Assessing Social Stability
on the Eve of the 17th Party Congress

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> Looking at recent data on overall opinion in China makes one fairly
> optimistic about the state of Chinese society: incomes are up, trust in the
> (central) government is high, and many aspects of government are seen as
> fair. But when one looks more closely at the issues closest to people—
> health care, social security, and local government—then the potential for
> social disturbance looks significantly greater. This is particularly true
> when one looks at the effect income has on opinion.

Social stability has been one of the hottest topics in China in recent years, influencing intellectual debates as concerns with "social justice" have become ever more prominent, and stimulating new policy initiatives, such as the decision to end the agricultural tax. Nevertheless, income has become increasingly unequal and social order has deteriorated as "mass incidents" have increased. Between 1993 and 2003, the number of mass incidents increased from 10,000 to 60,000, and the number of participants from 700,000 to over 3 million.[1] In 2004, the number rose to 74,000, and then to 87,000 in 2005.[2] There may have been some easing in this situation. On 6 November 2006, the vice minister of Public Security Liu Jinguo said that there had been only 17,900 mass incidents in the first nine months of the year, but this figure appears to be incomplete.[3] Rural income increased 7.4 percent in 2006, on top of a 6 percent gain in 2005.[4] Increased income, however, does not always produce happiness. Zhejiang Province leads the nation in rural income as well as in petitions.[5]

Some light on these often confusing and contradictory trends is shed by the recent publication of the 2007 edition of the "Blue Book" on the state of Chinese society, an annual compendium of articles published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Looking at the macro picture leads one to be optimistic about the social situation even though, as will be discussed below, a closer look reveals continued, and perhaps even deteriorating, problems in important areas of social life.

Overall, people in China appear to be rather optimistic about their own personal situation as well as the overall national situation. Li Peilin, a sociologist at CASS and one of the editors of the *Blue Book*, carried out with his colleagues a survey of 7,061 people in 28 provinces, 130 county/municipal/districts, 260 townships, and 520 villages. They report that three-quarters of Chinese citizens see the country's social situation as either "very harmonious" or "fairly harmonious" (unfortunately the political slogan "harmonious" has been introduced into survey research, making one wonder how people respond when they hear such cues). In contrast, only 16.9 percent of respondents see

Chinese society as "fairly unharmonious" or "very unharmonious" (only 1.8 percent of respondents falling into the latter category). Moreover, over 90 percent express confidence in the party and state's handling of affairs (see Table 1). Nevertheless, one must note that the 16.9 percent who see Chinese society as unharmonious represent a very large number of people. The labor force, aged between 15 and 64, is about 900 million, 16.9 percent of which would be 152 million people!

Individual Satisfaction

Table 1 suggests a surprisingly upbeat portrayal of the way citizens view the state of the society. According to this table, 91.6 percent of respondents express confidence ("very much agree" and "relatively agree") in the ability of the party and state to manage the country, suggesting a very high level of trust in the government (see the section below on "Trust in Government" for a more detailed look at this subject).

Table 1
Distribution of Views on the Circumstances of China's Economic and Social Development

Statement:	Very much agree	Relatively agree	Don't really agree	Very much do not agree	Uncertain	Total
The social developmental problems China is facing are temporary	27.7%	55.7%	8.8%	0.8%	6.9%	100%
The Party and State are capable of managing our country well	43.8%	47.8%	4.3%	0.5%	5.4%	100%
China's current status in the world is something to be proud of	44.1%	44.8%	5.2%	0.6%	5.4%	100%
The overall circumstances of China's socioeconomic development are good	36.3%	54.2%	4.7%	0.6%	4.2%	100%

Source: Li Peilin, Chen Guangjin, and Li Wei, "A Report on the Situation of Social Harmony and Stability of China in 2006," p. 21.

These apparently upbeat appraisals of the situation appear to reflect the rising standard of living of respondents. When asked about their expectations for the next five years and whether their incomes had risen over the past five years, a strong majority of people responded optimistically. Altogether, 63.4 percent said either that their incomes had increased a "great deal" or "somewhat" over the past five years, while 53.9 percent expressed confidence that those trends would be maintained over the next five years (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Urban and Rural Residents' Evaluation of Their Standards of Living*

Compared with five years ago, your standard of living has . . . ?		*In five years, do you feel your standard of living will . . . ?*	
increased greatly	9.7%	increase greatly	10.6%
increased somewhat	53.7%	increase somewhat	43.3%
no change	22.1%	no change	17%
decreased somewhat	9.0%	decrease somewhat	6.8%
decreased greatly	4.9%	decrease greatly	2.7%
hard to say	0.6%	hard to say	19.6%
sample size	7061	sample size	7061

Source: Li Peilin, Chen Guangjin, and Li Wei, "A Report on the Situation of Social Harmony and Stability of China in 2006," p. 22.

Although such figures appear good for overall social stability in China it should be noted that they are not as optimistic as those reported four years ago in a similar survey cited in the 2003 edition of the *Blue Book.* In that report, 66.6 percent said that their incomes had increased "somewhat" or "greatly" over the preceding five years. At that time, people were also a bit more optimistic about the future. A total of 63 percent reported that they expected their incomes to increase "greatly," "quite a bit," or "somewhat" over the ensuing five years (three choices were offered at that time), whereas this time only 53.9 percent expressed similar optimism. Similarly, the survey reported in the 2007 edition of the *Blue Book* shows that nearly 20 percent thought that it was "hard to say" about their future prospects; only 12.1 percent responded similarly four years ago.[6] Since the more recent survey makes no reference to the earlier survey, it offers no explanation for these different results; perhaps it has to do with the inclusion of rural residents in the recent survey or perhaps it is related to the growing concern about social security issues (see below).

Along with this generally upbeat appraisal of income growth, both past and future, an increasing number of people reflected satisfaction with their own individual economic circumstances, with their individual employment circumstances, and with their lives in general. See Charts 1–3.
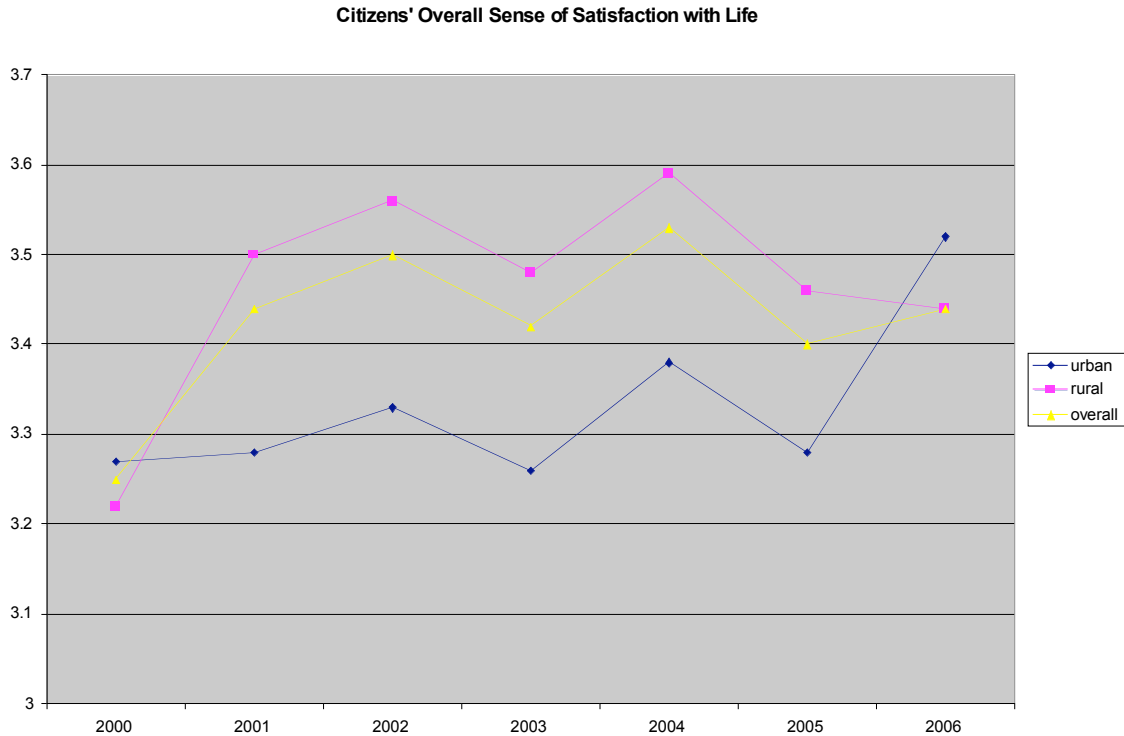
Chart 1

Urban and Rural Satisfaction with Individual Economic Circumstances
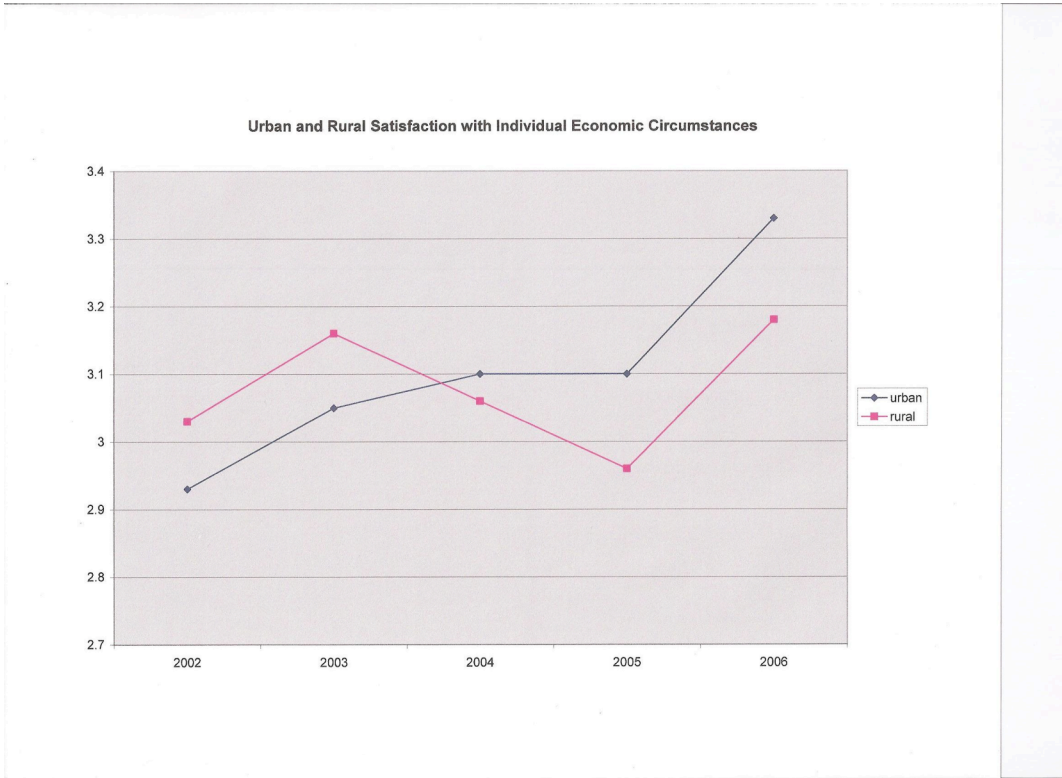
Source: Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 49.

Chart 2

Satisfaction with Individual Employment

Chart 3

Citizens' Overall Sense of Satisfaction with Life
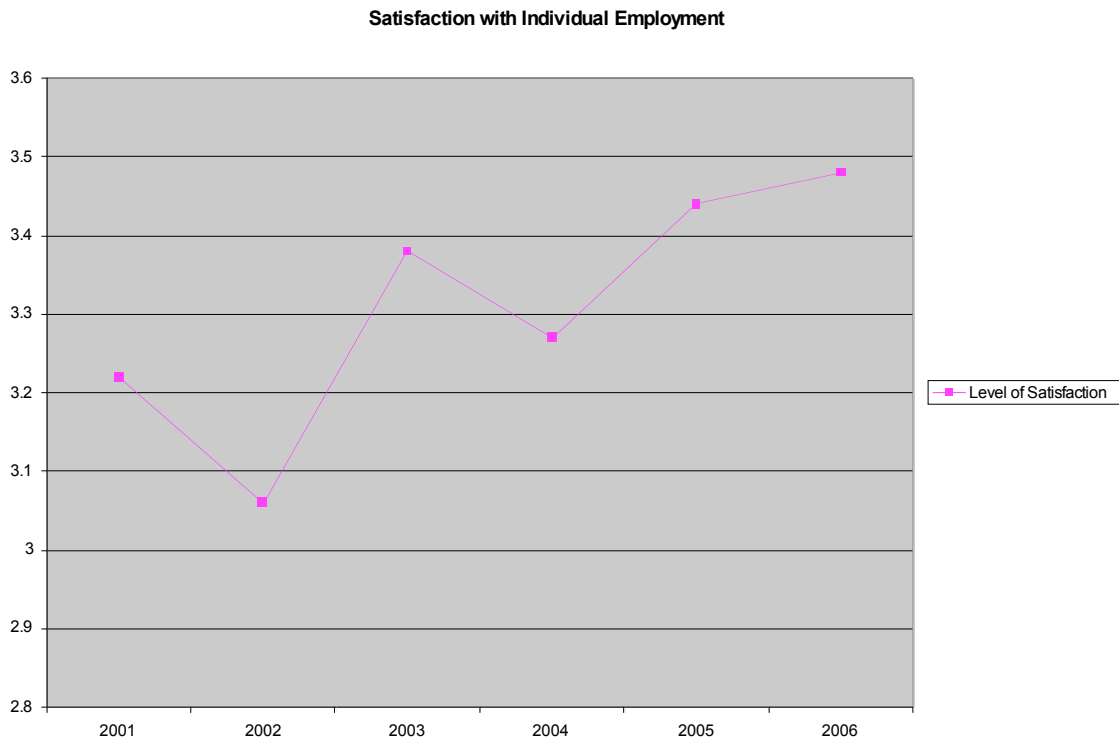
Source: Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 49.

What is particularly notable about these results is that urban satisfaction in 2006 for the first time rose above that in rural areas. Despite concerns over old age insurance and trust in government management (see below), people's economic circumstances, consumer confidence, and overall satisfaction with social security were higher than in 2005, and that higher rate of satisfaction drove the results. For the past five years, "individual economic circumstances" have been the most important factor in determining overall satisfaction.[7] According to Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui's report in last year's (2006) *Blue Book*, urban satisfaction with economic circumstances had been increasing four years in a row, from 2.93 in 2002, to 3.10 in 2005 (on a five-point scale).[8] In 2006, the figure rose again to 3.33. It is rural dissatisfaction with individual economic circumstances that pull the overall figure down (see Chart 2).

These results reflect the greater affluence of citizens, and this affluence is reflected in the declining Engels curve (which measures the proportion of income spent on food—see Table 3).

Table 3
Engels Curve

Percentage of urban and rural residents who have achieved great abundance (Engels curve below 30 %)	34%
Percentage of urban and rural residents who have achieved relative abundance (Engels curve between 30%-39%)	22.1%
Percentage of urban and rural residents who have achieved abundance (Engels curve between 40%-49%)	18.5%
Total	74.6%

Source: Li Peilin, Chen Guangjin, and Li Wei, "A Report on the Situation of Social Harmony and Stability of China in 2006," p. 21.

Nevertheless, the Horizon survey found that 17.5 percent of households interviewed had one or more people unemployed.[9] This suggests a degree of social strain not reflected in the figures above. Moreover, when asked whether they were satisfied with their local government's efforts to deal with employment, more people expressed dissatisfaction than satisfaction.[10]

Whether or not Chinese society should be described in any sense as "middle class" is highly unclear given the very different results obtained in two different surveys. In the survey conducted by Li Peilin and his colleagues, nearly 40 percent described themselves as "middle class" (with another 34 percent saying they were either "upper middle class" or "lower middle class"). Such results are not up to many developed nations, but they suggest that China is rapidly developing a middle class (see Table 4).

Table 4
Self-Identification of Social Status of Urban and Rural
Residents and International Comparison

| Nation	Upper Class	Upper Middle Class	Middle Class	Lower Middle Class	Lower Class	Can't Say
U.S.	1.9%	15.7%	60.7%	17.4%	3.6%	--
France	0.4%	10.9%	57.7%	25.2%	5.3%	--
Brazil	4.4%	13.1%	57.4%	17.2%	5.5%	--
Japan	1.1%	12.5%	56.0%	24.4%	5.0%	--
Korea	1.1%	14.7%	51.0%	23.7%	9.0%	--
India	1.2%	12.0%	57.5%	21.7%	7.5%	--
China: 2002 Survey	1.6%	10.4%	46.9%	26.5%	14.6%	--
China: This Survey	0.5%	5.4%	39.6%	29.1%	24.5%	1.0%

Source: Li Peilin et al., p. 26.

However, these results are directly contradicted by the survey conducted by Wang Junxiu and his colleagues, also at CASS. According to them, 2.3 percent describe themselves as "wealthy" (*furen*), while a whopping 75.1 percent describe themselves as "poor"

(*qiongren*). A large number of people—22.6 percent—declare that they cannot say for sure (*shuo bu qing*). Obviously, these figures add up to 100 percent, leaving *no one* as middle class, an unlikely outcome. But the *Blue Book* offers no explanation for such discrepancies or for why only 1 percent would respond that they "can't say" (*shuo bu qing*) to Li Peilin while over 22 percent would say the same thing to Wang Junxiu and his colleagues.[11] As useful as the *Blue Book* is, there are methodological issues that cry out for explanation.

Social Welfare

Despite this improving sense of satisfaction with individual well-being, and with a modestly improving sense of satisfaction with overall social security (see Chart 4, respondents replied to a five-point scale), survey results still reflect many concerns, particularly about old age insurance and medical coverage. For instance, in 2006, for

Chart 4

Urban and Rural Residents' Satisfaction with Social Security
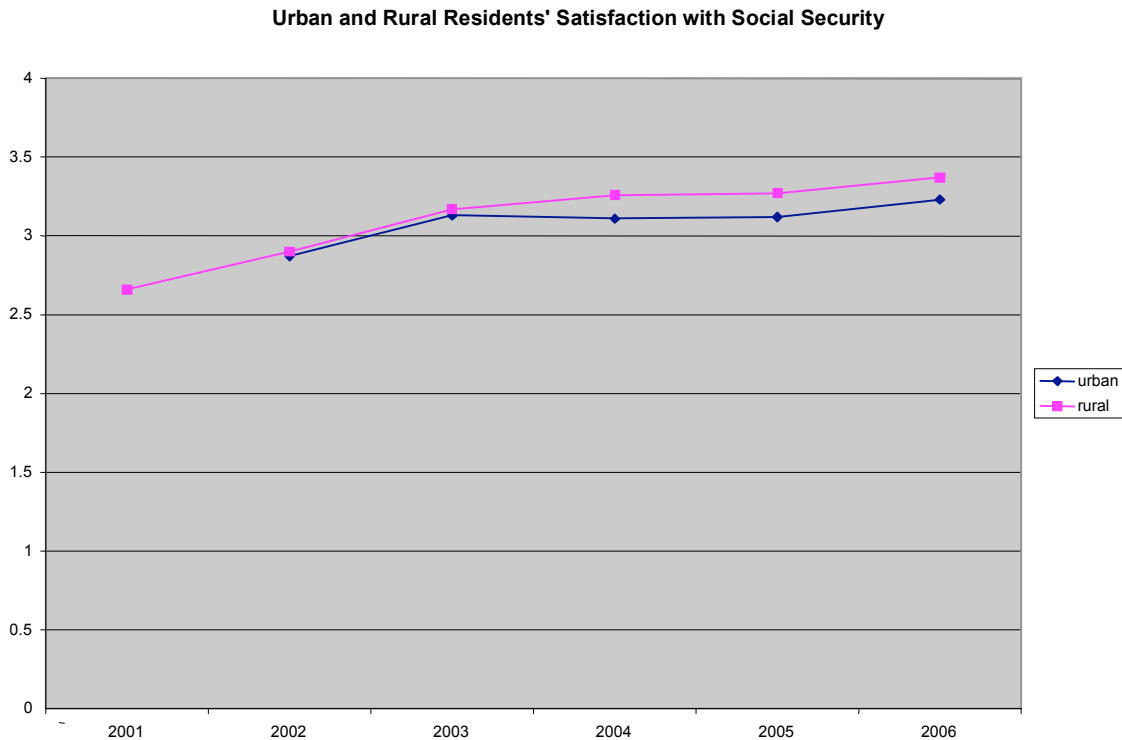
Source: Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 55.

the first time, urban respondents expressed greater concern with social security than with layoffs (*xiagang*) (although layoffs remained a serious worry).[12] The concern about social security may reflect a growing consciousness of welfare issues as much as a change in objective circumstance. In 2005, when asked about the provision of elder care, only 22 percent of urban respondents expressed concern (the figure for rural respondents was 24 percent). Yet in 2006, when the same question was asked, 39.6 percent of urban respondents and 32.2 percent of rural respondents expressed concern.[13] Such a rapid

increase in concern may reflect the amount of public attention paid to the issue over the past year or so.

Health care was another area of concern. Health care was listed as the number one concern of respondents (see Table 5).

Table 5
Summary Listing of Social Issues

Social Issue	Percentage	Rank
Seeing doctors is difficult, expensive	57.95	1
Unemployment	33.45	2
Income differences too great	32.06	3
Corruption	27.40	4
Old age insurance	27.32	5
Educational expenses	18.96	6
Housing costs too high	13.13	7
Social order	12.85	8
Social atmosphere	9.84	9
Environmental pollution	9.50	10
Urban-Rural disparity	9.26	11
Unfair treatment of peasant workers in city	6.87	12
Mass-Cadre relations	6.32	13
Judicial unfairness	4.31	14
Unfairness of compensation for land acquisition/housing	3.68	15
Prostitution	3.02	16
Labor-Management disputes	1.90	17
Other	1.05	

Source: Li Peilin, Chen Guangjin, and Li Wei, "A Report on the Situation of Social Harmony and Stability of China in 2006," p. 25.

The concern with health care is understandable when one looks at the poor coverage of the health care system. According to respondents, coverage for basic medical care and catastrophic illnesses remains low, especially in the countryside. Even in the cities, fewer than half of urban residents have basic medical coverage, and less than one-third have coverage for both basic care and catastrophic illness (see Table 6).

Table 6
Social Comprehensive Medical Coverage of Urban and Rural Residents

| Type	Cities	Townships	Villages
Percent having social comprehensive basic medical insurance	48.8	24.3	6.5
Percent having social comprehensive catastrophic illness insurance	39.8	7.2	3.3
Percent having both basic medical and catastrophic illness insurance	29.4	4.2	1.3

Source: Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 55.

Other survey results show that not only is medical coverage limited but also dissatisfaction with the medical services provided runs high—especially the standard by which fees are charged (see Chart 5).

Chart 5
Urban and Rural Residents' Satisfaction Regarding Medical Services, 2006
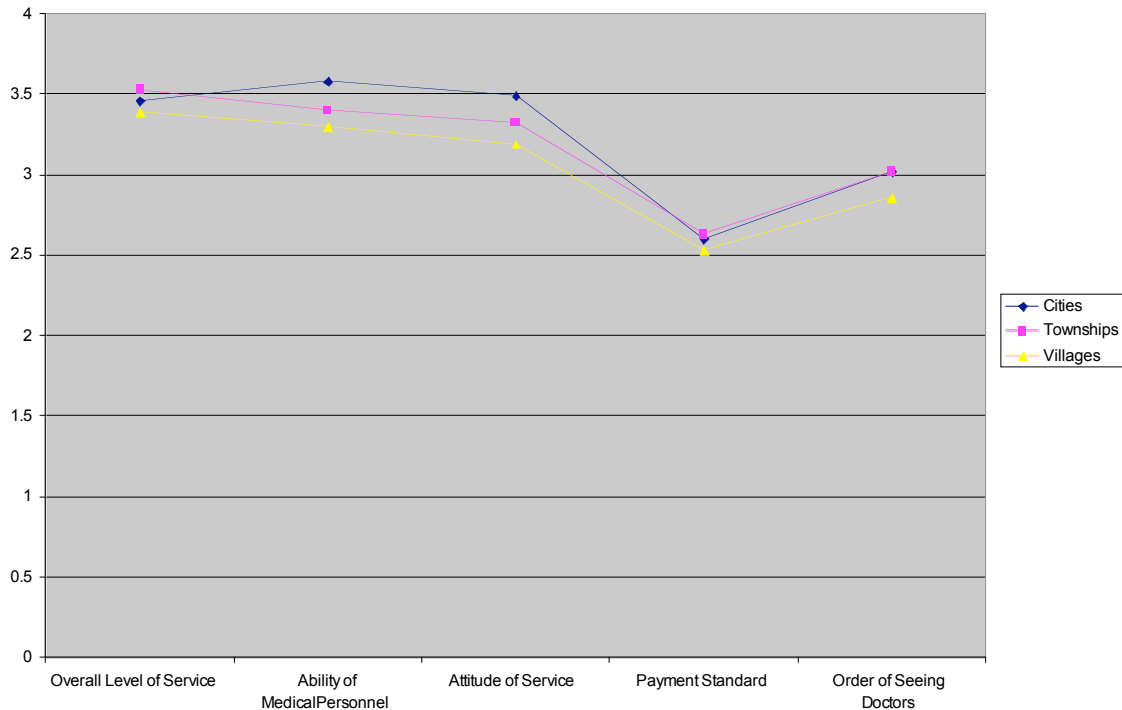
Source: Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 58.

Social Conflict

There has been much discussion in recent years about income inequality in China, and the figures included in the *Blue Book* reinforce these concerns. According to the survey done by Li Peilin and his colleagues, the Gini index (a measurement of inequality in which 0 indicates complete equality and 1 complete inequality, that is, that one person has all the income or wealth and the rest of society has none) has now reached 0.496. A footnote cites a study done by Chinese People's University that calculates the Gini index at 0.561. The lower figure would still make China more unequal than the United States (which has a Gini index of about 0.45), while the latter figure would suggest that China has reached Brazilian levels of inequality (Brazil's Gini index stood at 0.56 in 2005).[14]

Overall, the top 20 percent of the population makes 58.1 percent of all income in China, whereas the bottom quintile makes only 3.0 percent of total income—a ratio of 18.2:1. By way of comparison, in the United States, the top quintile pulls down 50.4 percent of total income while the bottom quintile receives 3.4 percent of total income (a ratio of almost 15 to 1). The disparity in wealth, however, is far greater. The top quintile of the Chinese population has 72.4 *times* the wealth (defined as real estate, financial assets, and durable goods) as the bottom quintile.[15] In the U.S., according to 1997 figures,

the top quintile owns 47.8 percent of the wealth, and the bottom quintile 17.9 percent (a ratio of 2.7:1).[16]

What is remarkable is that, despite these glaring inequalities, most respondents seemed satisfied with the fairness of most areas of social life (respondents were given three choices); the overall sense of fairness of social life was remarkably high (62.3). Although there was evidently much dissatisfaction with the distribution of wealth and income, still 40 percent regarded it as fair. The promotion of cadres, however, ranked low; only 34.4 percent of people believed the promotion of cadres was fair, ranking it 11th out of 13 categories (see Table 7).

Table 7
The Sense of Fairness about Different Social Arenas Held by Residents of Cities and Townships

Fields of Social Fairness	*Sense of Fairness*	*Rank*
Mandatory education	76.7	1
University examination system	71.5	2
Enjoyment of political rights	61.9	3
Opportunities for individual advancement	56.7	4
Finance and tax policies	56.5	5
Judiciary and implementation of law	55.1	6
Public Health	49.8	7
Work and employment opportunities	44.4	8
Distribution of wealth and income	40.2	9
Old age and other social insurance	37.5	10
Promotion of cadres	34.4	11
Treatment of regions and professions	33.6	12
Treatment of rural and urban areas	29.0	13
Overall social fairness	62.3	--

Note: "Sense of Fairness" combines the two categories of "Comparatively Fair" and "Very Fair."
Source: Li Peilin, Chen Guangjin, and Li Wei, "A Report on the Situation of Social Harmony and Stability of China in 2006," p. 26.

Standing in seeming conflict with this generally good sense of fairness was the belief that social conflict was likely to increase in the future. At present, 23 percent of respondents indicated that there is already either "serious" or a "relatively large" amount of social conflict between groups in society (and another 44.9 percent saying there is "some" conflict), but just under 40 percent of respondents believed that social conflict was "absolutely likely" to worsen in the future or "possibly would worsen" (see Table 8).

Table 8

Distribution of Views Concerning Conflict of Social Interests

Is there a conflict of interest between social groups in China?		*Is it possible that conflicts between social group interests will worsen?*	
Answer	*Percent*	*Answer*	*Percent*
Serious conflict	4.8	Absolutely will worsen	5
Relatively large conflict	18.2	Possibly will worsen	33.6
Some conflict	44.9	Not too likely to worsen	30.4
No conflict	16.3	Absolutely will not worsen	8.6
Hard to say	15.8	Hard to say	22.4
Sample Size	7061	Sample size	7061

Source: Li Peilin, Chen Guangjin, and Li Wei, "A Report on the Situation of Social Harmony and Stability of China in 2006," p. 23.

Interestingly enough, Li Peilin does not try to correlate views with income groups in his article in the recent *Blue Book*. However, he does so in a very interesting book that he did with several colleagues that was published in 2005. Based on survey data from 2002, Li presents the following figures:

Table 9
Perception of Serious Conflict by Different Strata

Stratum	Between rich and poor	Between cadres and masses	Between peasant and urbanites	Between managers and workers in SOEs	Between managers and workers in private enterprises	Between managers and workers in FIEs	Between managers and workers in joint ventures
Poorest stratum	26.8	24.0	5.6	18.2	19.4	15.6	14.5
Poor	17.4	11.4	3.4	9.9	14.6	10.6	8.7
Lower middle	14.3	9.5	2.6	7.9	12.4	9.1	7.1
Middle	12.2	8.1	2.4	5.6	10.5	8.6	6.7
Upper middle	11.6	5.9	2.0	4.7	9.2	8.5	6.3
Upper	14.2	10.5	2.0	4.2	12.4	10.7	10.7
Highest stratum	36.4	13.6	14.3	23.8	25.0	22.2	21.7

Source: Li Peilin, Zhang Yi, Zhao Yandong, and Liang Dong, *Shehui chongtu yu jieji yishi* [Social conflict and class consciousness] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), p. 139.

These figures not only differentiate different types of social conflict, perhaps eliciting different responses, but also suggest that the poorest stratum perceives significantly more social conflict than any other social stratum—with the notable exception of the wealthiest, which seems to betray its own concerns with social order (and, no doubt, being the target of social dissatisfaction).

Another table from the same work suggests an unexpected (by the authors) willingness of the public to participate in public demonstrations of various sorts. The question asked specified "collective petitions" but it is perhaps not too much to extrapolate from collective petitions to other forms of public protest. In any event, the results reflect surprisingly large numbers of people expressing a willingness to join in collective petitions. Moreover, although such attitudes are highest among the poor, the wealthiest also reflect a high propensity to join such protests (see Table 10).

Table 10
Attitudes of Individuals on Willingness to Participate in Collective Petition if Asked by Colleague or Neighbor (unit: %)
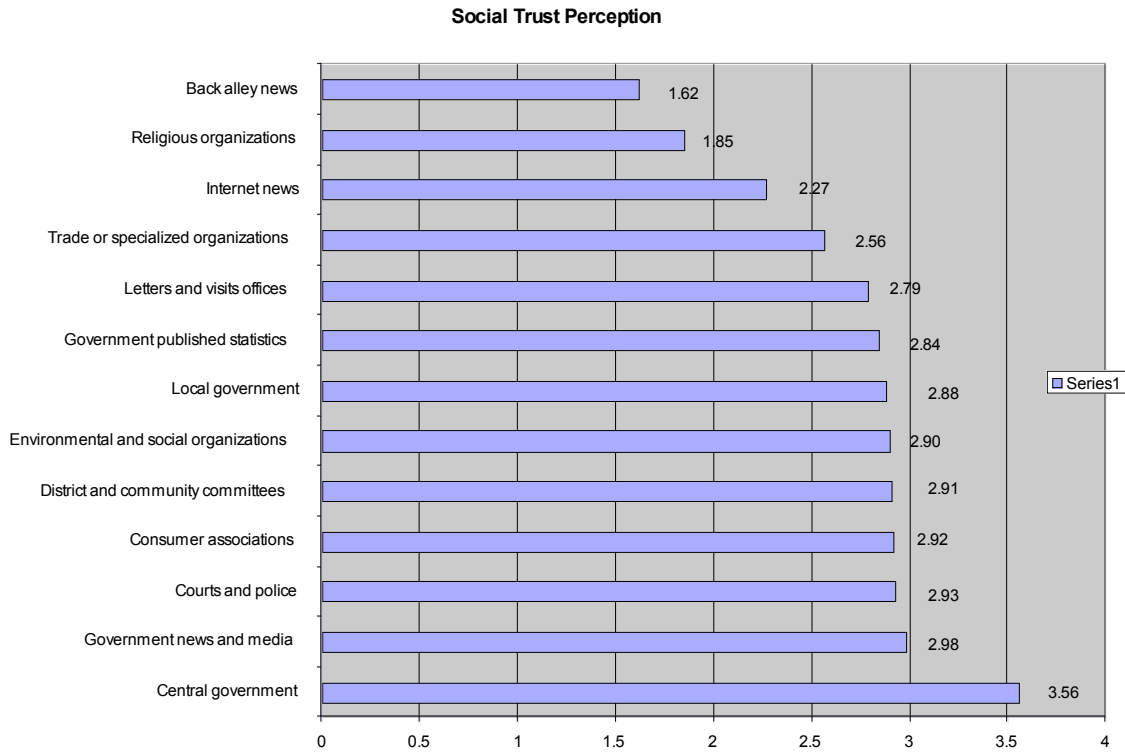
Basic attitude	Highest stratum	Upper stratum	Upper middle	Middle stratum	Middle lower	Lower stratum	Lowest stratum
Obstruct	10.5	15.0	16.8	13.4	9.4	7.4	8.7
Observe	10.5	17.3	21.3	18.9	17.7	18.8	18.2
Sympathize but not participate	47.4	44.9	39.5	42.0	44.8	40.8	35.7
Join in	31.6	22.8	22.3	25.7	28.1	33.0	37.4

Source: Li Peilin, Zhang Yi, Zhao Yandong, and Liang Dong, *Shehui chongtu yu jieji yishi* [Social conflict and class consciousness] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), p. 226.

Trust in Government

Another survey contained in the *Blue Book* suggests a rather high degree of trust in the central government, but a rather low level of trust in local government. On a five-point scale, the central government receives a relatively high score of 3.56, but local government gets only 2.88. Interestingly, the primary office assigned to receive citizens' complaints, the Letters and Visits Office, gets a score of only 2.79, and, perhaps surprisingly, both Internet news and "back alley news" (rumors) have low credibility (scores of 2.27 and 1.62, respectively) (see Chart 6).
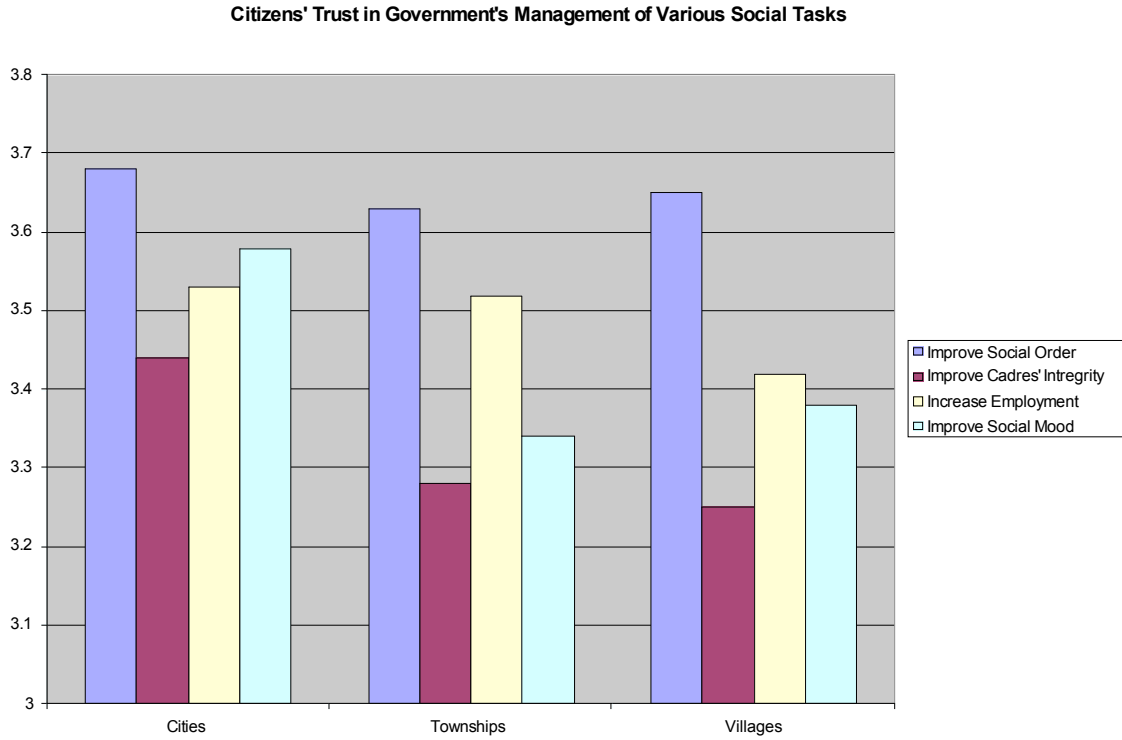
Chart 6

Social Trust Perception

Back alley news	1.62
Religious organizations	1.85
Internet news	2.27
Trade or specialized organizations	2.56
Letters and visits offices	2.79
Government published statistics	2.84
Local government	2.88
Environmental and social organizations	2.90
District and community committees	2.91
Consumer associations	2.92
Courts and police	2.93
Government news and media	2.98
Central government	3.56

Source: Wang Junxiu, Yang Yiyin, and Chen Wuqing, "Survey report on China's social mood, 2006," p. 65.

A different survey sheds more light on these results. This survey distinguishes trust in the government's management of economic affairs, international affairs, and social affairs. The first two indexes receive relatively high scores, but trust in the government's management of social affairs (an index composed of government efforts to improve social order, increase employment, increase cadre honesty, and improve the social mood) is relatively low, especially with regard to improving cadre honesty. See Chart 7.

Chart 7

Citizens' Trust in Government's Management of Various Social Tasks

Source: Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 61.

Looked at longitudinally, trust in government, particularly its management of social affairs, has been declining, especially over the past three years (see Chart 8).

Chart 8

Urban Residents' Trust in Government Management, 2001-2006
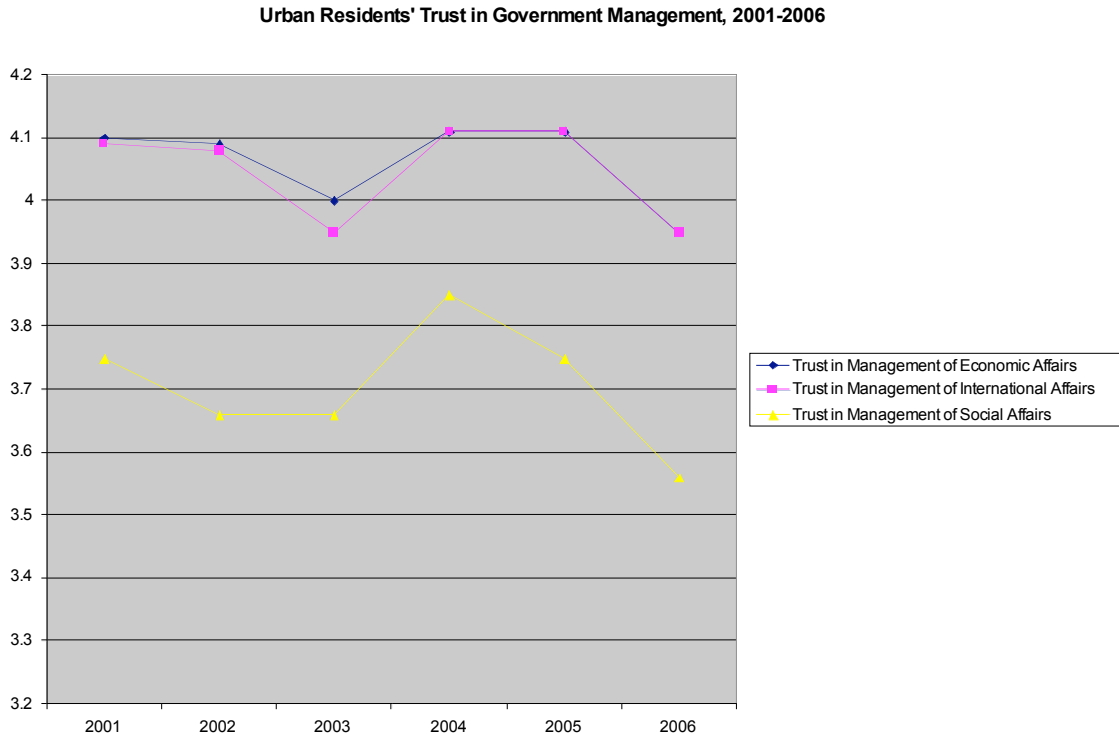
Source: Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 61.

Of those surveyed in this poll, only 5.8 percent reported having had a direct interaction with the government in the previous year. Of these people, 52.7 percent report being dissatisfied with the government's response, somewhat more than the 46.7 percent who reported being satisfied. Reasons cited for feeling dissatisfied included red tape (that is, one department saying the matter was the responsibility of another department), bad attitude, slow management of affairs, and complicated procedures.[17]

Chart 9 reinforces the impression that the more local the level of government and the more often people come in contact with it, they less satisfied they are. Local government gets low marks with regard to social security and assistance, medical and sanitation services, environmental protection, and managing in accordance with law.

Chart 9

Satisfaction with Work of Local Government
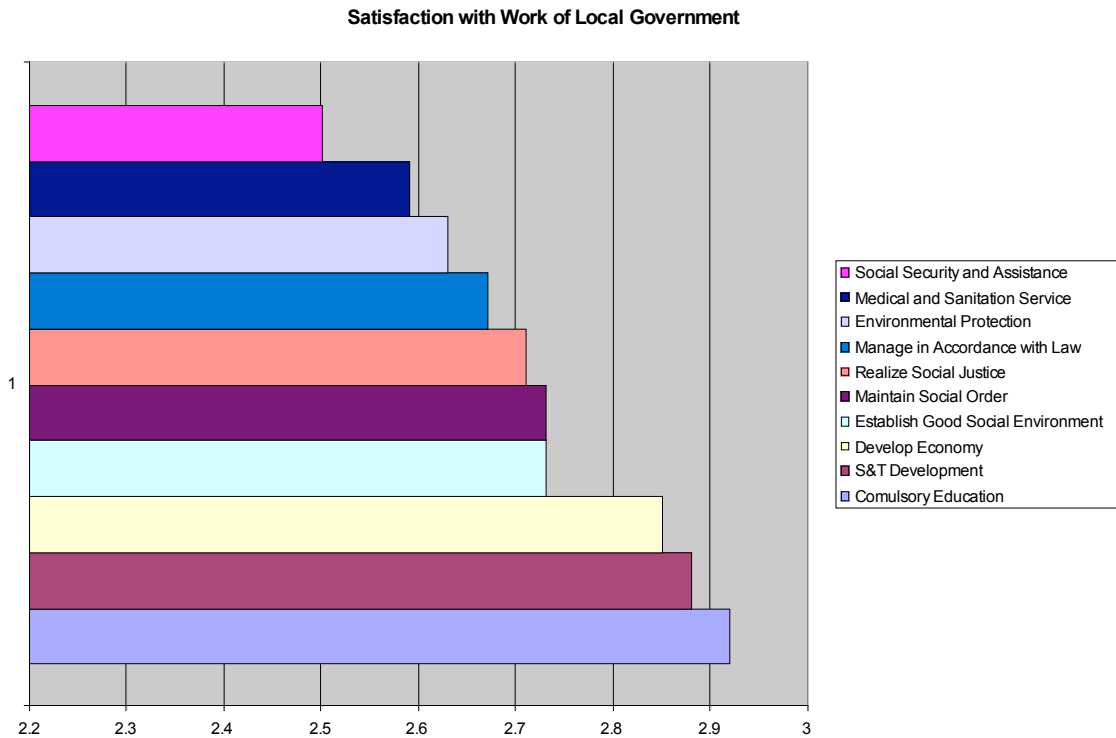
Source: Wang Junxiu, Yang Yiyin, and Chen Wuqing, "Survey Report on China's Social Mood, 2006," p. 66.

Relations between Cadres and the "Masses"

Relations between cadres and the "masses," as citizens in China continue to be called, have been sensitive for many years; most "mass incidents" appear to be a direct result of clashes of interest between people and cadres. It is relevant in this regard that the masses see cadres as the chief beneficiaries of reform, according to 71.4 percent of those asked. According to a different survey, done of cadres attending the Central Party School, *not one* cadre identified cadres as being the chief beneficiaries of reform.[18] Moreover, 28.3 percent believed that contradictions and conflict easily broke out between cadres and people. Such conflicts were most likely to happen at the local level, where contact between people and cadres was the most frequent, rather than between people and cadres at a higher level (see Table 11). This is consistent with the finding, reported above, that trust in the central government is higher than that in local government.

Table 11
Relations Between Cadres at Various Levels and the Masses

Relationship:	Between village (neighborhood) committee cadres and village (neighborhood) residents (%)	Between town (township or street) cadres and village (neighborhood) residents (%)	Between county (municipal, banner, district) cadres and village (neighborhood) residents (%)
Very bad	4	3.7	3.6
Not good	14.7	14.9	11.2
Fairly good	59.6	45.5	33.3
Very good	12.9	8.3	7.1
Hard to say	8.8	27.6	4.9
Sample size	7061		

Source: Wang Junxiu et al., "Survey Report on Social Mood in China, 2006," p. 68.

Again, the data from Li Peilin's earlier work sheds more light on conflict between cadres and masses. According to his data, lower income levels perceive more, and more serious, conflict than do those with higher incomes (though, again, those at the highest income levels perceive more than do those in the middle) (see Table 12).

Table 12
Views of Different Strata on Interest Conflict Between Cadres and Masses

Stratum	No conflict	Very little conflict	Some small conflict	Much conflict	Serious conflict
Highest	9.1	22.7	31.8	22.7	13.6
High	5.6	18.9	42.7	22.4	10.5
Upper middle	6.2	19.5	48.6	19.7	5.9
Middle	5.8	17.9	46.6	21.6	8.1
Lower middle	5.6	14.9	46.3	23.7	9.5
Lower	3.6	13.3	41.4	30.4	11.4
Lowest	5.4	6.2	36.4	28.0	24.0

Source: Li Peilin, Zhang Yi, Zhao Yandong, and Liang Dong, *Shehui chongtu yu jieji yishi* [Social conflict and class consciousness] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), p. 219.

The View from the Top: What Leading Cadres Think

Every year the Central Party School does a survey of *ting* (prefectural/office) level cadres who attend short-term classes (usually three months) at the school. *Ting* level cadres are the lowest-level cadres whose files are maintained by the Central Organization Department; they constitute the pool from which provincial deputy party secretaries, vice governors, and deputy bureau chiefs will be drawn from. Perhaps because these cadres have been successful at lower levels and aspire to higher office, their views are rarely controversial. Nevertheless, they do give some sense of the way China's "ruling class" views various issues. Although their views largely parallel those of the general population, there are some differences worth noting.

In 2006, there were 112 cadres who responded to questionnaires. Unfortunately, no data are given about the areas these cadres came from or even whether they came from urban or rural areas, so it is impossible to draw conclusions about the views of cadres facing different social situations.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most cadres view China's overall situation rather favorably. Roughly three-quarters of cadres view the social situation either as "relatively good" or "very good"—and this proportion has not varied much over recent years (see Table 13).

Table 13
Leading Cadres' Overall Evaluation of China's Social Situation (unit: %)

Evaluation	2000	2002	2004	2006
Very good	3.1	2.3	8.4	5.4
Relatively good	72.7	69.9	60.7	67.9
OK	19.5	24.1	22.4	20.5
Not very good	3.1	3.8	7.5	5.4
Very bad	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hard to say	0.8	0.0	0.9	0.9
Sample size	128	133	107	112

Source: Qing Lianbin, "Party and State Leading Cadres' Basic Opinions of China's Social Circumstances, 2006–2007," p. 32.

Similarly, when asked to evaluate the standard of living in their areas compared to one year previous, the views of cadres roughly parallel those of the population as a whole (though the population was asked about how their income compares with five years previous). About 70 percent see standards of living increasing greatly or somewhat over the past year, and, again, this proportion has remained fairly consistent over recent years, though the proportion that responded "basically the same" in 2002 was abnormally high (see Table 14).

Table 14

Leading Cadres' Evaluation of Living Standards in Their Areas Compared with One Year Previous (unit: %)

Change	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Greatly increased	2.9	2.3	6.9	3.7	7.7	8.9
Increased somewhat	68.6	51.1	64.7	66.4	56.6	52.7
Basically the same	25.5	43.6	27.6	24.3	35.7	31.3
Decreased somewhat	2.9	3.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	2.7
Sample size		128		107		112

Source: Qing Lianbin, "Party and State Leading Cadres' Basic Opinions of China's Social Circumstances, 2006–2007," p. 33.

When asked to evaluate the work of the state in various areas, cadres were upbeat about economic work and international issues (including the Taiwan issue), but much more pessimistic about progress in areas of more direct concern to the people: social security, education, public goods, health, income redistribution, and employment (see Table 15). Cadres' poor evaluation of accomplishments in these areas mirrors the citizens' poor evaluation of government work in these same areas (see above, Chart 8). Nevertheless, these evaluations seem to broadly reflect the emphasis the central government places on such matters as economic development, and the role that the development of the economy plays in the evaluation of cadres. It will be difficult to get away from this emphasis on GDP even though the central government in recent years has been calling for more emphasis on environmental protection and social reforms.

Table 15
Leading Cadres' Evaluation of Various Types of Work (unit: %)

	Very apparent	Not very apparent	Not at all apparent
Maintain economic development	68.8	27.7	0.9
Manage international affairs	67.9	27.7	2.7
Enlarge opening to outside	59.8	35.7	0.9
Manage the Taiwan issue	57.1	35.7	5.4
Reduce peasant burdens	46.4	44.6	5.4
Promote theoretical development	46.4	46.4	3.6
Control corruption	45.5	40.2	10.7
Construct spiritual civilization	32.1	57.1	7.1
Correct social order	26.8	58.0	13.4
Reform SOEs	22.3	57.1	17.0
Deepen organizational reform	19.6	63.4	12.5
Reform social security system	15.2	54.5	27.7
Resolve supply of public goods in villages	14.3	58.0	25.9
Increase educational fairness	9.8	50.9	36.6
Improve health and sanitation	6.3	47.3	45.5
Readjust distribution of income	6.3	69.6	22.3
Solve unemployment and layoffs	6.3	69.6	21.4

Source: Qing Lianbin, "Party and State Leading Cadres' Basic Opinions of China's Social Circumstances, 2006–2007," p. 34.

When asked about their evaluations of the most important problems facing China, most cadres cite social order and redressing income gaps. Indeed, their lack of focus on such issues as medical care seems strange in view of the focus the population puts on this issue (see Table 16).

Table 16
Leading Cadres' Judgment of Existing Problems, 2006 (unit: %)

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Combined
1. Social order	36.6	7.1	6.3	4.5	54.5
2. Income gap	23.2	18.8	4.5	6.3	52.8
3. Medical Care	5.4	8.0	18.8	20.5	52.7
4. Corruption	8.0	12.5	21.4	6.3	48.2
5. Unemployment	6.3	19.6	8.9	1.8	36.6
6. Social mood	7.1	9.8	8.0	8.9	33.8
7. Educational inequities	1.8	3.6	8.0	19.6	32.0
8. Gaps in regional development	5.4	4.5	7.1	5.4	22.4
9. Land disputes	0.9	3.6	4.5	5.4	14.4
10. Peasant burdens	2.7	4.5	3.6	1.8	12.6
11. Poverty	0.9	2.7	1.8	5.4	10.8
12. SOEs	0.9	2.7	0.9	4.5	9.0
13. Other	0.0	0.9	2.7	4.5	8.1
14. Natural disasters	0.0	0.0	0.9	5.4	6.3
15. Consumer prices	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.0	2.7
16. Major accidents	0.0	0.9	1.8	0.0	2.7
17. Regional prejudices	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Qing Lianbin, "Party and State Leading Cadres' Basic Opinions of China's Social Circumstances, 2006–2007," p. 36.

It seems to follow from their evaluation of the problems facing China that they would place a high premium on continued economic growth, and that is precisely what the data show (although answers to this question reflect a high priority for strengthing social security) (see Table 17).

Table 17
Most Important Factors for Maintaining Social Stability (unit: %)

Order / Important Conditions	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Total
1. Maintain rapid and healthy economic growth	50.9	3.9	10.7	65.2
2. Accelerate reform of social security system	23.2	34.8	8.0	66.0
3. Readjust income gap	8.9	13.4	12.5	34.8
4. Solve the *xiagang*/unemployment issue	2.7	9.8	9.8	32.3
5. Control corruption	3.6	10.7	14.3	28.6
6. Rectify social order	5.4	9.8	8.0	23.2
7. Handle land disputes well	1.8	1.8	10.7	14.3
8. Rationally guide migrant laborers	0.9	3.6	7.1	11.6
9. Maintain continuity of reform policies	0.9	3.6	4.5	9.0
10. Reduce burdens on peasants	0.0	3.6	3.6	7.2
11. Reduce the gap between regions	1.8	3.6	0.9	6.3
12. Strengthen the construction of spiritual civilization	0.0	1.8	4.5	6.3
13. Accelerate reform of SOEs	0.0	0.0	2.7	2.7
14. Other	0.0	0.0	2.7	2.7

Source: Qing Lianbin, "Party and State Leading Cadres' Basic Opinions of China's Social Circumstances, 2006–2007," p. 41.

In past years there have been questions about the importance of political reform, but the 2006 survey contained no such question (that was reported). But it did ask what tasks were most important in carrying out political reform, and, as in previous years, it seems clear that leading cadres are focused far more on what we might call administrative reform than political reform. Strengthening the supervision of public opinion, expanding the role of the "democratic" parties, and increasing the functions of the local people's congresses all get low marks. Perhaps surprisingly, so does "inner-party democracy," which the central party has been promoting at least since the 16th Party Congress in 2002 (see Table 18).

Table 18
Decisive Factors for Political Reform to Be Successful (unit: %)

Year / *Decisive Factor*	First Place 2006	First Place 2004	Second Place 2006	Second Place 2004	Total 2006	Total 2004
1. Transform government functions	38.4	24.3	10.7	12.7	49.1	36.4
2. Step up struggle against corruption	17.0	4.7	18.8	6.5	35.8	11.2
3. Manage well party-state relations	12.5	29.0	9.8	15.9	22.3	44.9
4. Strictly implement cadre term limits	4.5	3.7	17.0	6.5	21.5	10.2
5. Raise function of People's Congresses	5.4	9.3	9.8	14.0	15.2	23.3
6. Expand inner-party democracy	5.4	20.6	8.9	17.8	14.3	38.4
7. Strengthen supervision of public opinion	2.7	2.8	8.9	8.4	11.6	11.2
8. Reduce Party organs	3.6	4.7	3.6	7.5	7.2	12.2
9. Improve decision-making mechanism	6.3	0.0	8.9	10.3	4.5	10.3
10. Expand functions of democratic parties	2.7	0.9	0.9	0.9	3.6	1.8

Source: Qing Lianbin, "Party and State Leading Cadres' Basic Opinions of China's Social Circumstances, 2006–2007," p. 39.

Conclusion

There are a few, at least tentative, conclusions that this reader draws from the most recent edition of the *Blue Book*. First, the more general the question—overall situation of society, optimism about the future, trust in government (especially the central government)—the more likely respondents are to give favorable answers. It is not clear if this has more to do with the way questions are asked, the abstractness of the question, or something about the way the general public perceives broad issues. But the data suggest that as questions become more specific and closer to the respondent's world, the answers become more negative. Thus, people are pleased that their incomes are going up, but they are unhappy with health care costs. They trust the central government, but they are distrustful of local government.

Overall, the data look favorable in terms of social stability. But as soon as the questions become more concrete—health care, employment, welfare issues, local government—then the answers given are less upbeat and sometimes suggestive of

considerable conflict. Indeed, the responses to the question about expectations of future conflict (Table 8) suggest a societal pessimism in contrast with the more optimistic answers about personal welfare and trust in government. In this regard, there is a very interesting article that appeared in *Liaowang* in October 2006 that reports that there is a growing phenomenon in China of people joining protests that have nothing to do with them. For instance, there was a mass incident in Jintan City in Jiangsu Province involving the raising of funds. An investigation after the event found that 80 percent of the participants in the protest had not invested in the questionable funds. They had simply taken advantage of a public incident to vent their own frustrations. A local official in Jintan commented that these days, when a pedestrian slips and falls down on the street, instead of getting up, dusting himself off, and proceeding on his way, he is likely to get up and curse: "Those f*cking cadres; they made the road out of doufu dregs!"[19] The point was that social conflict was becoming more difficult to resolve because there was so much unchannelled anger that the smallest incident could trigger a significant societal outburst. Preserving social order, despite all the favorable signs reported above, was becoming more difficult. It seems that such attitudes are what lay behind the surprising number of people who said that they wood be willing to join a collective petition (see above, Table 10).

Notes

[1] *Ta Kung Pao*, 12 July 2005.

[2] Irene Wang, "Incidents of Social Unrest hit 87,000 in 2005," *South China Morning Post*, 20 January 2006.

[3] *Ta Kung Pao*, 28 November 2006. An article in the 27 November issue of *Liaowang,* apparently working from the same data, said that mass incidents were down 22.1 percent in the first nine months of 2006, repeating the figure of 17,900 mass incidents. But 17,900 incidents would be a decline of nearly 73 percent from the expected 65,250 incidents that would have occurred in nine months if they happened at the same rate as last year.

[4] People's Daily Online: "Statistics Chief on Current Economic Focuses," translation by Open Source Center (OSC), CPP20070131701001.

[5] Chen Xiwen, "Dangqian de nongcun jingji fazhan xingshi yu renwu" [Current situation and tasks in the development of the rural economy], *Nongye jingji wenti*, 23 January 2006, pp. 7–11.

[6] See Zhou Jiang, "2002 nian Zhongguo chengshi redian wenti diaocha" [Survey of hot issues among urban residents in 2002], *Shehui lanpishu 2003 nian: Zhongguo Shehui xingshi fenxi yu yuce* [Blue Book of Chinese society—China's social situation: Analysis and forecast, 2003], Ru Xin, Lu Xueyi, and Li Peilin, eds. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), p. 152.

[7] Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," in *Shehui lanpi shu 2006 nian: Zhongguo shehui xingshi fenxi yu yuce* [Blue book of Chinese society—China's social situation: Analysis and forecast, 2007], Ru Xin, Lu Xueyi, and Li Peilin, eds. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), p. 49.

[8] Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Survey report on Citizens' Quality of Life, 2005," *Shehui lanpi shu 2006 nian: Zhongguo shehui xingshi fenxi yu yuce* [Blue book of Chinese society—China's social situation: Analysis and forecast, 2006], Ru Xin, Lu Xueyi, and Li Peilin, eds., (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), p. 58.

[9] Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 59.

[10] Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 59.

[11] Wang Junxiu, Yang Yiyin, and Chen Wuqing, "Survey Report on China's Social Mood, 2006," p. 68.

[12] Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Survey report on Citizens' Quality of Life, 2005," p. 54.

[13] Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," p. 56.

[14] Gini indexes for the United States and Brazil are taken from the CIA *World FactBook*, available at www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields/2172.html.

[15] Li Peilin, Chen Guangjin, and Li Wei, "A Report on the Situation of Social Harmony and Stability of China in 2006," *Shehui lanpi shu 2007 nian: Zhongguo shehui xingshi fenxi yu yuce* [Blue book of Chinese society—China's social situation: Analysis and forecast, 2006], Ru Xin, Lu Xueyi, and Li Peilin, eds., (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006), p. 24.

[16] http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p60-231.pdf, and Javier Díaz-Giménez, Vincenzo Quadrini, and José-Víctor Ríos-Rull, "Dimensions of Inequality: Facts on the U.S. Distributions of Earnings, Income, and Wealth" (Minneapolis: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Quarterly Review, v. 21, n. 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 3–20, available at www.minneapolisfed.org/research/QR/QR2121.pdf.

[17] Yuan Yue and Zhang Hui, "Research Report on Citizens' Quality of Life," pp. 61–62.

[18] Li Peilin, Zhang Yi, Zhao Yandong, and Liang Dong, *Shehui Chongtu yu jieji yishi* [Social conflict and class consciousness], Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005

[19] "Shehui maodun xin jinghao" [New alarm about social contradictions], *Liaowang*, 16 October 2006, pp. 10–13.