

The
China
Quarterly



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December 2001

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Political and Social Trends in the Post-Deng Urban China: Crisis or Stability?*

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This study examines popular attitudes in urban China towards market reform and political systems, and compares the change in public opinion between Deng and the post-Deng eras. It further depicts the general political and social trends in urban China and the probable forces of change. Empirical evidence is used from 1999 and earlier urban public opinion surveys.

Crisis or Stability?

China in the post-Deng era faced a number of problems as well as positive changes. Depending on which set of facts one believes, China either was going through a crisis or achieved further stability.

On the crisis side, China suffered from economic slowdown during the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and losses incurred by flooding in 1998.¹ The shutting down of inefficient state enterprises as part of the post-Deng reform programmes resulted in huge numbers of workers being laid off,² which further contributed to a growing income gap between the beneficiaries of reform and its losers.³ Social welfare was reduced at the workplace and increasingly relied on market forces and family self-support,⁴ resulting in a decline of living standards, particularly among the disadvantaged groups and regions.⁵

Politically, the post-Deng regime suffered some setbacks in confidence. Most remarkable was a large-scale protest in spring 1999 by the *Falun gong* sect, which surrounded the Communist Party headquarters to protest for official recognition. It was the largest anti-government action since

* I would like to thank Thomas Metzger for his guidance and crucial support at each stage of this project, including developing research ideas, securing financial support, designing the questionnaire, conducting the survey and drafting this article. The Hoover Institution at the Stanford University and the Asian Studies Program at the University of Pittsburgh provided generous financial support.

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