

How Internal are China's Internal Problems?

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Introduction

For centuries China was known for its vast population and its heterogeneity. It was during the Qing dynasty, due to the increase of agriculture production and other factors that China's population reached 400 million. However, a rising population exceeds its resources and the later increase of population became one of the important factors for the downfall of the Qing Dynasty. The fear of a population explosion and its impact continues to haunt China in modern period as well. Three decades after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Chinese government decided to control the rising population through coercive methods.

From 1800-1911, there were around eight major well known rebellions in China, covering different parts of the empire. One of the common reasons for the outbreak of all these rebellion was misgovernment and corruption. Within four decades of the establishment of the PRC, the Tiananmen Square protests broke out in China led by students and later joined by union laborers, and common Chinese people. Once again, the reasons for the protests were a decade of misgovernance and growing corruption. From 1993 to 2008, there were a total of 614,100 protests across China. These protests resulted from many factors including misgovernment and corruption at the Centre as well as at the provincial level. Chinese people mainly protests when their rights are taken away or taken away from them by the government. When someone takes away what is dear to you, it is natural for people to protest. This paper is an attempt to throw light on the fact that the recurring protests in China are not a recent phenomenon; they are embedded in Chinese history. In the following pages, an attempt has been made to reveal that there is a connection between past and present which has implications for future of China.

Poor Governance, More Rebellions

A Century of Peasants Rebellions

In 1766, the French political economist Francois Quesnay remarked:

No one can deny that this state is the most beautiful in the world, the most densely populated, and the most flourishing kingdom known. Such an empire as that of China is equal to what all Europe would be if the later were united under a single Sovereign.¹

From the above observation by Francois Quesnay, it can be concluded that during that time, China was economically flourishing along with its growing population. But Quesnay's observation was about to gradually change. Lord George McCartney while visiting China on behalf of King George III in 1793 noted "Scarcely a year now passes, without an insurrection in some of the provinces."² This highlighted the grassroots situation prevailing in China during his official visit. In 1797 a revolt broke out in China named the Miao Revolt by an Imperial government. The revolt was the result of growing corruption and heavy taxation by the Qing government officials on Hunan peasants. When the revolt was waged, various ethnic factions, especially the Miao, Han, and Bouyei, cooperated as allies. The ethnic divisions which were often found throughout China were dispensed with by the peasants of this region as they attempted to throw off the yoke of the Qing Dynasty.³ The above dramatic changes of events signify the dynamic nature of China, where change is constant. In order to prevent future unrest and cooperation among the ethnic groups, Han Civilians were brought in, large number, to alter the demographics of the region, and large military structures were erected throughout Western Hunan in order to maintain control over the populace.⁴ This strategy is today adopted by China in their minority regions for the same reasons. For instance, the case of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and as well as other Tibetan inhabit areas, the question about whether Tibetans are being

¹Henry Kissinger, **On China**, (Penguin Books Ltd: London, 2012) p.12.

² Ibid., p.64.

³ Immanuel Ness (ed), **The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present**, Vol. 1, (Blackwell Publishing: West Sussex, 2009)p.715.

⁴ Loc. Cit.

overrun by the Chinese population is debated widely. However, the more important question is the increase of Han population in TAR as well as in other Tibetan habitats area. Yan Hao, (Institute of Economic Research, State Department of Planning Commission, Beijing) published an article entitled "Tibetan Population in China: Myths and Facts Re-examined" in *Asian Ethnicity Journal*, **March 2000**, where he stated "*As for the officially registered Han residents in the TAR, their number has actually dropped by nearly half from 122,400(sic, 122,356(Ma Rong, 2011) in 1980 to 64,890 in 1993. However, the figures began to change. From 1993 to 2008, the total number of registered Han residents in the TAR increased from 64,890 to 123,558 (Institute of Sociology and Anthropology, Peking University, Beijing, China MA Rong, 2011) Thus from the above findings it can be concluded that the number of registered Han residents has increased since Yan Hao's assertions, hence signifying the reality of the demographic invasion.*

Qing officials were aware of the fact that the Ming dynasty was established in 14th century as a result of peasant rebellion. In China, the nineteenth century would come to be defined in Chinese history as a particularly fervent period of rebellion.⁵ From 1800-1911 there were around eight recorded major rebellions in China, covering different parts of Qing empire. Among all the rebellions in China, the Taiping Rebellion stands out because of its intensity and number of casualties which was unprecedented in Chinese history. The Taiping rebellion was only the first, albeit the most dangerous, of a spate of insurrections against the ailing government of China in the mid-19th century.⁶ There are still disagreement among western and Chinese scholars over the causes for the outbreak of the Taiping rebellion.

Western scholars often attribute its impetus to widespread poverty and Chinese scholars ascribe the force of the movement to its anti-Qing ideology.⁷ However from this disagreement, one can deduce the fact that the Taiping rebellion was in fact a peasant rebellion caused mainly by decades of misgovernment. The rebellion organized by peasants from 1851 to 1864, was so pervasive and successful that it lasted for over a thirteen years. It is said that in 1856, the Taiping

⁵ Immanuel Ness (ed), **The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present**, Vol. 1, (Blackwell Publishing: West Sussex, 2009)p.715.

⁶ Ian Health, Michael Perry, **The Taiping Rebellion 1851-1866**, (Osprey Publishing Ltd: London, 1994) p.3.

⁷ Immanuel Ness (ed), **The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present**, Vol. 1, (Blackwell Publishing: West Sussex, 2009)p.17.

army numbered 1 million (which is equivalent to around 100 regiments (Shih)) thus signifying its popular support from the common Chinese people. Statistics relating to this conflict are unreliable, but there is no question that the Taiping Rebellion was war on the largest scale the world had ever seen. A total of about 10 million troops had been involved, and as many as 600 cities had changed hands time and time again during 15 years of conflict.⁸ The outcome remained uncertain for several years, with the rebellion only finally being crushed by the raising of new armies by the Qing and the support of British and French troops.⁹ However, the number of casualties from the outbreak of rebellion were much larger. It is estimated that the uprising resulted in the death of 20-40 million people.¹⁰ Due to the series of insurrections in different provinces in the following years, the number of casualties were higher. While no official figures exist, it is estimated that during the Taiping, Muslim, and Nian upheavals, China's population declined from roughly 410 million in 1850 to roughly 350 million in 1873.¹¹ From the above developments, it becomes clear just how potent common Chinese people can become during a difficult phase, if guided and led by a charismatic leader. Later in the 20th century civil war in China, Mao too depended on the strengths of peasants to fight back the Kuomintang led by Chiang-Kai-Shek, and eventually he succeeded.

In the following years, there was increase in the involvement of foreign powers in the internal affairs of China. Due to the presence of foreigners on Chinese soil, and their rampant abuse of power in the form of sphere of influence, the Chinese people were angered. The Boxer Rebellion was one insurrections, which directly targeted anything foreign.

From the above series of insurrections in China, it is clear that whenever there was an ailing government unable to resist foreign aggression and widespread corruption in the imperial court, Chinese people always rally behind a leader who emerged out of an unstable situation. This happened again when Mao decided to lead China. China was not only invaded many times by nomadic people from outside its borders but was also turned upside down many more times by its own citizens, mainly the peasants. In all, there were 1,109 main military conflicts between the Chinese and the northern nomads from 215 BC to 1684 AD and as many as 225,887 recorded

⁸ Ian Health, Michael Perry, **The Taiping Rebellion 1851-1866**, (Osprey Publishing Ltd: London, 1994) p.7.

⁹ Martin Jacques, **When China Rules the World**, (Penguin Books Ltd: London, 2012) p.101.

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Henry Kissinger, **On China**, (Penguin Books Ltd: London, 2012) p.65.

armed rebellions between 210 BC and 1900 AD. The impact of these conflicts and rebellions was not trivial in terms either of accounting costs and opportunity costs, as huge number of people and animals were killed, a vast area of cultivated land abandoned, and farming equipment and facilities destroyed.¹² Deng's argument is further validated in the following figures.

Population Growth in China from 0- 1998 A.D.

Table no. 1.

(000)

year	Population Growth
0	59,600
1000	59,000
1300	100,000
1400	72,000
1500	103,000
1600	160,000
1700	138,000
1820	381,000
1850	412,000
1870	358,000
1998	1242700

(Adapted from Angus Maddison, **The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective**, OECD: Paris, 2006) p.42.

From the above figure it is clear that the population growth in China witnessed a tremendous growth during the Qing Dynasty. However, due to rising internal rebellions and other factors there was a decline of population growth in the late 19th century. There were other major population losses in the Taiping and other anti-Qing rebellions in the 1850s and 1860s. As a result of these and associated famine and disease, the Chinese population dropped by more than 50 million from 1850 to 1870.¹³ The impact of the internal rebellion was also visible on the

¹² Kent G. Deng, **A Critical Survey of Recent Research in Chinese Economic History**, The Economic History Review, New Series, Vol.53, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), p.7.

¹³ Angus Maddison, **The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective**, (OECD: Paris, 2006) p.41.

Chinese economy in terms of per capita income. China's per capita income declined from \$600 in 1820 to \$552 in 1913.¹⁴

From the above developments, it is clear that China in the 19th century witnessed a series of rebellions led by peasants, which were mostly violent in nature (armed rebellion). The most common reasons for the outbreak of rebellion in China were poor governance and rampant corruption by imperial officials. The recurring problems of corruption and poor governance later became a major cause for the mass protests launched by students in the 20th century.

Same Problem, Different Era

The Dawn of the Twentieth Century and the Emergence of Students' Movement

Asian students have a particularly long and active history of political involvement. India, China, Burma, Indonesia, Pakistan, and other nations have all seen nationalist upsurges in the 19th and 20th centuries in which university students and Western-oriented intellectuals have been active.¹⁵ However, in China, Chinese students became more active after gaining exposure to western ideas through overseas education. Prior to the twentieth century, student protest was a relatively uncommon phenomenon in China.¹⁶ However, the trend of Chinese students studying abroad was started by the Qing government as early as 1872. Between 1846 and 1949 about 150,000 Chinese students studied abroad. In the 1880s, the returned students from the United States and Europe became the main managerial forces in the new enterprises of the Self-Strengthening Movement (1862-1894).¹⁷ By 1906, there were about 17,000 Chinese students studying overseas, with the largest number in Japan but with substantial groups in the United States, France, Germany, and England.¹⁸

¹⁴ Meghnad Desai, **India and China: An Essay in Comparative Political Economy**, (Critical Quest: New Delhi, 2008) p.4.

¹⁵ Philip G. Altbach, **Student Movements in Historical Perspective: The Asian Case**, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March, 1970) p.74.

¹⁶ Immanuel Ness (ed), **The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present**, Vol. 1, (Blackwell Publishing: West Sussex, 2009)p.718.

¹⁷ He Li, **Returned Students and Political Change in China**, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 30, No 2(2006) pp.8-9.

¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, p.77.

There were number of factors which facilitated the emergence of the Chinese students' political involvement. These activist youths were, for the most part, inspired by nationalistic zeal and many of them wished to overthrow the Qing government so that China could be ruled by Chinese people, who might, they reasoned, take more care to build and defend the nation.¹⁹ Manchus were not Chinese in origin. They were partially nomads and hence they were looked upon as outsiders by Chinese people. However, even after the overthrow of the Qing government, the problems still persisted. Because of inefficient government, foreign interference in the internal affairs of China was on the rise, similar to the situation which prevailed during the emergence of the peasant rebellion in China. To make the situation even tense, not every returnee received suitable employment in China. Most of the returned students from abroad were unable to find a suitable job and this created a situation where their problems became common and the source of all these problems was a weak Republican government which more or less failed to change the situation. According to Arnold P. Goldstein (*The Psychology of Group Aggression*, 2002) convergence theory holds that rather than a more-or-less random group of individuals becoming a collective through a contagious spread of emotion, mobs are formed by the coming together of people sharing conscious or unconscious needs. The weak state of the Chinese government during this period gave students ample reason to protest, and enabled them to do so with limited backlash from political authorities. At the same time, this was also a period during which China's educational system rapidly developed.²⁰ All the above circumstances created a situation where mass protest became imminent.

The demonstrations which erupted on May 4, 1919 against continuing foreign influence in China marked the emergence of students as a major political force in the country, and also launched the nation on a period of radical intellectual ferment.²¹ This demonstration was also launched because of weak Chinese government and its weak response to the Treaty of Versailles. Jaffrey N. Wasserstrom (*Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China*, 1991) remarked “During the few short weeks between the May 4 march in Beijing and the end of the general strike in Shanghai, Chinese students proved that they were capable not only of organizing themselves for

¹⁹ Immanuel Ness (ed), **The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present**, Vol. 1, (Blackwell Publishing: West Sussex, 2009)p.719.

²⁰ Loc.cit.

²¹ Philip G. Altbach, **Student Movements in Historical Perspective: The Asian Case**, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March, 1970) p.78.

disciplined political action, but also of bringing citizens of all classes together in a common cause to fight imperialist aggression and domestic misgovernment.” The common reason for the student to protest against the Chinese government was its poor governance, because of which a number of problems emerged one after another. Foreign aggression, unemployment, and corruption are few of the problems which later became a source of student resentment against the Chinese government. Later when Mao came to power, this time he too depended on students to achieve his aims. During the Cultural Revolution, he employed the Chinese students to fulfill his aims. He even publicly declared that “...the workers, peasants, and soldiers should not interfere with the students' great Cultural Revolution. Let the students go into the street. What is wrong with their writing big-character posters or going into the street?”²² This clearly shows how shrewd a politician Mao was, who in order to fight back the Kuomintang, depended on the peasants and later in order to strengthen his legitimacy, depended on the strength of Chinese students. However later the situation in China got out of control and soon China was enveloped in a cloud of chaos. For more than two full years after the middle of 1966, the world's largest communist state was torn apart by mass protests and chaotic local rebellions that in some regions escalated into virtual civil war. Not until August 1968 were the flames of China's Cultural Revolution extinguished by the imposition of a harsh regime of martial law.²³ After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, it is the first time that People's Liberation Army was deployed to control the situation inside China. This clearly shows the intensity of the situation prevailing during that time and Mao's decision to deploy the army. However, this would be not the last time when the army was deployed to control the situation in China.

Precursor to Chinese Student Movement (Tiananmen Square Protests)

The three-year famine of 1959-1961, (during which an estimated 30 million people died of hunger), and the Cultural Revolution are only the two most well-known events. At the time of Mao's death in 1976, the Chinese economy was on the verge of collapse. Chinese people were living in poverty, and grievances were mounting in the society. It was largely the widespread

²² Arup Kumar Sen, **1989 Student Movement in China**, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 32. No 29(July. 19-25), p.1833

²³ Andrew G. Walder, **Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement**, (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 2009) p.1.

crises brought by the Cultural Revolution that pushed China's new leaders to start reforms in 1978.²⁴

The various steps taken by Mao had driven China to the point of desperation, where reform was the only door left for the mitigation of the situation. Hence under the stewardship of Deng Xiaoping, various reforms were introduced in China. Economic modernization became the principal goal of the state. A market economy was introduced which led to the emergence of private business, joint ventures and investment from foreign firms were also encouraged. The reforms also percolated down to intellectuals. State control over people became less. More freedom was given to intellectuals and there were an increased number of Chinese students studying abroad. With these reforms, there was tolerance for the exploration of western ideas in China, which is best validated by allowing the Chinese students to study abroad. Here in this paper, I have included the number of Chinese students as well as Chinese scholars who were issued visas for further studies as well as for academic visits to the United State of America.

Table no 1.2.

The number of Chinese students and scholars who were issued a visa to study in USA

Year	J-1 Visas	F-1 Visas	Total
1979	807	523	1,330
1980	1,986	2,338	4,324
1981	3,066	2,341	5,407
1982	3,327	1,153	4,480
1983	3,328	1,003	4,331
Total	12,514	7,358	19,872

Source: Consular Reports, U.S. Department of State, cited in **A Relationship Restored: Trends in U.S.-China Educational Exchanges, 1978-1984**, (National Academy Press: Washington, 1986) p.32.

²⁴ Dingxin Zhao, **The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement**, (University of Chicago Press: London, 2001) p.42.

Soon after the Sino-American rapprochement in July 1972, there were only 50 Chinese students and scholars who had come to the United States. However, with the passage of time, the number of Chinese students and scholars visiting America skyrocketed. The above figure clearly shows that the number of Chinese students and scholars studying in America has risen since the start of scholarly exchange between the two nations. The total number of J-1 visas and F-1 visas issued in 1979 were 1,330. Gradually it increased to 4,331 in 1983. The total number of J-1 and F-1 visas from 1979 to 1983 were 19,872. The simple reason for the higher number of J-1 visas is because students were largely financially supported by the Chinese government, U.S. government, U.S. foundations, U.S. corporations and others. According to Dingxin Zhao (1997), it was mainly the decline of the political control over students during the process of reforms which made a significant contribution to the rise of the 1989 Chinese Student Movement. However there were other factors which also contributed to the escalation of the Chinese Student Movement. Because of the reformist period, many Chinese students and scholars received opportunities to study abroad.

According to official statistics, from 1978 to 2003, a total of 700,200 Chinese students studied in 108 countries and regions all over the world. The number of students from China in America is frequently larger than the number of students from any other foreign country.²⁵ As mentioned previously, from 1979 to 1983 there were a total of 19,872 Chinese students and scholars who were issued visas by USA. Hence, exposure to western ideas from the "land of democracy"(America) itself gave them enough intellectual stimulation to protest. The installation of a statue of the Goddess of Democracy during the Tiananmen Square Protests is testimony to the impact of Western ideas, especially that of America. Another interesting fact is that the largest number of Chinese students and scholars who visited America during 1983 were from Beijing.

²⁵ He Li, **Returned Students and Political Change in China**, Asian Perspective, Vol. 30, No 2(2006) p.6.

Percentage Distribution of PRC F-1 and J-1 Visa Holders by Birthplace and Residence, Compared to 1982 PRC Population Distribution, 1983. Table no. 1.3.

Province or Municipality in China	% of PRC 1982 Population	Birthplace		Current Home	
		F-1	J-1	F-1	J-1
Beijing	7	19	10	25	37
Shanghai	1	37	19	33	14
Guangdong	6	15	5	17	5
Xinjiang	1	–	0	0	0
Xizang	–	0	0	0	0
Neil Monggol	2	–	1	0	1
Sichaun	10	3	7	1	5
Tianjin	1	1	2	2	3

Source (Adapted from A **Relationship Restored: Trends in U.S.-China Educational Exchanges, 1978-1984**, (National Academy Press: Washington, 1986) p.41.

The above figures reveal that most of the Chinese students and scholars were from Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong. Before the Tiananmen Square Protests, the first interuniversity ties among student activists were established on April 18 between Beida and Qinghua University, and first nationwide association was formed on April 21 linking students from Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou.²⁶ Not only that, out of the 21 student leaders on the most wanted list published by the Chinese government after the military crackdown (*Guangming Daily* 1989), Beijing University had seven, Qinghai University and Beijing Normal University each had three.²⁷ Han Dongfang, who later was to become the leader of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation, was born in Beijing and he even worked briefly at the library of Beijing Normal University. During the period of reform, Chinese intellectuals had opportunities to visit foreign countries for various academic activities. When they returned to China, they often gave visitor reports on Chinese campuses to convey their image of the West, generally depicting the West as a perfect society. They thus greatly aggravated the grievances that the uninitiated young

²⁶ Corinna-Barbara Francis, **The Progress of Protest in China: The Spring of 1989**, Asian Survey, Vol. 29, No.9(Sep., 1989)p.904.

²⁷ Dingxin Zhao, **Decline of Political Control in Chinese Universities and the Rise of the 1989 Chinese Student Movement**, Sociological Perspectives, Vol. 40, No 2 (1997), p.172.

students had towards Chinese realities.²⁸ Fang Lizhi, was one such intellectual, who visited many countries including the United State of America during the reformist period, and his speeches have inspired many Chinese students to rethink on their country's destiny. Zhou Fongsuo, a student of Tsinghua University before the Tiananmen Square Protests, remembers listening to Fang Lizhi's speeches. Following are two excerpts from them:

The youth of the West and of China are different; the West is a free society, and opportunities for young people are relatively great, and people who have tempered themselves are relatively many. Because opportunities are many and the competitive nature strong, you only have to go do something; there are none who cannot find opportunities. Therefore their students first temper their own independent, creative ability; you only need to have ability, then you can do anything.²⁹

The above speech glorified the Western countries in general and America in particular, and the unlimited opportunities available in the western countries. Similar to that, Fang Lizhi gave numerous provocative speeches, thus generating much enthusiasm among the Chinese students and scholars alike. Following is another excerpt from one of his speeches:

One reason for this situation is our social environment. Many of us who have been to foreign countries to study or work agree that we can perform much more efficiently and productively abroad than in China....Foreigners are no more intelligent than we Chinese. Why, then, can't we produce first-rate work? The reasons for our inability to develop our potential lie within our social system.³⁰

His criticism of the social system in China highlighted indirectly the need for reforms in China, lack of which had been impeding China's development. Fang Lizhi visited many colleges campus and had given a series of speeches including at Peking University, Tsinghua University, Zhejiang University, Jiaotong University, and Tongji University. All these facts reveal that exposure to western ideas, directly or indirectly, influenced the Chinese students and scholars.

²⁸ Dingxin Zhao, **The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement**, (University of Chicago Press: London, 2001) p.63.

²⁹ Ibid.,p.64.

³⁰ http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/fang_lizhi_responsibility.pdf p.3. accessed on 15/10/2015

The Rampant Political Corruption

The reforms however benefited those who had a good connection to the party officials and those who won't were left to the mercy of their fate. One of the students recalled her grueling life in China during the 1980s:

We students from the Beijing University Department of Economics had great difficulty finding suitable jobs. Some of my classmates became shop assistants in department stores after graduation; some went to construction companies; some went to very small research institutions. I felt very sad because good jobs in state ministries, trading companies, and banks were only given to those who had backdoor access. Thus, even if there was a good job, there would be several hundred people competing for it, and eventually only those who had the best backdoor access could get it.³¹

Despite graduating, thousands of Chinese students were unable to find a suitable job afterwards and were often engaged in menial jobs. The prospect of getting a good job was even more difficult. Only those who had the best political connection with officials usually end up getting a job. Not only this, the students who have returned from overseas study were also unable to get suitable jobs.

China has problems in putting the skill and training of returned students and scholars to best use despite the fact that Beijing is making an earnest effort to alleviate this difficulty. From November 23 to 29, 1984, China's State Council convened a national conference at which State Councilor Zhang Jingfu was reported to have “called for a change in work conditions for the 14,000 people who have returned from overseas study. *Seventy percent* of them were not being fully used because of a shortage of advanced facilities and unsuitable work assignments”.³² Roger W. Howard, who reached Jilin University (which is located in Changchun (a major industrial city in Northeast China), a capital of Jilin (Kirin) province. on 16 May 1989, witnessed the progress of the protests during the Jilin University's annual sports meet. The slogans and

³¹ Dingxin Zhao, **The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement**, (University of Chicago Press: London, 2001) p.90.

³² **A Relationship Restored: Trends in U.S.-China Educational Exchanges, 1978-1984**, (National Academy Press: Washington, 1986) p.173.

banners reflected a cross section of student demands at that point: no distorted reporting of the movement in the press, elimination of corruption in the government, elimination of back door appointments for the children of high officials, the resignation of Li Peng, the removal of corrupt officials, selection of younger leaders, release of political prisoners, public reporting of the positions on issues taken by individual leaders, disclosure of the incomes of high officials and their relatives..³³

Corinna-Barbara Francis visited Beijing University as a doctoral candidate from the Department of Political Science, Columbia University and spent two years (1986-1988) there. She argued that two characteristics were decisive in propelling Tiananmen Square Protests: the idea driving the movement, the idea that society has the right to an identity independent of the state and the right to organize and represent itself autonomously, which in fact a similarity with the idea had promoted by Fang Lizhi. Another characteristic is its organization and political strategy. She further added that protest against economic hardship, government corruption, and social injustice is not new in China's history, and these issues did play an important part in this year's protests.³⁴ Han Dongfang (27 years old at the time of TSP³⁵, who was one of the leaders of Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation during the Tiananmen Square Protests), mentioned this in an interview given in a New Left Review, July Aug 2005, After graduating in 1980, when he was seventeen, he joined the army. "I became disillusioned with the corruption of the officers, and began increasingly to question the orders I received. So I was passed over for promotion, and repeated applications to join the party were turned down. Thus, the rampant political corruption and China's deteriorating society and economy later became hotly debated topics in the following years.

A Fever of Reforms

The fever of reforms in China led to the creation of many fevers. The intent of these reforms was to mobilize economic growth, but their unintended consequence was a gradual loosening of the

³³ Roger W. Howard, **The Student Democracy Movement in Changchun**, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No.24 (Jul., 1990), pp.238-239

³⁴ Corinna-Barbara Francis, **The Progress of Protest in China: The Spring of 1989**, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 29, No.9 (Sep., 1989) p.898.

³⁵ The Tiananmen Square Protests

party's control over society.³⁶ Hence the reforms began creating new pressures for change. The fever of reforms in China gave enough space and scope to the gradual development of many fevers. The following are a few, which later became major factors for the rise of the Tiananmen Square Protests.

The River Elegy Fever

River Elegy was a six part series shown on CCTV (China Central Television) in 1988, which depicted the reasons behind Chinese backwardness. The series essentially argues that China's inward looking, river- and land based "yellow civilization" has led to conservatism, ignorance, and backwardness. In order to survive, China has to learn from the maritime-based "azure civilizations" and to establish a market-based economy.³⁷ The film *River Elegy* epitomized the tendency in the 1980s for cultural criticism to lead to an all-round criticism of politics and social reality, and then to "complete Westernization." This led to a "new dogmatism" of worshipping Western values.³⁸ Criticism of Chinese culture for its backwardness gradually spread to criticism of politics and its social norms. The popularity of the series can be easily understood in the following excerpt:

The series captured the attention of millions of Chinese as soon as it was televised by the China Central Television Station (CCTV) during prime time in June 1988. A "River Elegy fever" developed immediately. Students in universities discussed and debated various issues raised in the series. After watching the program many people wanted to have a copy of the script, leading to the rapid sale of over five million copies of it. Pushed by high demand, as well as supported by the then CCP general secretary Zhao Ziyang, the CCTV retelevised the whole program.³⁹

Hence, the River Elegy series gave Chinese students enough stimulation to discuss and debate. The gradual discussion from dormitory to hall gave rise to another fever, a conference fever.

³⁶ Immanuel Ness (ed), **The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present**, Vol. 1, (Blackwell Publishing: West Sussex, 2009)p.3285.

³⁷ Dingxin Zhao, **The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement**, (University of Chicago Press: London, 2001) p.p. 72-73.

³⁸ Joseph Fewsmith, **China Since Tiananmen: From Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao**, (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008)p.105.

³⁹ Op.cit p. 73.

Conference Fever

Reading makes a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man. — Francis Bacon.

Conferences played a vital role in the student movement of Indonesia; it was students in Indonesia who played an instrumental role in the overthrow of the Sukarno regime in 1965. Prior to the Dutch administration, the islands which constituted the Dutch East Indies were never politically united, and had no common language. As a sense of nationalism developed among students, particularly as a result of conferences, a sense of Indonesian national identity began to emerge. The basis of a national language, hitherto non-existent, was laid by the student movement, as well as other aspects of a national state.⁴⁰ Indonesian students, after getting higher education in the Netherlands and European countries, found exposure to western ideas made them more aware, and it was there that the first student activism started germinating among them.

In China, the reformist period gave intellectual freedom like never before. The dormitory room became a venue for discussion. The deteriorating social-economic situation in China led to the questioning of the leadership incapability. In China, people's grievances tend to be State-centered because state policies are often the source of discontent.⁴¹ Hence whatever happened in China, the only ones to be blamed for the cause is usually the Chinese government. By 1988, however, as China's economy declined, making speeches in universities became a major channel for intellectuals to spread their ideas. Consequently, a "conference fever" formed in China's major universities.⁴² The situation has reached a tipping point, where in Beijing University, if speakers failed to criticize the Communist party; they were greeted by boos and jeers from the students. Speeches by non-conformist intellectuals such as Fang Lizhi and Liu Binyan gave them enough intellectual stimulation to raise questions. Frequent discussions on the hard-to-solve

⁴⁰ Philip G. Altbach, **Student Movements in Historical Perspective: The Asian Case**, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March, 1970) p.77.

⁴¹ Dingxin Zhao, **Decline of Political Control in Chinese Universities and the Rise of the 1989 Chinese Student Movement**, *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 40, No 2 (1997), p.161.

⁴² Dingxin Zhao, **The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement**, (University of Chicago Press: London, 2001) p.76.

social problems made students more sensitive to these issues and gradually they came to a consensus on a few basic viewpoints as social problems became prolonged or even worsened. Therefore, during the late eighties more and more students came to believe that democracy and capitalism were solutions to China's problems.⁴³ Hence all the above factors together fanned the situation for the outbreak of the Tiananmen Square Protests.

From a Silent Society to a Civil Society

The World Bank has adopted a definition of civil society which has been developed by a number of leading research centers *“The term civil society refers to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations”*.

Here in this paper, I defined civil society in China as members of society who become aware of their potential and responsibilities towards the society. They reach, where Chinese government failed to reached; they cooperated with the Chinese government for the betterment of society. Most of them carry out politically uncontentious activities. On the other hand, there are those who openly protests against the local and Central government when they failed to get their rights. The following pages will be dealing with this issue.

After the Tiananmen Square Movement, China was diplomatically isolated. Most of the Western countries froze high-level contacts with the Beijing authorities for two years. Some discreet visits took place in order to keep diplomatic channels open and to reassure the Chinese leadership that there was no western plan to destabilize the People's Republic.⁴⁴ After the Tiananmen Square massacre, the whole Chinese people were in the process of recovering from

⁴³ Op. cit., p.170.

⁴⁴ Jean Phillippe Beja, **The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre**(Routledge Publications:New York, 2011) p.194.

the shock of outcome of the Tiananmen Square protests. The impact of the Tiananmen Square protest had reached every corner of Chinese society. The Tiananmen Square incident slowed down the FDI growth rate to a single digit in 1989 and 1990, which ended the second stage of FDI development from 1984-1991.⁴⁵ Hence, the Tiananmen Square movement has affected China to an extent that is unprecedented in nature. In the following year's aftermath of the Movement, the role of public opinion remains modest in China, but its significance has clearly grown. One aspect of this growing realm of public opinion has been the commercialization of culture, a trend that has forced intellectuals to compete in or against a real marketplace.⁴⁶ The seminal phase began in the spring of 1992, when Deng Xiaoping toured China's southern coastal areas and Special Economic Zones (SEZs), which was accompanied by the declaration of the 14th Party Congress that China was to pursue a 'socialist market economy'.⁴⁷ Gradually the role of intellectuals also grew in China. Wang Huning, a well-known political scientist at Shanghai's Fudan University, was invited by Jiang Zemin to join the government in an important think-tank role. This clearly shows the efficacy of intellectuals for the Chinese government. After the 1989 protests in Tiananmen Square, and their subsequent bloody putdown, the deal China's leaders offered the country changed: stay out of politics and you can do almost anything else you want. Most of the new quasi-freedom was economic, but social space expanded, too.⁴⁸ The expansion of social space was in fact inevitable in a large and populated country like China. The CCP is like a father in a huge joint-family, where a father cannot reach every child and fulfill their wishes. The emergence of NGOs and protests in China symbolizes the failure of a father and his responsibilities towards his family.

The responsible children would take responsibilities and do their parts in redressing the grievances of a father and family. One common reason for the growth of NGOs in China is that, behind the growth is the irrepressible rise of a new middle class. They share the party's desire for stability. But some members, at least, also want new ways to participate in society. Party leaders, now only vaguely constrained by Communist ideology, have a new sense that something is to be

⁴⁵ Mohan Guruswamy, Zorawar Daulet Singh, **Chasing the Dragon, Will India Catch Up with China?** (Longman:Delhi, 2010)p.54.

⁴⁶ Joseph Fewsmith, **China Since Tiananmen:From Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao**, (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2008) p.14.

⁴⁷ Loc. Cit.

⁴⁸ The Economist, **Beneath the Glacier: Chinese Civil Society**, April 12TH-18TH 2014, Volume 411, Number 8882, p.21.

gained by co-opting such activist citizens rather than suppressing them. It may, they think, offer a way of providing some of the social support that the party can no longer supply on its own.⁴⁹ Thus, the party realized the importance of NGOs and their good works which helped the party in maintaining social stability in China. Because of that, the party relaxed the terms for the registration of NGOs and also started encouraging unregistered NGOs to become registered.

China has been undergoing an “association revolution” over the last 20 years, particularly since the second half of the 1990s. By the end of 2013, there were over 500,000 registered NGOs in China. Between 1988 and 2013, the number of registered NGOs had increased 100 fold, from just under 4,500 in 1988 to over 540,000 in 2013.⁵⁰ Hence NGOs in China are emerging as a powerful as well as responsible tool, which cannot be ignored if the party wants a stable China. However, these NGOs are always under the watchful eyes of the party. NGOs are not allowed to register branch office in different provinces, which may link up around the country, thus creating a network.⁵¹ This implies that party is adopting a very cautious approach towards the NGOs and their activities. On the other hand there are the children who protest when their rights are taken away by local as well as Central government. For several years, the number of protests have been increasing in leaps and bounds. Most of the mass incidents were launched by disadvantaged social groups, such as laid-off workers and peasants. They were fighting for their right to subsistence. Yet there were a couple of large-scale mass incidents that were mainly participated in by the new middle class in the cities. Two were related to environmental protection (anti-Maglev protest in Shanghai and anti-PX plant protests in Xiamen) and another was the anti-dog killing gathering in Beijing.⁵²

There are many reasons for the social unrest or protests, such as land disputes, environmental degradation, labor conflicts, fiscal recentralization, the cadre evaluation system and institutional failure to redress grievances. Most of these problems emerge because of poor

⁴⁹ Op. cit., p.22

⁵⁰ John W. Tai, **Building Civil Society in Authoritarian China, Importance of Leadership Connections for Establishing a Effective Non-Governmental Organizations in a Non- Democracy**,(Springer Publications: Washington, 2015) p.20.

⁵¹ The Economist, **Beneath the Glacier: Chinese Civil Society**, April 12TH-18TH 2014, Volume 411, Number 8882, p.24.

⁵²Tong Yanqi, Lei Shaoha, Large Scale Mass Incidents in China, East Asian Policy, p.30.

governance and rampant political corruption in China, problems which have been haunting China for a long time and became the cause for its dynastic falls.

From the following table 1.4., one can easily find that the number of protests in China has been increasing.

Incidents of Social unrests in China	
1993	8,700
1994	10,000
1995	11,500
1996	12,500
1997	15,000
1998	24,500
1999	32,500
2000	40,000
2001	-----
2002	50,400
2003	58,000
2004	74,000
2005	87,000
2006	90,000
2007	-----
2008	127,000
2009	-----
2010	1,80,000

(Source: Adapted from George Katsiaficas, *Asia's Unknown Uprising* Vol. 2. 2013, Daniel Kubler, Lisheng Shong, *Urban Mobilization and New Media in Contemporary China* (2014), Alan Taylor, *Rising Protests China*, Atlantic.com, 2012.)

In 1993, the number of protests in China was 8700, which means that every day there were about 23 protests in China. In 1994, there were 10,000 protests in China, averaging 27 protests in a day. However the number of protests in China were increasing. In 1999, there was a threefold increase of public protests in China, which mean that in a day (on average) 87 public protests occurred. In 2003, there were 58,000 protests in China, which indicates that in a day there were 158 protests in China. In 2004, the number of protests reported in China was 74,000, thus in a day there were 202 protests in China. In the following years, the number of protests has

increased. Mass incidents have become a major problem for social stability. Public Security Minister Zhou Yongkang said in July 2005 "Their number is on the increase and the scale is constantly expanding... the trend towards the greater organization is clear."⁵³ This clearly proved that the Chinese leaders are realizing the significance of these increasing protests throughout China, which if not checked in time, can in future, sow the seeds of a mass uprising in China.

Conclusion

The internet which today has become a place for discussion and debate provides another means of communication with Chinese people. Today China is the country with the largest netizens in the world having 564 million at the end of 2012 and around 280.8 million micro bloggers in 2013. In the past few years where social media provides a platform for organization and mobilization of public protests, we have seen the Arab uprising in Tunisia, and mass protests in Egypt, and Libya. Poor governance and corruption were among the important factors for the Arab uprising. In China, for centuries, weak governance has led to many problems including weak policy and corruption. The number of armed rebellions inside China was higher than the number of military conflicts with the neighboring nomads. Hence there is a good reason for the Party to spend more on internal security in China. The recent anti-corruption campaign championed by Xi Jinping is not something he wants, but he needs it to stay in power. As Xi remarked at the party's 2012 plenum, "The problems among our party members and cadres are corruption, taking bribes, and being out of touch with the people- which must be addressed with great effort. Only when corruption is minimized or eradicated if at all, then the smooth political and other reforms in China could be possible". Thus Xi knows that it is corruption that has always driven Chinese people to act and react. If the Chinese government doesn't implement people-friendly political reforms with Chinese characteristics, then the internal problems may become external problems and there would be two possible impact on the rest of the world.

⁵³ Susan Shirk, **China Fragile Superpower: How An Internal Politics Could Derail its Peaceful Rise**, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2007)p.56.

Presently, the total population of the world is 7.3 billion and China's population presently is 1.3 billion, which accounts 19.24 % of the world total population. With a population of 1.3 billion, China recently became the second largest economy and is increasingly playing an important and influential role in the global economy.⁵⁴

However, a major unrest in China, crippling its social stability and economy could have an adverse impact on the rest of the world. In China, there are more than 250 million people, floating population, a rapidly growing population migrating to urban areas from rural areas for their livelihood. Hence, another impact, which is likely to occur, if there is major social unrest in China, would be that millions of these floating population would flee to neighboring countries.

History is a good place to look for lessons. The mass migration of millions of refugees from East Pakistan to India resulting from the military crackdown by General Yahya Khan later became one of the causes for India-Pakistan war of 1971. Another recent lesson to be learnt is from the Syrian crisis of 2011. More than 250,000 Syrians have lost their lives in four-and-half years of armed conflict, which began with anti-government protests before escalating into a full-scale civil war.⁵⁵ More than four million people have fled Syria since the start of the conflict, leading to a mass migration to European countries. Hence social stability in China is in the interest of the rest of the world, because China's internal problems will not remain internal. If crisis in China escalates, it might become a problem for the rest of the world.

⁵⁴ accessed on 9/12/2015 <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>

⁵⁵ accessed on 8/12/2015 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>