share much in the process of the state's rationalisation of their existence as appropriate national policy for the Chinese nation and requiring the strict compliance of the Chinese people to succeed.

From Rationalising Campaigns to Rationalising *Weiben*

The action and thinking behind the shift to *weiben* were particularly inspired in the late 1990s and early 2000s when thousands of mass incidents and other social protests began igniting the Party-state's obsession with national stability and unity. Drawing Maoist rhetoric back to centre stage in the early 2000s, the authorities began to reconfigure policing agendas with the political discourse needed to justify the Hu–Wen regime's dominant approach to law and order: essentially, preserving or protecting social stability at all costs. Central to this reconfigured rhetoric was the concept of *weiben* in policing discourse.

Weiben is now ubiquitous in 21st century Chinese policing discourse, yet it did not emerge spontaneously in the 2000s as a mature and developed concept. Rather, it "shaped itself in the making" through a process of ideological rationalisation and policy experimentation at the hands of the Party-state authorities as they responded variously to the mass incidents erupting far and wide among aggrieved pockets of Chinese society. The concept of "preserving social stability" (保护社会稳定, *baohu shehui wending*) has for decades been a leading rationale for policing crime, but the term *weiben* is relatively new to the policing repertoire. *Weiben* and the discourse surrounding it first surfaced on the policing scene in a forum that Chinese policing circles now regard as an "historic" conference: the Twentieth National Public Security Work Conference, known in shorthand policing parlance as "20-gong" (二十公, *ershi gong*). 20-gong was the birthplace, not only of *weiben* discourse in policing, but also of

initial moves by politico-legal leaders including the minister of public security, Zhou Yongkang, to encourage policy-makers to adapt Maoist rhetoric to fit police rationalisation for controlling mass incidents and other forms of social protests.

Here, we observe how the process of rationalising *weiwen* has the hallmarks of a managed campaign, corresponding to the process described above for the *yanda* campaigns, but with one key exception: rationalising *weiwen* relied much more heavily on the use of social science research projects commissioned by the Ministry of Public Security and the Central Party Committee. Below we examine the three main stages for rationalising *weiwen*:

- Stage 1: Rationalising the necessity of *weiwen* as a key to protecting national development;
- Stage 2: Launching a national conference where authorities demonstrated political support to give *weiwen* political legitimacy;
- Stage 3: Commissioning research projects to assess “social contradictions”.

Stage 1: Rationalising *weiwen* as a Key to Securing National Development

Senior members of the police had backed the Party’s anti-crime campaign ambitions for decades, but the dismal failure of a national Strike Hard campaign from 2001 to 2003, which failed to achieve anything like its stated aim of a “basic turnaround” in the crime situation, was the catalyst for a change of heart in senior policing circles. At a national policing conference in late 2003, senior policing officials called for a “turnaround” in crime control strategies. Senior police had gradually become more tolerant of serious crime as an inevitable side effect of China’s modernisation and economic transformation. They could see that their policing strategies and the national policing policy that guided them needed to cope with another development: the mass incidents expressing public grievances, which disrupted social stability and national development (Trevaskes 2010: 111–116).

The pivotal shift in rationalising policing operations for “preserving stability” was made in late 2003. In China, subtle changes in the political lexicon often signal major changes in policy. So it was for the annual report by public security minister Zhou Yongkang to senior police, which downplayed “attacking crime” and emphasised “preventing

crime” and “preserving stability”. Zhou’s speeches to senior police in late 2003 indicated that a new line had been put in place on the policy-making board. At the highest levels of politico-legal power, preference was shifting solidly to “stringent crime prevention” away from the strike hard “attack” mode of policing that had dominated policy and practice for the previous 20 years. Late in 2003, Luo Gan, Politburo member, head of the Party’s Politico-legal Commission and the nation’s chief *yanda* proponent, announced that “striking hard” would be “routinised” or “regularised” into everyday practice, that is, taken out of its campaign shell (Trevaskes 2010: 118–120). In this way, the belated recognition that striking hard through campaigns could not solve the serious crime problem in China dovetailed with the start of a new national emphasis in policing policy on a more lenient approach to dealing with social crime and on maintaining stability by managing social protests.

The Communist Party of China Central Committee of (CPCCC) sounded the bugle for a new national policy shift, the rhetorical badge for Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao as national leaders, with the official announcement of China’s need to build a harmonious society in the mid-2000s. The change in policing priorities from striking hard at serious crime to *weiwen* policing had already been under way officially since late 2003, introducing an approach more consistent with the “harmonious society” position. But while 2003 was apparently the pivotal year for the shift in policing policy, the process of rationalising the nexus between actual policing and *weiwen* philosophy to address the burgeoning protests had already been in train the year before. The CPCCC had already begun to commission reports on the state of social stability and to solicit opinion about the actual extent of the threat that mass incidents pose to China’s stability.

In 2002 a national research grant was awarded to Chen Jinsheng and his research team from the Shanxi University Law Department to compile for the CPCCC a national “state of play” report into the impact of mass incidents on stability. Their report for the CPCCC on the state of mass incidents from 2002 to 2003, entitled *Research Report on Mass Incidents* (Chen 2004), identified five ways in which mass incidents pose a direct threat to the nation. First, they gravely damage the government’s image (严重破坏政府的形象, *yanzhong pobuai zhengfu de xingxiang*) since the protests are always, in essence, an expression of no-confidence in the government. Second, they gravely damage the image of the Communist party in the eyes of the community (严重破坏共产党的形象, *yanzhong*

pobuai gongchandang de xingxiang) since mass incidents are counter to the idea that the Party exists to protect the masses. Third, they gravely threaten the authority of the law, in the sense that their existence mocks the claim that China has successfully built a legal system and laws that effectively regulate social relations. Fourth, they gravely threaten political stability (严重危害政治稳定, *yanzhong weibai zhengzhi wending*) to the extent that they provide an avenue for anti-government forces to promote their political causes. Fifth, they gravely threaten community respect for order (严重危害群众对社会秩序的尊严, *yanzhong weibai qunzhong dui shehui zhibixu de zunyan*), which has the potential to impact negatively on social values in the community (Chen 2004: 214–216).

In the same year, the MPS commissioned the Shandong Provincial Public Security Bureau to organise ten province-wide workshops on the state of mass incidents to develop a feel for the state of play on mass incidents and to elicit advice from grassroots policing quarters about handling incidents. The outcome of the ten forums attended and “workshopped” by hundreds of senior Shandong police personnel was a report written for the entire constituency of provincial public security chiefs in China. The report stated that since the turn of the 21st century, mass incidents had changed significantly in scope and in the nature of their targets of protest. Its authors argued that by the turn of the century two years earlier, protests had become the biggest threat to social and political stability in China (Yang 2002: 22).

The Shandong report identified four main ways in which mass incidents impact on police work. First, the spontaneity of incidents means that they are an unknown quantity to the police and the police cannot devise any means of forecasting their level of threat to society from one period to another. Hence the police are unable to forecast the level of resources needed and the police response to that threat. Second, mass incidents drain the police of financial and human resources, giving public security bureaus no alternative but to divert funding from grassroots policing into policing protests. This diverting of funds directly affects the ability of the police to protect public order. Third, mass incidents lead to a dramatic loss of community trust in the state, pitting those who manage society (管理者, *guanlizhe*) against those in society who are managed (被管理的, *bei guanli de*), further escalating the antagonism between state and society. Fourth, if mass incidents are not put under control, a larger part of the community will probably “model” (模范, *mofan*) their own behaviour on the protestors. This will lead to a further breakdown in

community values and attitudes attached to the very idea of socialism (Yang 2002: 24).

Stage 2: Launching a National Conference

As we have observed above, the rationalisations and targets of *yanda* campaigns were invariably announced at a national conference to build legitimacy for the policy initiative. This rings true for *weiwén* discourse's grand entrée onto the policing stage. As noted above, *weiwén* was first announced as a catchcry by the minister of public security, Zhou Yongkang, at the Twentieth National Public Security Work Conference, the so-called 20-*gong*, in 2003 (Zhou 2003). The conference was declared a crucial turning point in the era of building a harmonious and a moderately prosperous society and a "milestone" (里程碑, *lichengbei*) in public security in China. This is because Zhou declared in his keynote speech that, henceforth, all strength and effort would be given to the "struggle" for the important "strategic opportunity" that *weiwén* presented to the nation.

This was the first national hoisting of the *weiwén* flag. Here Zhou explained that policing forces would be placing their capacities behind new ideas and methods for maintaining stability (Zhou 2003). Also announced at the conference was a decision by the CPCCC to commission 18 major national studies that would report back to the CPCCC in 2005 on issues central to policing in China (Ershi gong jingshen lilun yanjiu wenji bianweihui 2005). Not one of the 18 studies related in any way to the strike hard policy, which gives further indication that, by this stage, striking hard against severe crime through anti-crime campaigns was well and truly off the political agenda. Two of the 18 commissioned studies were on mass incidents. The CPCCC's Politico-legal Commission signalled that it required a theoretical study on the "the state of social stability and its relationship to changes in the nature of social contradictions in China" and it commissioned Tian Quanhua and Ren Hongjie from the Public Security University in Beijing to write the report (Tian and Ren 2005).

Stage 3: Commissioning Research Projects on "Social Contradictions"

A key ingredient missing from the *weiwén* rationalisation process was an explanation of the direct connection between the social instability that

warranted the *weimen* policing response and the particular elements of society at whom the policy was directed, that is those whom the Party-state had targeted in its efforts to control and manage dissent. Tian and Ren worked on their CPC-Commissioned research project for nearly two years. The title of their report, published in internal policing and Party circles in April 2005, translates as “Factors Influencing the Evolution of Social Contradictions in China and Their Impact on Social Stability” (Tian and Ren 2005). This report argued that social contradictions (社会矛盾, *shehui maodun*) continued in China in the 21st century despite announcements in the early 1980s by key party figures such as Deng Xiaoping that class struggle no longer steered the party’s socio-political agenda. However, the specific “form” into which social contradictions had evolved in the two decades of post-Mao reform had undergone a “tremendous transformation” over the past decade or so. Tian and Ren summarised the key changes in social contradictions in China in terms of six main types of social relationships, all of which were increasingly contradictory and marked by greater inequality. These were relations between:

- rich and poor;
- government officials and the masses;
- labour and capital;
- people from urban and from rural areas;
- Han and various ethnic minorities; and
- people from different regions within China (Tian and Ren 2005: 73–102).

Tian and Ren argued that clashes between disparate interests are the central reason for continuing social contradictions, as borne out by the fundamental and deep conflicts between all the pairs in the six duopolies of people on their list of contradictions. The increasingly acute disparity of interests between these groups had engendered the ever more hostile atmosphere of “struggle” evident in the antagonistic way that people sought to protect their own interests through protests (Tian and Ren 2005: 73–74). They recommended that *weimen* activities should be realigned to better address the increasingly combative nature of these contradictions in the face of these popular struggles and hostility.

In the six contradiction-laden relationships listed in their study, the most acute contradiction affecting attitudes in society is, they argued, that between government officials and the masses. They blamed the

escalation of this contradiction on the ongoing pillaging of public funds and financial interests by venal officials through corruption and other criminal activities that the authorities and the legal system have left unchecked and unpunished for at least two decades. In other words, Party-state officials directly damaging the economic interests of the masses had caused the party-masses split. Conflict over financial interests, through the criminal activities of corrupt officials nationwide to remove the public monies of the masses, was the key source of widespread antagonism (Tian and Ren 2005: 74). Astoundingly for a report written for the CPCCC, Tian and Ren also detailed the extent of the problem: the lowest average annual amount of lost revenue due to corruption in the period 1995–2000 was 98.7 billion CNY. The highest annual figure in those years was 125.70 billion CNY. These figures represent between 13 per cent and 16.8 per cent of China's GDP for those years (2005: 74). Tian and Ren point out that these figures do not include the hundreds of thousands of incidents each year at the local level where cadres illegally extract portions of the profits of appropriated agricultural land, forestry land, farm tax and so forth from private or public purses, or the deliberate withholding of public servant salaries, both of which would likely inflate these figures enormously.

Tian and Ren argued that increasing community awareness of official corruption has fuelled the fire of protestors seeking their own personal redress. This is particularly so for society's most vulnerable groups, including the unemployed and low wage earners. Many of the people who protest at the injustices done to them have minimal financial resources. So when those limited resources (for instance, their low paying jobs or their home) are threatened, their sheer vulnerability to poverty is the trigger that converts their anger into public protest to express, in Mao's words, their directly "antagonist" relationship with the Party-state (Tian and Ren 2005: 77). With their grievances unresolved, their initially benign social actions (such as petitioning visits to government offices and courts) escalate from "small disturbances" (小闹, *xiaonao*) to "large disturbances" (大闹, *danao*) (Tian and Ren 2005: 77).

In 2005, forces began to propel the nascent *weimen* research industry into overdrive, particularly after the now renowned call to build a harmonious society, fortified by the Hu–Wen imprimatur at the Sixteenth Party Congress. In July 2005, the MPS Research Unit No. 4 conducted a national research project led by Liu Boxiang in collaboration with local policing agencies. Their report, *Public Security Work and Harmonious Society*,

positioned controlling mass incidents at the top of the public security agenda for building a harmonious society. The report was distributed internally to public security branches nationwide in 2006.

Chapter 13 of the report detailed methods to improve the capacity of public security to handle mass incidents, stating that “maintaining stability provides the very basis for safeguarding the building of a harmonious society” (Liu 2006: 227). Claiming “mass incidents are extremely detrimental to the building of a harmonious society” (Liu 2006: 227), the report identified the current volume and intensity of mass incidents as the most prominent issue impacting the state of public security in China. Minister Zhou Yongkang’s recorded response to the report was that “preventing and handling mass incidents will now be an extremely important priority for public security work” (Liu 2006: 227). Zhou declared,

We must in a practical and realistic way, strengthen this work and make it a priority task for Party committees at each level. This is an important political task (重要政治任务, *zhongyao zhengzhi renwu*) of the public security in China [...] Maintaining stability is intimately connected to the entire plan of building a harmonious society (Liu 2006: 227).

Here was an unequivocal declaration by the minister that the policing of protest and dissent was now to be perceived as a pre-condition for the success of the entire harmonious society agenda. From this point on, it was articulated increasingly in the Ministry of Public Security and beyond that “harmonious society” needed to be “protected” through *weiren* policing of dissent.

Weiwen’s Past and Future

Since the late 1990s, police “protection” of society from the social effects of instability created by social protests has taken a two-sided approach: coercive tactics aimed at the minority who are protest ringleaders, and “persuasion and education” for the vast majority of participants (Tanner 2007). Coercion, persuasion and education come directly from Mao’s theory of how to handle contradictions between the people and their enemies (coercion) and among the people (persuasion and education). It was also a means of determining criminality in the Mao period; “democracy” was the means of dealing with the contradictions among the people, and “dictatorship” was the means of dealing with the contra-

dictions between the people and their enemies (Cohen 1968). “Contradictions among the people” could be dealt with in a non-antagonistic manner through the democratic means of “discussion, criticism, persuasion and education”. Whereas contradictions among the people were non-antagonistic and could be resolved by peaceful methods, antagonistic contradictions could not be resolved in this way. The mode of “dictatorship” was applied to the “enemy” as a way to solve antagonistic contradictions in a coercive manner (Mao 1977).

In the 21st century, mass incidents are officially regarded as “contradictions among the people” and are therefore “non-antagonistic contradictions”, but those who organise protests or defend the organisers can be treated “coercively” through legal punishment since their relationship with the Party-state can be considered “antagonistic”. We are informed by the *weixin* literature outside China that the police employ these broad measures of coercion, persuasion and education to deal with protestors and to protect the harmonious society agenda (Chen 2012; Wong 2012; Tong and Lei 2010; Chen 2008; Cai 2008; Tanner 2007). Scholar Chen Xi, for instance, outlines four key government strategies: repression, concession, persuasion and procrastination (Chen 2012: 65–86). Murray Scot Tanner identifies as the key element of the security strategy, containing and managing small-scale unrest through non-violent means to avoid raising the intensity of the protest, while at the same time “driving wedges between average citizens and politically active organisers” (Tanner 2007: 11). Essentially, the wedge strategy is employed so that it appears to observers that the Party is addressing the issue of concern that inspired the protest and is showing “restraint in dealing with rank-and-file disgruntled citizens, while actively isolating and repressing would-be organizers of protest movements” (Tanner 2007: 11).

The internal security strategy aims at getting disgruntled citizens to believe that they have no option but to accept and work with the current CCP system, and that they would still be taking a very dangerous risk to see such options. The strategy threatens those who try to organise dissent – even formally legal dissent – with serious repression. “Rank and file” protestors also certainly risk detention and punishment. But internal security officials are officially urged to try to avoid alienating the majority of citizens by publicly recognising the legitimacy of their complaints, and avoiding the use of ham-handed, indiscriminate violence that risks turning small-scale non-violent protests into mass riots (Tanner 2007: 3)

Cai Yongshun's work on the suppression of protesters notes that, although there have been cases of the police opening fire on protestors, violent crackdowns are not the norm. The most common mode of suppression is "exemplary punishment" given to those who organise protests and disseminate information, that is, to "isolate and punish the minority and to win over, divide and educate the majority" (Cai 2008: 29). Local authorities employ two main means to isolate and punish the minority: hiring thugs to harass or attack activists and legal punishment (Cai 2008: 29). Individuals can be sentenced for three to seven years' imprisonment under Article 290 of the Criminal Law for disrupting social order if the consequences of their disruption lead to "serious losses", and up to ten years for activist leaders who attack state agencies.

Mao's treatise, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, was borne of a period in PRC history when Mao himself faced a "stability preservation" crisis in the nation that he led. By late 1956, students, workers and peasants were increasingly incensed at the course of socialist construction and had begun to organise street protests and strikes. The disastrous period of repression following the promulgation of Mao's *Contradictions* in 1957 conveys to us that the political benefit of his contradictions theory was its flexibility and its discretionary power that could be applied when judging the question of whom to suppress. A deliberately flexible approach to applying criminal justice and other repressive practices was promoted as a legitimate means of adapting to changes in the political and economic conditions of social development in the 1950s, so authorities could react promptly to the changing threats to the social order. Hence, Mao's contradictions theory provided a template that encouraged flexibility and wide discretion when meting out "punishment" for enemies and "education" for the people, a practice that authorities have carried over into the 21st century.

Crime control and stability maintenance strategies both in the 1950s and today are driven by a particular idea that, in order to best serve "the people", law concerning stability maintenance operations must be applied in a flexible manner, both procedurally and substantively. Socialist legal ideology prescribes that changes in the concrete circumstances of social development are reflected in Party norms. The application of the law changes in response to changes in Party norms, and adjustments and changes in Party norms are based on Party assessments of the "actuality" of the social conditions of socialist transformation, as interpreted through Party policy. As the law serves the interests of state-building and

social development, it must be flexible. Application of law can be amended and renegotiated on the basis of Party assessments of historical developments and current circumstances. Flexibility in this sense is rationalised on the basis that the law should not be so rigid as to hinder the Party's ability to direct state and social development.

It is not surprising then that flexibility has served well Politburo Standing Committee member and head of China's law-and-order operations, Zhou Yongkang, in his "about-face" on stability preservation policy promulgations in 2012. A year earlier, at the height of Bo Xilai's reign in Chongqing, Zhou had committed China's police to the ethos of Bo's Chongqing model.

China's most influential mass incident in years, the Wukan uprising in late 2011, created a new *weiren* "hero" in Wang Yang, the provincial governor of Guangdong and arch rival of Bo Xilai, who declared that his police force's successful handling of the incident by accommodating the protestors had created a new "model" for *weiren* operations in China. With Bo Xilai's demise in March 2012, Zhou Yongkang found himself politically alienated and suddenly in the mood for a more "harmonious" *weiren* agenda, thus on 4 July 2012 he affirmed that the "Guangdong Model" is the new direction for *weiren* in China (Zhao 2012). An apparent new openness in Beijing to a more harmonious approach to reporting on protests is now evident. Days after police attacked crowds with tear gas, flash grenades and baton charges in a protest in Shifang in Sichuan province in July, news accounts about the "Shifang Affair" and public comments had become surprisingly open and accessible (Lee 2012). *Asia Times* writer Peter Lee cites a Chinese journalist's take on the new willingness to allow debate on local police heavy-handedness:

(There were) three strange things about the Shifang affair: 1. There was almost no removal of posts on Weibo; 2. *Xinbuanet* and *People's Daily net* reported strongly, pointing the finger at the special police for forcibly dispersing the people, in a change from the previous tradition of covering such matters up; 3. Police violence has become the widespread target of public opinion. One gets the vague feeling that behind all this is a giant chess game going on (Lee 2012).

Weiren as policing policy no doubt has an uncertain future in China and events in 2012 indicate that members of the Politburo were not united in their approach to *weiren*. Post-Eighteenth Party Congress, the "rigid" stability preservation approach is now out of political fashion but the annual *weiren* budget continues to increase, indicating that preserving

stability remains a top political issue in Xi Jinping's China. But whatever policing model reigns supreme under the new Party leadership, it will necessarily retain the central authorities' strategy of "localising grievances while insulating the Centre" (Mattis 2012). It will at least encourage the public perception that the central government is both sympathetic in principle to the aggrieved, poor and vulnerable people involved in such protests and is working hard to restore stability for the nation.

This is precisely the perception that the state and policing authorities have carefully tried to convey with their public rationalising of *weimen* to try to manage, through policing, the ever more disruptive public expressions of dissent and disorder that are said to damage social relations and stability in Chinese society. In justifying what they are doing through policing policy, the higher levels of authority have sought to veil what they are not doing or are limited in doing through law and what the people themselves cannot do through the law. The authorities are thus not effectively addressing either of the two key sources of public anger that fuels social unrest. Most obvious is the corruption and apathy towards corruption apparently entrenched at all levels of government, under which many of the masses are suffering. Less obvious, and apparently less acknowledged and articulated, is the issue of access to formal justice, that is, the incapacity of many people to use and afford the legal system as an avenue through which their grievances could be addressed. In this way, the process of rationalising *weimen* serves, by intentional default, an expressly political purpose as the state itself struggles to regulate social relations at this stage of the reform drive. The authorities are not directly addressing the contradictions inherent in the institutionalised corruption now abrading China's socio-political systems.

Even though it recognises the imperative to maintain stability as prerequisite to the success of its reform drive, the Party appears unwilling and/ or unable to control the abuse of power and corruption at the local level that most powerfully drives social protest and dissent. Many of Chinese society's "managers", Party and government officials from county to central level, are the very people who attract the greatest ire of the masses; their unwillingness to redress injustices and their sometimes negligent, illegal or corrupt conduct are the main sources of the land and labour disputes with which China is now riven. Over the last decade, those in the lower and mid-ranks of power, those who manage the masses at county, municipal and provincial level and whom the central authorities rely on to maintain stability, are the very ranks of officialdom

that the masses see as the source of negligence, corruption and injustice. An irony, perhaps tragedy, of *weimen* is that many of the millions of local government and Party actors use their political positions in an illegitimate and sometimes criminal manner by influencing local government decisions and litigation outcomes to serve their own interests. Meanwhile, these are the very political actors on whom the Party knowingly relies to implement stability preservation policies and operations.

As Tian and Ren (2005: 77) observed, vulnerability to poverty and loss of income is the trigger that escalates a protest by the masses into a directly “antagonist” (对抗性, *duikangxing*) relationship with the Party-state. Failure to address legitimate disputes and failure to tackle corruption head on will continue to encourage “small disturbances” to morph into “large disturbances” (Tian and Ren 2005: 77). By design or default, then, the state’s failure to take effective action provides ongoing validation of the rationale for its *weimen* policing approach. Here we see that those state officials who are the very source of corruption in Chinese society are precisely those on whom Beijing continues to rely for maintaining stability. This is the primary reason why the central authorities are unwilling to address the heart of the “instability” problem. It is also the greatest “contradiction” we find in the regulation of state-society relations in China today.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how public security and central political authorities have rationalised a new policing strategy of *weimen* from the early 2000s to manage mass incidents and other protests that increasingly disrupt the preservation of stability in China. In constructing a discourse of *weimen* rationalisation, we find that the hand of Mao has been kept firmly in place on this policy steering wheel. The ideology and language of Mao, as well as the typically Maoist notion of policy change and adaptation, manifest in what Perry (2011) describes as “managed campaigns”, remain clearly in the mindset of the authorities and the government officers who manage social control. These Maoist trappings, therefore, still resonate in the policing arena through the *weimen* “stability preservation” agenda.

At the heart of *weimen* is a political agenda that understands stability as a crucial ingredient in the success of China’s economic modernisation drive. This is why the *weimen* policing agenda is at heart a political en-

deavour to protect the Party's very hold on political power. For well over a decade now, since the Party-state has seemed incapable of or unwilling to address the endemic corruption responsible for much of the protest roiling the nation, it has rationalised the shift to policing instability by including social protest as a particularly dangerous form of social deviance. Through this rationalisation process, society's enemies can be publicly identified and treated as such. While Heilmann and Perry observe Chinese policy-making as a process of continual adjustment that "shapes itself in the making" (2012: 12), our examination reveals the more active hand of the state's policy-makers, certainly in the rationalisation process, to protect the Party as well as the nation from instability.

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