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China's 'Mass Incidents': Declining Numbers or Hidden Data?

Gunjan Singh *

Abstract

After recording a series of rising incidence of mass protests in China, the Ministry of Public Security (PBS) stopped publishing the data from 2011. 'Mass incidents' are defined as incidents involving more than 100 protesters - some have involved more than 25,000 people. In just a decade the number of mass incidents in China rose from 10,000 (1994) to 87,000 (2005), according to the official figures published by PBS. The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that the Chinese government decided to stop publishing the figures after the estimates of such incidents rose to 100,000 and beyond by the year 2010. Bulk of these incidents are in protest against rising corruption and abuse of power by officials, deteriorating environmental conditions as the country pursues extensive energy and industrial projects, and the growing income disparities and welfare deficits. While Xi Jinping has cracked down on corruption and launched a 'war on pollution', he has also undertaken massive steps to control the media and enhance domestic surveillance in order to prevent both the incidence and reporting about protests. The strategy increasingly seems difficult to sustain because of the growing contradictions.

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The economic reform and opening up, which was introduced under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in December 1978 has transformed the Chinese economy and society. The introduction of reform and opening up have given rise to a society which is riddled with significant issues and problems. One major development which worries the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the consistent increase in the number of what is officially called 'mass incidents' in China. This also calls for an effort to understand what a 'mass incident' is since till date there has been no official definition. However, as explained in an article in *China Daily*, " 'Mass incidents' are defined as incidents involving more than 100 protesters - some have involved more than 10,000" (Liqiang 2014). According to the Ministry of Public Security in just a decade the number of mass incidents in China rose from 10,000 (1994) to 87,000 (2005) (Branigan 2009). The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that the Chinese government decided to stop publishing the figures after the estimates of such incidents rose to 100,000 and beyond by the year 2010 (Kennedy 2012). Because of this, there are no official figures available for the ongoing mass incidents in China since 2011 and this makes it difficult to chart any trend line. However, since the causes of the increasing protests are still very much in existence it is to be expected that there are still many protests and mass incidents taking place in China even though they may not be reported as often as they were before Xi Jinping came to power.

The rapid economic development in China has along with its large economic gains also led to the rise of major challenges for the CCP. Some of the problems which the CCP faces today are Environmental Degradation, Corruption, growing income inequalities, within the context of official high-handedness and routinized repression of dissent in an authoritarian state. Today these very issues have become the dominant catalysts for the mass incidents in China. These factors are behind a considerable number of major protests in China.

The economic path of high-speed growth at all cost has given rise to significant income inequalities in China. As per a recent study, China's upper one percent of the population holds two-third of the wealth while the twenty-

five percent poor populations hold just one percent of China's wealth (Wildau and Mitchell 2016). Another study shows that in China, "Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, has worsened to 0.61 -- well above the 0.4 level economists consider destabilizing" (Zhai and Chen 2017). The economic policies pursued have also been responsible for major environmental degradation in China. Today a majority of Chinese water bodies, landmass and air are polluted. The blurring of lines between the political and entrepreneurial role of the CCP has resulted in steep rise in corruption among Party officials. China today is one of the most corrupt nations in the world, and for anyone to be able to do any business in China one needs major contacts and connections within the Party. The monopoly over power exercised by the Party has led to its cadres being involved in major land grab scams tied to construction and infrastructure projects. These land deals were generally done without proper compensation to the people living there. The way the CCP is entrenched in every aspect of the Chinese economy, politics and society can be gauged from this apt observation: "The Party is like God. He is everywhere" (McGregor 2012). The abuse of power and the corruption affects the image of the Party; yet the leadership has been more concerned about strengthening the Party's political and economic hold rather than being too worried about the welfare and wellbeing of the Chinese people.

When Xi Jinping undertook the reins of the Party in 2012, he was well aware that the CCP faced an enormous number of existential challenges which required undivided and focused attention. He understood that if the CCP wants a future in which it remains relevant and continue to rule China, there is a need for major changes in the existing policies. He also accepted that steps need to be taken to change the overall image of the Party. In his speech at the 19th Party Congress gave the impression that the CCP is ready to acknowledge that a lot more that needs to be done if the stability of the Chinese society is to be maintained. However, while Xi appears to be undertaking an overhaul of some of the policies and agendas for achieving stability within the society, he has also tightened censorship and control over the media and enhanced surveillance of the people to prevent the prevent outbreak as well as the

reporting of any mass incidents. This is aimed to maintain the image that all is well. But suppression of protests and reporting by the media could accentuate tensions and further destabilise society if the existing problems are not significantly ameliorated.

Through the past four decades of economic liberalization the CCP has shifted the basis of its legitimacy from socialist ideology to economic growth and nationalism. Sustaining high rates of growth and therefore high investments in industry and infrastructure are seen as crucial for creating jobs and sustain its appeal among the people. It fears that if a large section of the population feels that the party is not doing enough for their welfare, the Party's authoritarian hold may face serious opposition. . The CCP under Xi Jinping at the 19th Party Congress acknowledged that there is a shift in the expectations of the Chinese people vis-à-vis the CCP. He spelled out a New Principle Contradiction during his speech at the 19th Party Congress. Since Mao, the CCP has used the Principle Contradiction as the driving agenda for the CCP.

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The New Principle Contradiction

It has been a long-established practice of the Communist movement, including the CCP, to identify the Principle Contradiction in society around which politics is to be organized and which needs to be addressed for sustaining its control over the masses. A Principle Contradiction is generally a definition or identification of the major problems which the Chinese society is facing at any given time. With the changes and evolution in the basic fabric of the Chinese society, there was a need to identify the newer challenges and problems and Xi did that very aptly. Xi defined a new Principle Contradiction at the 19th Party Congress (China Daily 2017a):

As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved. What we now face is the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. China has seen the basic needs of over a billion people met, has basically made it possible for people to live decent lives, and will soon bring the building of a moderately prosperous society to a successful completion. The needs to be met for the people to live better lives are increasingly broad. Not only have their material and cultural needs grown; their demands for democracy, rule of law, fairness and justice, security, and a better environment are increasing. At the same time, China's overall productive forces have significantly improved and in many areas our production capacity leads the world. The more prominent problem is that our development is unbalanced and inadequate. This has become the main constraining factor in meeting the people's increasing needs for a better life.

The articulation of the new Principle Contradiction was an essential step towards formulating policies and plans to deal with the causes of 'mass incidents' and instability in Chinese society. The CCP accepted that development has been 'unbalanced and inadequate' and that the primary demand of the people today is better living conditions and fixing the acute environmental problems. Recent surveys underline that there are reasons to think that the challenges are serious enough to demand urgent attention of the leadership. A large section of the Chinese people believes official corruption is the most serious problem within China today. This sentiment was expressed in a Pew Poll of September 26, 2016 when 83 per cent of those surveyed identified corruption amongst government officials as one of their major concerns followed by increasing income gap and a deteriorating environment (Pew 2016). The poll highlights the major areas of concern for the Chinese government.

Following the enunciation of the new political line Xi has initiated several changes in the older approach through his stepped up attack on official corruption and the 'war on pollution'. . The abolition of the fixed

Presidential term indicates that the policies adopted by Xi Jinping would last for a while and enable him to deal with them. In the following section the three areas that have given rise to the most visible mass incidents and Xi's approach in dealing with the grievances are discussed.

Corruption

Corruption had become a significant problem for the CCP since the reform and opening up and is one of the most negative outcomes of this process. The line 'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely' defines the level of corruption present within the CCP. Corruption was also one of the leading factors behind the rising mass incidents and protests in China. The media in China has been flooded with stories of corruption among the Party officials and members and how they have been leveraging their status to gain economic and political benefits. In the last decade, there has been a growing unease and intolerance developing within the Chinese society towards the incidents of corruption.

Since taking over the office as the President of PRC, Xi Jinping has launched a major anti-corruption drive which has been focused against both 'tigers and the flies', thus not discriminating against rank and position. He had identified corruption as a major challenge to the rule and legitimacy of the Party while speaking to the press on November 15, 2012. Xi said, "Under the new conditions, our Party faces many severe challenges, and there are also many pressing problems within the Party that need to be resolved, particularly corruption, being divorced from the people, going through formalities and bureaucratism caused by some Party officials" (South China Morning Post 2012) He had also argued that the negative public perception was creating a major rift between the people and the Party and the Party was being seen as not being concerned with the larger good (Brown 2018). With the ousting of two Central Military Commission Vice Chairmen, Gen. Xu Caihou and Gen. Guo Boxiong, The Chinese President had sought to demonstrate that his anti-corruption drive is "the boldest and most serious that China has ever experienced" (Li and McElveen 2014). As per the official *China Daily* in October

2017, since the conclusion of the 18th National Party Congress in 2012, a total of 280 central officials and around 1.4 million Party members were investigated and punished for being involved in corruption-related activities (China Daily 2017b). According to China's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection till 2017 action had been taken against some 527,000 people under the anti-corruption campaign. Out of these "58 were officials at the provincial and ministerial level or higher, about 3,300 were bureau-level, 21,000 county-level, 78,000 town-level, 97,000 ordinary cadres and the rest were from village or enterprises. Moreover, the punishments included warnings, demotion, expulsion from the Party, and removal from office" (Gao 2018). Thus Xi's anti-corruption drive has targeted a large section of the Party and officials, and he has appeared to be committed to his goal. Xi has indicated that he believes that the primary role of the Party and its officials is to keep politics and not economics in command. The priority to economics and the blurring of lines between politics and economics has been the major catalyst in the high level of corruption in China. (the).

The extent to which corruption has become a problem for the CCP can be judged from the fact that the speech by Xi at the 19th Party Congress had a subsection titled "*Securing a sweeping victory in the fight against corruption*" (China Daily 2017a) After the conclusion of the NPC in March 2018, the government announced the creation of a National Supervision Commission, replacing the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), to take over the role of the older anti-corruption body and was given an extended mandate to investigate into all the employees of the state sector and move beyond the mandate to look into the dealings of Party members (Buckley 2017). The head of the new body is Yang Xiaodu who was the Deputy Chief at the CCDI (BBC 2018). The new body thus has increased power and mandate to investigate corruption. There is much hope within the Chinese officials and the people that this new anti-corruption campaign will help the Party get rid of this stigma. This sentiment was expressed by Zhang Shuofu, the director-general of the newly established Beijing Municipal Supervision Commission, when he said, "We firmly believe that our political environment

will, through tireless efforts, like seas fallen calm and rivers running clean, be clear and free of corruption" (Baculinao 2018).

Corruption is adversely affecting the credibility of the CCP. "The main effect is the impact that it has on the party's relationship with society. People do not trust the party in the way that they used to; they do not see it as necessarily helping their lives" (Johnson, C K., Pei, M. & Brown, K, 2016).

According to a public opinion poll reported in the *Xinhua* "about 75 percent of Chinese people were satisfied with the anti-corruption efforts in 2012. The figure rose to almost 94 percent by 2017" (Xinhua 2018b). The anti-corruption drive appears to have raised the hope among the Chinese people that the leadership is devoted to ending this problem. The increasing corruption levels in China was affecting the livelihood of the ordinary people and thus was one of the major factors behind the increasing number of mass incidents and protests in China in last few years. As the Party members were becoming richer resorting to corrupt practices and also getting away with it, the confidence of the people in the Party was waning. Yet, given the monopoly over power that CCP's one-Party rule sustains and which Xi wants to deepen it is uncertain as to how effective Xi's attempt to stamp out official corruption would be in the long run.

Pollution

Since taking over as Party General Secretary and the President of People's Republic of China (PRC), Xi Jinping has initiated a plan to control the rising pollution. In the first five years of his rule Xi has undertaken several steps to manage and control the ever-increasing environmental degradation in the country. It was no surprise that environmental degradation and pollution received a prominent place in the speech at the 19th Party Congress. Xi's speech had a full section dedicated to this aspect titled '*Solving prominent environmental problems*' and '*Intensifying the protection of ecosystems*' (China Daily 2017a) thus indicating that the uncontrolled environmental degradation as a result of fast-paced economic growth strategy had become a challenge for the legitimacy of the CCP and a major cause of discontent among the people.

Xi has appeared to be strict in punishing people who have attempted to violate the environmental rules and norms set for running factories and undertaking projects. As per some estimates, in the last few years almost 80,000 factories have been investigated or fined for not following emission rules (Nace 2017). The steps adopted by Xi are being termed as a 'war' against the excessive air, water, and land pollution and rectifying the situation the Chinese government has even managed to shut down some factories which were seen as violating the norms (Hancock 2017). As part of this campaign, the Chinese government has also punished almost 5,700 officials (Corne and Browaeyns 2017). The Chinese government has moved beyond routine inspections of the factories and regions in its fight against pollution. The adoption of a stricter new law which was in tune with the existing changes and problems was a major step in this direction. The Chinese government had first passed the Environmental Protection Law in 1989. However, a lot has changed on the ground with China becoming the second largest economy and the largest environmental polluter in the world. These developments called for significant changes to the existing law. Keeping this in view, a new 'Environmental Protection Law' was adopted on January 1, 2015. According to Article 69 of the Law, the violations will be considered as a criminal offence. It states, "Those violate this Law and constitutes a criminal offense shall be investigated for criminal liabilities by the law" (China Dialogue 2014). The aim was to make it highly difficult to violate environmental rules and regulations. The old Ministry of Environmental Protection has been replaced with the new Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) this year with expanded powers to regulate, monitor, control and take appropriate action to ensure policies are effectively implemented.

To add strength to the Environmental Law passed in 2015 the Chinese government introduced an environmental tax on January 1, 2018, which was put in place to replace the pollutant discharge fee which the Chinese government had been collecting for the last four decades. While talking about the new environmental tax Wang Jinnan, head of the Chinese Academy For Environmental Planning said, "This is China's first tax clearly designed for

environmental protection, which will help establish a "green" financial and taxation system and promote pollution control and treatment of pollutants" (Xinhua 2018a). The tax was introduced with the aim to reduce the loop holes which the polluters exploited in order not to pay the pollutant discharge fee. . According to the South China Morning Post, "After struggling for years to force growth-obsessed local governments to toe the line, China's beefed-up environment ministry now has the authority to hold officials to account for failing to comply with pollution policies" (South China Morning Post 2018a). Li Wanfu, the director of the Taxation Science Institute of the State Administration of Taxation, has said that the new tax imposed by the Chinese government is an indication of "a green tax system" (Jia, 2018). Even foreign firms investing in China have had to follow the stricter new directives for pollution reduction. According to recent reports, Walmart has promised to reduce its carbon emission by 50 million metric tons. This is supposed to be equal to "annual electricity consumption of 40 million Chinese households" (Bloomberg 2018).

Although China is undertakings steps to monitor its environmental degradation and reduce pollution from becoming more severe, the results are

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unlikely to be as per expectations. As argued by Greenpeace's East Asia climate and energy campaigner, Huang Wei, "China's national air pollution action plan has brought massive reductions in pollution levels and associated health risks, but policies favouring coal and heavy industry are holding back progress" (Lau 2018).

Given the Party's continued commitment to high investment led economic growth and fossil fuel based energy production, Xi's environmental objectives are difficult to attain. The two goals are unlikely to be mutually compatible in the foreseeable future. Pollution is something which affects the livelihood of the people at every level and thus if the

government now fails to address this problem it may have to pay a very dear price for this mistake.

Economic Challenges

Rapid economic growth has helped China lift a large section of its population out of poverty and it has also become the second largest economy in the world. With time the Chinese economy has prospered and China today has a large middle class (China Daily 2017c). According to a report published by China's State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development in the last five years (2012-2017) China has lifted around 68 million people out of poverty (Economic Times 2018). However, the economic growth strategy adopted by the Party has also led to new problems such as the rise of acute income inequalities and large development gaps between the rural and the urban areas as well between coastal and the interior western regions. It was obvious by the time Xi Jinping came to power that there was an urgent need to revamp the Chinese economic growth model. According to Andrew Sheng and Xiao Geng, "Managing the transformation of China's regional economies while preserving social stability will demand a careful balance between the old growth strategy exemplified by the losers, which relied heavily on state-owned enterprises and public investment, and the new, more human-capital-oriented approach being developed by the winners" (Sheng and Geng 2018). This will be a major challenge for the CCP shortly. The older pattern of growth, which has proved successful to date, cannot be continued further if China has to become a 'moderately prosperous economy.' But reforms cannot be introduced too rapidly or extensively since economic growth rates would significantly decline and new protests would emerge from the working classes, the provinces and even the middle class. Another side effect of economic restructuring will be the further contraction of the State Owned Sector, which

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will result not only in loss of thousands of jobs but also seriously undermine the Party's control over the economy.

In an attempt to address these complex challenges of reforms Xi has stressed the need for major economic policy changes and the need for a growth model based on domestic consumption. Xi believes that this type of economic growth will help in bridging the developmental gap between the rural and the urban sectors (Fortune 2017). The Chinese government under Xi is also pushing for an innovation-driven high technology growth. Xi in a statement at the Central Economic Work Conference held in December 2017, said, "Realizing high-quality development is a must for sustaining healthy and stable economic development and adapting to the changed principal contradiction of the Chinese society" (Xinhua 2017a). The need for balanced development has become an important agenda for the next phase of economic growth. The Chinese government wants to push China up in the value chain of international production as it believes that this will generate better jobs and will also help the people in enjoying better living standards.

But economy is a very difficult field to restructure. The changes in the economy have a direct effect on the Communist Party's rule and on society. Xi worries that if the restructuring leads to increase in unemployment levels it may directly impact both the stability in the society and the Party's legitimacy and ability to govern. It could also increase the number of mass incidents and protests which may question the legitimacy of the Party.

Controlling the Media and Suppressing Dissent

Since Xi overtook the reigns of the Party in November 2012, he has systematically worked towards controlling the freedom of the media and the civil society. A large number of dissenting voices have been silenced, and journalists and lawyers have been arrested. As argued by a political science professor at the Renmin University, Zhang Ming, "Cracking down on street protests and the Internet is just showing he does not want more external chaos while he is trying to unify his authority from within" (Denyer 2013). During his high profile visit to China Daily office in 2016, Xi had laid out the

thrust of his government's media policy when he said that, "The nation's media outlets are essential to political stability" (Phillips 2016).

In due course, the media in China has been reorganized under the new leadership. The Chinese government Propaganda Department has merged the major Chinese media outlets under one body called 'Voice of China.' They will

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be reporting directly to the Propaganda Department, thus streamlin the chain of command and make it easier to monitor and censor the news (Buckley 2018). As per a report, "While the Chinese government has for a long time kept tight control over the media, Xi's government is returning to a level not seen since the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989, punishing media for

exercising independence from the Communist Party's ideology" (UCA News 2018). The increased control is an important tool in monitoring what the media is reporting, and under Xi, there has been a push for the media to follow the party *dictat* .

Along with strict control and censorship of the media and the internet Xi has also enhanced social surveillance across the country using new technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Chinese National Development and Reform Commission had announced in 2017 that China would be releasing a social credit system by 2020. This will help the government share information about citizens and also monitor their private and public behaviour. It will also help the Chinese government to punish 'bad behaviour' while rewarding 'good behaviour' (South China Morning post 2018b). Based on these credit scores the Chinese government will decide not only recruitment for jobs but also who will be allowed to board planes and trains. As per the Chinese Supreme Court because of recorded misdemeanors, in 2017 around 6.15 million Chinese were not allowed to board planes (Reuters 2018). According to a recent study: "The Chinese notion of credit – or xinyong – has a cultural meaning that relates to moral ideas of honesty and

trust.” There are up to 30 local social credit pilots being run by local authorities, in huge cities such as Shanghai and Hangzhou and much smaller towns. Meanwhile, eight ostensibly private companies have been trialing a different set of rating systems, which seem to chime with the government’s control objectives. The most high-profile system is Sesame Credit – created by Ant Financial, an offshoot of the Chinese online retail giant Alibaba” (Harris 2018). The credit system was started at a small scale in 2010, in Suining County near Shanghai. The system is also under experiment in Rongcheng. The Rongcheng Social Credit Management Office assigns 1000 points at the beginning to all the citizens, and then the deductions and additions begin (Mistreanu 2018). This system is an attempt to control the people with the carrot and stick method and a way to inhibit people from joining public demonstrations. Though these ideas appear to be a part of sci-fi novels and movies, the Chinese government appears quite committed to implementing such methods to prevent the rift between the citizens and the Party from further increasing. In the words of Brendon Hong, “The Chinese Communist Party thinks the public should be like docile Victorian children—seen but not heard. The people, however, have other ideas” (Hong 2016).

Such strong steps are an indication that the CCP is worried about the spread of news and information which it does not deem right for the Party image. As a result of these controls, the reporting of mass incidents has reduced drastically. The new credit system will also be used as a tool to force the people to be less critical about the Party publicly and may give rise to new levels of control, where the Party will be able to direct every action of its citizens, both in private and in public.

Fate of Mass Incidents

Since Xi took over the reins of the CCP, reports regarding protests and mass incidents do not appear that regularly in both the media and the social media. Since 2015 Xi Jinping has undertaken major steps to control any formal protests. He has arrested journalists, human rights workers as well as lawyers who were perceived to be participating in such events. Even western NGOs are

now not allowed to operate that freely in China. These are clear indications of efforts to control the civil society (Fu 2017). While these steps have not erased the protests, today they are significantly more controlled and monitored, and it is tough to spread news and information about them. In August 2017 the Chinese court sent to prison Lu Yu the founder of the blog “Not the News” for four years on the ground of stirring up problems. Lu had been reporting on the protests in China, and according to his blog, he had detailed around 30,000 mass incidents in China in 2016 which were not widely reported (Radio Free Asia 2017a). The Chinese government under Xi had also issued some ‘directives’ in 2017 to the media houses. An analysis of around 500 ‘directives’ issued by the government between 2013 and 2017 concludes that “The vast majority of them call for “negative” actions, such as deleting an article, not sending reporters to cover an event, or closing a website’s comment sections. However, some mandate “affirmative” actions to promote the party line, particularly republishing copy from official news sources” (Cook 2018).

Some of the major protests reported during the last five years were against the construction of new paraxylene (PX) (a chemical used in the production of plastic and textiles) plant in 2015 in Shanghai. . In June 2015 thousands of people protested against the plan for establishing another PX plant in Jinshan district near Shanghai (Ruwitch 2015). While in April 2015, hundreds of people protested against the expansion of coal power plant in the Guangdong province which was causing concern about increasing pollution (Reuters 2015). While in the same month thousands of peasants in Tianmu were protesting against illegal land grabs by the local governments. The protests lasted for around 70 days (Hoffman and Sullivan 2015). In June 2016 there were major protests in Hubei over the building of a chemical factory near the city’s water treatment facility (Radio Free Asia 2016). In May 2017 thousands of people protested against the building of a waste incinerator in Guangdong. The residents argued that they were not confident about the local government’s commitment to prevent the release of toxic gases and wastes in their neighbourhood (Radio Free Asia 2017b). In June 2017 there were major protests in Shanghai over a new rule which barred people from selling flats

which were earlier office space. According to some journalists, the local media was ordered not to report the protest, and the information on the social media was monitored and censored (South China Morning Post 2017). An innovative protest was staged against air pollution in Chengdu in December 2016 where people had put masks on statues (Haas 2016). The call for people to gather and protests on social media was deleted, and the local government put barricades around the site where the people were supposed to gather (Tang 2016).

The last five years have also witnessed an incremental increase in the number of protests and strikes by workers because of financial disputes with employers. There were around 2700 strikes in the year 2015, and the pattern continues (Griffiths 2016). In October 2017 a large number of workers at the Wuxi city iPhone supplier unit had protested against unpaid bonuses (CNBC 2017). Wukan witnessed another major protest in June 2016, which was heavily censored by the media in China, but some information trickled out via the Hong Kong press. The issue was similar to the 2011 incident where the villagers were not given adequate compensation and there was an official attempt to tarnish the image of the local leader who was voted to office by the local people (Beech 2016). The news about child abuse at the RYB Education New World kindergarten in Beijing led to some parents protesting online. However, there were reports that most of the reports were censored while others had their comments sections turned off -- a clear sign of the government attempting to censor the internet and prevent any large-scale protests (Jiang 2017).

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These reports give an indication that though the reporting on mass incidents have been controlled and stifled under Xi, their occurrence has not reduced significantly. . The media may be pressured not to report because of the controls put in place, but the new communication technologies are making it tougher for the Party to monitor every information from reaching the people. However, at the backdrop of the introduction of the new social credit

system, it is difficult to gauge to what extent the Party can go in suppressing dissent and tightening mass surveillance.

Conclusion

In the last few years, the degree of discontent among the people has been growing, and there was a fear that it may gain in strength to question the legitimacy of the CCP's rule. The ongoing mass incidents and online protests are a clear indicator of the enormous range of issues and areas where the CCP needs to rectify things. China is on the path to achieving a greater global status and becoming a major economy. However, the problems at home can derail it all. The current leadership understands this and appears committed to change the situation on the ground. Some have argued that Xi is working towards creating a system that is capable of surviving after him. While the anti-corruption campaign has helped him get rid of some of his major rivals it has also generated some hope among the people for the CCP (Schmitz 2017). As argued by Joseph Fewsmith, the number mass incident may have declined in the first few years under Xi, and this can be a direct consequence of his anti-corruption drive (Fewsimth in Ross and Bekkevold 2016). In the words of Kerry Brown, "I think this time there is an attempt to inculcate a kind of "rule-abiding" discipline within the Party because there is an awareness that this is a treacherous time. If the Party is not able to discipline itself . . . Then it will lose its mandate to rule, and it will be game over. So the stakes are high, and that is why I think this struggle is not going to disappear any time soon" (Johnson, C K., Pei, M. & Brown, K). However, Xi has also undertaken massive steps to control the media and thus prevent any reporting about protests. There have been major changes in the media landscape in China and a return to the pre-Deng era kind of control and command.

What may prove to be an Achilles Heel for the CCP is its fear of criticism. Even though Chinese society is loaded with mass incidents which are aimed against the policies and rules of the CCP, till date the criticism has not been aimed directly at the Central Leadership. The CCP has managed to appear reasonable by directing these criticisms towards the local and

provincial leaders. However, with time the people could start criticizing the central leadership which will be a direct attack on the legitimacy of the CCP. The leadership understands that the increasing buildup of discontent would question the CCP directly, and thus the focused effort to change the image of the Party. As of now Xi appears to be in control of the existing system and appears committed too, but the changes which are necessary also can affect the Party adversely, and Xi has a very tough task of balancing the two in the coming months.

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