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# Rising Central Spending on Public Security and the Dilemma Facing Grassroots Officials in China

XIE Yue

**Abstract:** In response to worsening social instability in China, among grassroots communities in the poorer central and western provinces in particular, the Chinese central government has made budgetary arrangements, since 2003, to increase investment at the grassroots level to improve the capacity of local governments to maintain social order. However, this action by central government has created a dilemma for local cadres: how to perform their duty to maintain social stability while also balancing a heavy fiscal burden caused in part by the receipt of insufficient additional budgetary subsidies from higher government. This paper is an account of and an analysis of how local cadres in China perform their official duties when faced with this dilemma.

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**Keywords:** China, *weiven*, expenditure for public security, performing official duties, coercive capacity

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## Introduction

China's rapid economic growth in recent decades has put it in the global spotlight, and yet this growth has also been troubled by an accompanying rise in the number of economic and social grievances. In some cases, aggrieved citizens are resorting to criminal action and protests against local governments and the state. These often violent protests are seen by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to be harmful not only to economic growth but also to its political rule. Driven by this perception, the Party has ceaselessly strengthened domestic coercive institutions to make *weiwen* (维稳, preserving stability) a priority, resulting in the need for greater expenditure on maintaining security.

Prior to 2003, financial autonomy from the central government induced local governments to provide as little expenditure for public security as possible. As a result, policing agencies at the grassroots level, in particular those in the poorer areas, were short of budget to deal with the maintenance of normal social order. To make things worse, this budgetary shortage often led to a greater number of disputes between local governments and citizens as the security apparatuses of local governments began to levy illegal charges or fines on citizens to supplement their finances and meet expenditure.

This situation changed, however, in 2003, when funding reform was implemented. By adjusting the central-local proportion of fiscal share and making more money available to local governments, the primary goal of the reform was to increase the amount of money spent on public security in local communities and to enhance local governments' coercive capacity, especially in the central and western areas. In fact, total expenditure on domestic public security increased so sharply in 2011 that it surpassed the national defence budget (The State Statistics Bureau, 2011). This increase was meant to guarantee the availability of funds to public security agencies and departments in poorer areas.

Surprisingly, however, this rapid rise in spending on stability preservation does not seem to have deterred growth in the number of criminal cases and protests. For instance, the courts nationwide dealt with 2,015,647 criminal cases in 1987. This figure reached 5,712,669 and 6,982,594 in 1996 and 2008, respectively, representing a more than two-fold increase in 20 years (Editorial Board of Law Yearbook of China). Furthermore, the incidence of collective protests, which the regime considers more challenging to its legitimacy than general criminal activities, also remained on the rise. The number of "mass incidents" (群体性事件,

*quntixing shijian*) involving 15 or more participants increased from 8,700 in 1993 to 127,000 in 2008, representing a more than 10-fold increase (Shirk 2007: 57; Jacob 2009).

Specialists in Chinese politics have made a significant contribution to the understanding of the issues of public security in China. For instance, Tanner pays attention not only to the central government's changes of strategy in dealing with collective protests (Tanner 2006), but also to the inadequacies in reforming the personnel system within public security (Tanner and Green 2007). From the perspective of history, Dutton reveals how politics shape policing in China (Dutton 2005), while Wong has provided a convincing account of the changing structure and functions of the policing system in China (Wong 2012). However, current research has not provided an explanation for the phenomenon of rising public security expenditure and growing disorder. This paper is an attempt to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the ongoing reform process and structural elements within the Chinese fiscal system. Available documents and statistics are supplemented by data generated through interviews and case studies.

A comparative perspective is significant, as there is a huge disparity between the wealthier eastern coastal regions of China and the poorer central and western inland areas (Tao, Liu and Zhang 2003). In this paper, Guangdong and Jiangsu, two of the five richest provinces, are taken as examples of the wealthier areas, while Qinghai and Ningxia, two of the five poorest provinces, are taken as representatives of the poorer areas.

## The Background of Financial Reform in Public Security

Decentralisation to shift the locus of economic decision-making to lower-level agencies was part of market-oriented reform in China during the 1980s (Lieberthal 1995: 315). Yet decentralisation did not take place only in the sphere of the economy, but also in other fields, such as personnel. As a result of decentralisation, the principle-agency relationship between the centre and the local in the 1990s was delineated as “the state of the state” (Baum and Shevchenko 1999: 333–362) or “fragmented authoritarianism” (Lieberthal 1992: 1–30) and “federalism, Chinese style” (Montinola, Qian and Weingast 1996: 50–81), even though the process might

actually have strengthened the centre's control over its agencies (Yang 2004).

Just as in economic decentralisation, local agencies have gained more autonomy in political power sharing. They are empowered to administer all law-and-order sub-agencies, including bureaus of public security (公安局, *gong'anju*), the people's procuratorates (人民检察院, *renmin jianchayuan*), the people's courts (人民法院, *renmin fayuan*) and bureaus of legal affairs (司法局, *sifaju*). In particular, the CCP's branches at the levels of province, prefecture and county take full control in appointing all cadres within these coercive departments. Meanwhile, at each level of the Party's branches, a sub-division known as the Commission of Politics and Law of the CCP (政法委, *zhengfawei*, CPL for short hereafter) has been set up exclusively to take charge of manipulating and monitoring all the coercive departments within its jurisdiction.

The autonomy gained by local agencies from the central government, however, has not led to greater independence. Instead, these local agencies have been made more dependent upon the financial and political resources of the local Party organisation and government. For example, the heads of the local police, courts and procuratorates are selected by the local Party committee and judicial department, and endorsed by local people's congresses through a single candidate "election". The principle and practice are summed up as "unified leadership with graded management" (统一领导, 分级管理, *tongyi lingdao, fenji guanli*) and "combining vertical and local leadership, with local leadership as the mainstay" (条块结合, 以块为主, *tiaokuai jiehe, yikuai weizhu*). These arrangements aim to create much more powerful incentives for the local legal apparatus to obey their local Party and government "principals" rather than their superior public security "principals" or the central leadership (Tanner and Green 2007).

The economic control of local governments over coercive agencies has been gradually established through the process of the decentralisation of the fiscal system, as central and higher-level government transferred primary budgetary support from coercive to lower-level local governments. In 1996, for example, one provincial-level government spent 40 million CNY on public security and only received an additional one million CNY from central-level public security organs (Tanner and Green 2007). In the 1980s and 1990s, the central government, for the purpose of institutionalising the centre-local fiscal relationship, formulated the core principle of public security financial policy as "using one's

own income to cover one's own expenditure" (自收自支, 收支挂钩, *zìshōu zìzhī, shōuzhī guāgōu*). With the exception of employees' salaries, which were paid for entirely through governmental finance provided at a corresponding level, all other costs were met depending on local governments' own ability to raise the funds through various means, such as levying charges and fines. In fact, in those poorer provinces in the central and western areas, local governments could not even ensure the provision of full salaries for their coercive departments. Thus, the fiscal decentralisation system pushed local coercive agencies to increase their revenue-raising power.

Governments at both central and local levels actually encouraged local coercive agencies to maximise revenue-raising activities that depended on extracting fines and payments from citizens. In response, local police and other law-and-order departments across China made use of their powers to profit as much as possible from fines and fees. In 1996, the budget outlay for the bureaus of public security in Guangdong province was only 30 per cent of their annual spending (Zhang 2000). In underdeveloped provinces like Qinghai and Ningxia, county-level bureaus of public security received only 500 CNY from their governmental budget for each employee on average, and 40 per cent of annual expenditure was financed by fines in the 1990s (Mo 2004). Local courts, likewise, depended mainly on charges to meet the expenditure shortfall. In 1997, local courts nationwide spent 4.7 billion CNY on trial cases, of which fees and charges amounted to 3.91 billion CNY, while government finance accounted for only 0.79 billion CNY. In 1996 and 1997, local procuratorates received 9.88 billion CNY from the fiscal budget, whereas actual expenditure amounted to 18.76 billion CNY; in other words, 47.3 per cent of the expenditure was covered through charges and fees (Zhang 2000). As a typical case, in 2004, the Longhui County Court of Hunan province spent 6.48 million CNY, of which 4.39 million CNY (67.7 per cent) came from charges (Li 2008).

Even though coercive departments resorted to levying as many fines and charges as possible, the sharp reduction in central government financial support towards local governments' share of local public security costs led to an acute shortfall, especially in the poorer western regions. Complete data nationwide is unavailable, but the deficit was evidenced in some provinces. In Guangdong, one of the most developed provinces, the bureaus of public security suffered an estimated 30 per cent shortfall in funding needs in 1996, while the bureaus of public security of Cheng-

du, the capital city of Sichuan province in the poorer southwest, faced a shortfall of 60 per cent of funding in the same year (Zhang 2000). In 1996, prefecture- and county-level courts in north-western Shanxi province spent 80.26 million CNY on trials and court cases, of this 41.98 million was paid for through charges on members of the public using the courts, while only 4.98 million came from the central government, resulting in a deficit of 33.3 million CNY in that year (Zhang 2000). The most extreme cases were seen in the most underdeveloped areas, where the unreliability of some local governments' revenues meant that they could only assign 400 CNY a month to their bureau of public security for the purpose of investigating criminal cases (Mo 2004).

As a result of the decentralisation reforms, serious shortages of funding and a deepening dependence upon local governments vastly impeded coercive departments, particularly in the poorer central and western regions, from maintaining social order efficiently. Firstly, the revenue shortage prevented coercive departments from conducting regular operations. One report on the issue lamented:

In the underdeveloped provinces, some county-level bureaus of public security often have their power, telephone service and water cut off because of non-payment, investigations are often suspended indefinitely; nobody in charge pursues even known fugitives, and police facilities remain simple and crude (Mo 2004).

In Ningxia, a poor and arid province in the north-western region, it was reported in 1998 that 66 per cent of local police stations had no vehicles and 31 per cent had no office buildings, and 80 per cent of detention houses lacked prison vans (Zhu 1998).

Secondly, the budget shortfalls and distorted revenue-raising incentives encouraged the use of unlawful fines and charges by police and other law-and-order enforcement officials; activity which frequently led to disputes between them and the local residents. In other words, the departments originally charged with maintaining social order and handling disputes often became the cause of increased public disorder. To increase revenues through increased fines and charges, the police often preferred to only investigate cases that might bring in greater profit; in addition, the police often tended to make these profits by resorting to outright illegal and arbitrary fines that went beyond officially mandated limits (Mo 2004).

Thirdly, lower-level coercive departments across China not only undertook their normal function of handling disputes and maintaining public

security, but they also took on a large number of extra missions. Subject to the policy preferences and whims of local governments, local officials could mobilise the coercive departments within their control to help investors to repress, for instance, any opponents of commercial developments that involved taking over land and demolishing houses (Pan and Pan 2007). In the countryside during the 1990s, policemen were frequently assigned to the job of implementing governmental directives, such as collecting grain, fines and debts (Bernstein 2000). As early as 1992, based on a survey of 75 county-level bureaus of public security, it was found that, on average, 10 to 15 per cent of the work of local policemen related to non-policing duties that were assigned by local leaders (Wang 1993: 99). Although several recent documents have officially forbidden such use of security forces and have explicitly authorised local police leaders to defy local leadership and refuse to undertake such tasks, the incentives for police officers to obey are often overwhelming (Tanner and Green 2007).

In the end, however, the total ineffectiveness of local governments in the task of *weiwen* (preserving stability) and the resulting increased disorder ultimately made the CCP realise that it had to do something to change the situation, because, after all, political stability is essential to the one-Party regime. Thus, the focus of the ensuing reform centred on the fiscal system, rather than on legal and political changes. Specifically, the reforms began with an increase in central government funding for public security agencies at the grassroots level, particularly in underdeveloped provinces. The project began with the bureaus of public security in 2003, and then spread out to include other law-and-order departments.

In November 2003, the Twentieth National Public Security Work Conference (第二十次全国公安会议, *Di ershi ci quanguo gongan huiyi*) decided to readjust the finance system that had been in place for over a decade. One decision made at the meeting, the Decision of the CCP Central Committee on Strengthening and Improving the Work of Public Security (关于进一步加强改进公安工作的决定, *guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang gaijin gong'an gongzuo de jue ding*) revised the original principle of “using one’s own income to cover one’s own expenditure” into that of “decoupling income and expenditure, and funding with fully-ensured allocations” (收支脱钩, 全额保障, *shouzhi tuogou, quan'e baozhang*) (The General Office of the CCP Central Committee 2003). The expectation of the policy-makers was that the new decision by the bureaus of public security to rely upon governmental budget allocation would help them to ease the



expenditure shortage so that they would no longer seek to generate their own income by collecting fines and charges.

Based on this decision, part of the increased expenditure was expected to come from multiple sources, including county- and higher-level government. As a consequence, county-level governments were required by the centre to provide sufficient funding to coercive departments, rather than forcing coercive departments to collect fines and charges from the public to cover their expenditure. At the same time, the central and provincial governments also increased their transfer of funding to county-level coercive departments. The decision, nevertheless, regulated that those funds transferred from higher levels of government could be used only to improve security facilities through the construction of office buildings, the purchase of vehicles, the upgrading of firearms and other measures, while other expenses such as the costs of case investigation were left the full responsibility of the county-level governments.

Similar reforms to the courts and procuratorates were carried out in the following three years. The blueprint was presented in two documents, one for legal system reform issued in December 2004 and the other for expenditure reform within courts and procuratorates enacted in May 2006. The Communist Party leadership has also mandated huge increases in spending for county-level courts and procuratorates. On the one hand, county-level governments are required to set the higher spending standards for all departments; and on the other hand, downward transfers of funds from central, provincial and prefectural governments are to increase significantly.

For the leaders in Beijing, this ongoing reform within the nation's coercive departments has, in the first instance, aimed at dramatically reducing the extent of the expenditure shortfalls within grassroots coercive departments in the poorer areas of central and western China, which were the location of more serious ethnic conflicts. For example, between June 2006 and August 2010, there were 53 large-scale protests in China with over 5,000 people, according to New York-based NGO Human Rights in China, of which 39 occurred in the poorer provinces, compared to 14 in the more developed areas. As a result, coercive departments in central and western China received a greater amount of funding from higher-level government than their wealthier counterparts in more developed areas, accounting for 50 per cent to 90 per cent of their total budgets.

## Expenditure Growth under the Reform

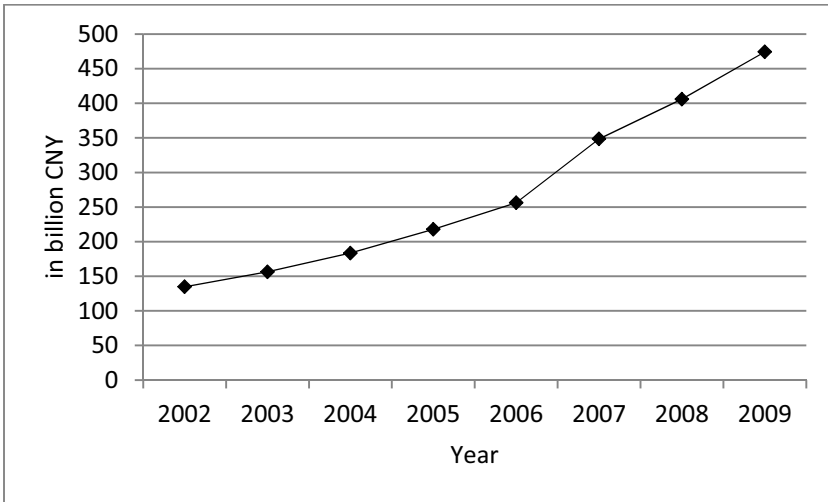
Prior to 2008, the data on domestic security spending was presented in two sub-items in *The Yearbook of Statistics in China*: the expenditure of the bureaus of public security, courts and procuratorates under the leadership of the Central Politics and Law Commission, CPLC (公检法司开支, *gongjian fasi kaizhi*); and the expenditure of the People's Armed Police, PAP (武警开支, *wujing kaizhi*). Since 2008, both sub-items have been merged under “domestic security” (公共安全, *gonggong anquan*). In this paper, total public security expenditure is based on the figures of both sub-items before 2008. As a rule, the central government has contributed between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of expenditure, leaving the rest on the shoulders of the local governments.

As well as the figures shown in the annual statistics, there is also special funding for public security, popularly known as “funding for *weiben*” (维稳基金, *weiben jijin*), which is allocated to grassroots government. This type of funding is usually used to placate the aggrieved in unjust cases or to reward those who are viewed as contributing to the task of preserving stability or *weiben*, for instance the informants, also known as “the ears and the eyes” (耳目, *ermu*) of the state, the mediators (调解员, *tiaojieyuan*), and the members of security committee groups in local communities (Xie 2011). In 2009, for example, the middle-level courts in Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi province, established a special fund for stability maintenance in order to mollify workers who been made redundant during the process of enterprise bankruptcy. By making compensation available to those who had lost their jobs, the courts were hoping to prevent any possible instability caused by the lay-offs (Guo 2009). However, compared with the domestic security expenditure mentioned in *The Yearbook* previously, the amount of *weiben jijin* made available to grassroots government is too trivial to be included in the following data analysis.

Based on the available data at the national level since 2002, a rapid increase in spending on public security during the period 2002 to 2009 is shown in Figures 1 and 2. In 2002, domestic security spending was 134.8 billion CNY, but four years later it had almost doubled to 256.2 billion CNY (The State Statistics Bureau 2003 and 2007). The rate of growth slowed a little between 2007 and 2009, but domestic security spending in 2009 was still 36 per cent more than that in 2007 (The State Statistics Bureau 2008, 2010). Figure 2 breaks down domestic security expenditure

by provincial-level government. During the period 1995 to 2009, the allocation of funding for domestic security increased more than tenfold from 28 billion CNY in 1995 to 390 billion CNY by 2009 (The State Statistics Bureau 1996 and 2010).

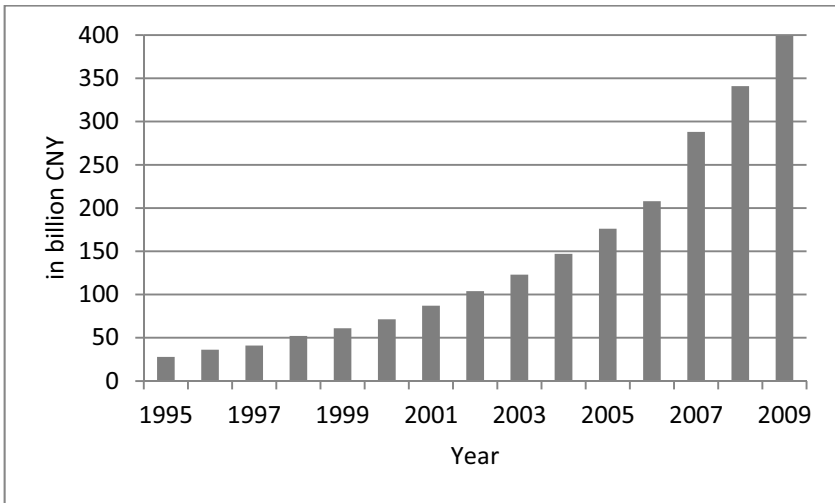
Figure 1: Total Public Security Expenditure in China, 2002–2009



Source: The State Statistics Bureau 2003–2010.

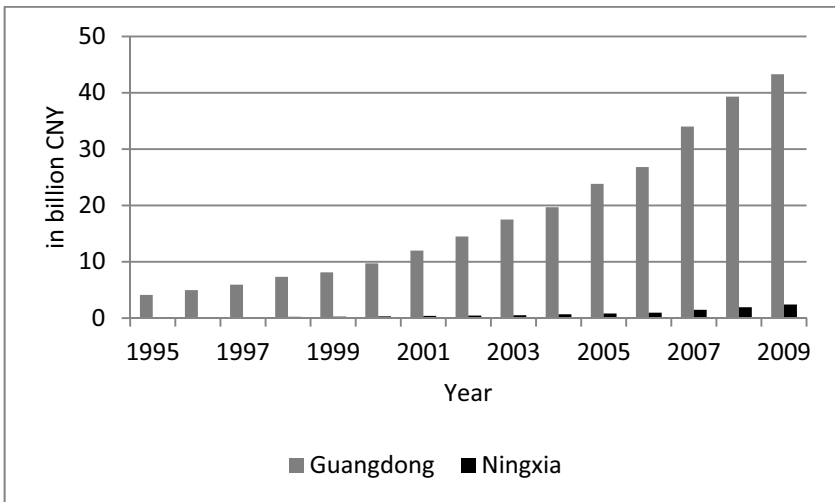
The increase in public security expenditure can be further revealed by looking at spending in individual provinces. Guangdong province in the south and Ningxia province in the west are the provincial-level governments that spent most and the least, respectively, on domestic security. Although there is a huge gap in the absolute amounts of security spending between Guangdong and Ningxia, Figure 3 shows that, since the mid-1990s, spending on domestic security in both places has consistently risen year upon year. In 1995, the law-and-order departments in Guangdong received 4.2 billion CNY, and this amount grew to 43.3 billion CNY 14 years later in 2009, a more than tenfold rise. In Ningxia, the domestic security budget in 1995 was 1.1 billion, and by 2009, it had reached 24.17 billion, representing a 24-fold increase (The State Statistics Bureau 1996 and 2010).

Figure 2: The Total Expenditure of Public Security in Locals, 1995–2009



Source: The State Statistics Bureau 1996–2010.

Figure 3: A Comparison of Public Security Expenditure in Guangdong and Ningxia Provinces, 1995–2009



Source: The State Statistics Bureau 1996–2010.

In recent years, spending growth on domestic security has been underwritten by increasing allocations from the central government, which has increased its payments to county-level departments. From 2009 to 2011, such transfers from the central government grew from 44.2 billion CNY to 57.4 billion CNY in 2010 and 59.3 billion CNY in 2011 (Xie Xuren 2011). The transfer payments to county-level departments under the CPLC are made up of not only the central budget, but also an equivalent amount from the provincial budget, as instructed under the CCP's regulation: Suggestions for the Issue of Deepening Legal System Reform (中共中央关于深化司法体制改革的建议, *zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shenhua sifa tizhi gaige de jianyi*). As stated earlier, most of the funds transferred from the central government were allocated to counties in the central and western provinces and regions. In 2009, 33.3 billion CNY of the total 44.2 billion CNY allocation was distributed to the western provinces and regions (Qian 2009). Table 1 shows, for example, that in E'min County in Xinjiang province in the far northwest, transfer payments from the central and regional government to law-enforcement agencies rocketed by 283 per cent, between 2006 and 2009 (Wang 2010).

Table 1: The Transfer Payments and Growth of the Expenditure for Departments of the DPL in E'min County, 2006–2010 (in CNY)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Transfers	2,505,900	3,870,000	4,349,000	9,610,000	9,010,000
Per staff member	15,500	23,300	25,100	41,400	31,300

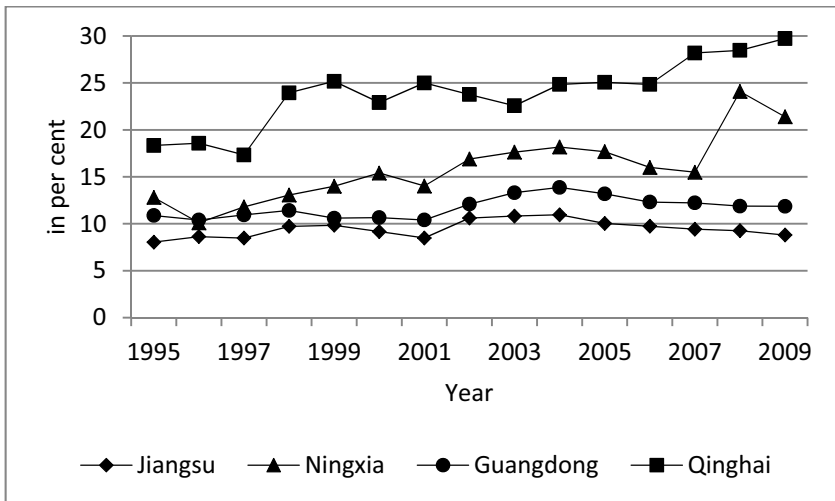
Source: Author's own compilation.

Since the reforms to increase domestic security budgetary allocations, the funds transferred either from higher-level government or appropriated from county-level government have increased at a much higher rate for law-enforcement agencies than for any other arm of the government. Generally, the share of growth in revenues enjoyed by domestic security agencies is several times as much as that of other administrative departments. In Jin An District of Lu'an City in Anhui province, for example, the budget program for 2011 set the budget for various departments as follows: 18,000 CNY per head for both court and procuratorate staff, 15,000 CNY per head for bureau of legal affairs staff, 3,000 CNY per head for all departments of the Party Committee (党委, *dangwei*), the People's Congress (人大, *renda*) and the Chinese People's Political Con-

sultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议, *Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi* or 政协, *zhengxie*, for short), and only 2,000 CNY per head for other administrative departments. In E'min County, likewise, budget allocations for the law-and-order agencies under the CPLC on average went up from 15,500 CNY per staff member in 2006 to 41,400 CNY in 2009 (Wang 2010).

The reform-driven increase in expenditure on security maintenance is also striking when compared with overall fiscal revenue growth, as shown in Figure 4. Within Figure 4, Guangdong and Jiangsu provinces are used to represent the top-spending provinces for domestic security, while data from Ningxia and Qinghai provinces is used to show the lowest levels spending. In all provinces, regardless of wealth, however, the share of domestic security spending as a proportion of fiscal revenues has risen continually over the past 14 years. In Jiangsu and Ningxia provinces, the proportion grew from 8.04 per cent and 12.81 per cent, respectively, in 1995 to 8.8 per cent and 21.4 per cent, respectively, in 2009. In Guangdong and Qinghai provinces, the proportion rose from 10.9 per cent and 18.3 per cent, respectively, in 1995 to 11.8 per cent and 29.7 per cent, respectively, in 2009 (The State Statistics Bureau 1996, 2010).

Figure 4: Ratios of Expenditure for Security vs. Fiscal Income among Guangdong, Jiangsu, Qinghai and Ningxia, 1995–2009

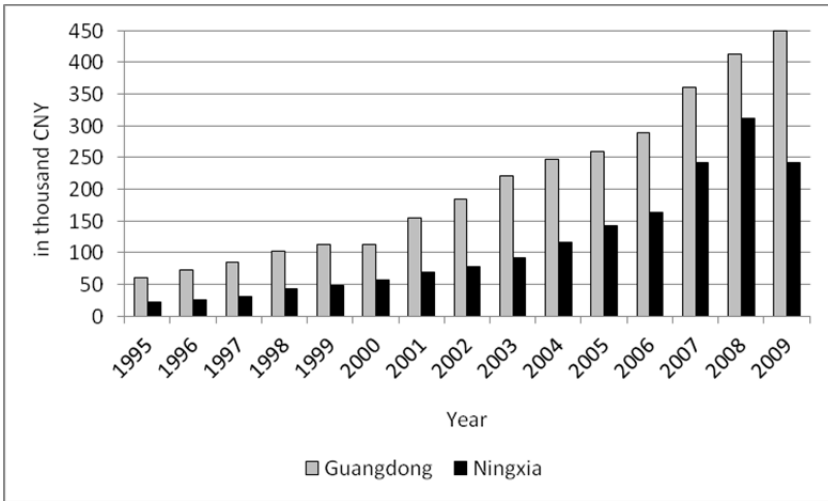


Source: The State Statistics Bureau 1996–2010.

## The Gap between the East and the Mid-West of China

To a large extent, however, the level of economic development in a particular region determines how much that area will invest in domestic security. Usually, the more wealthy a province or region is, the more it spends on domestic security, and vice versa. Figure 3 shows the regional gap between wealthy Guangdong and its poor cousin, Ningxia. In 1995, the total amount that Guangdong spent on domestic security was 41.6 billion CNY, or more than 37 times more than the 1.1 billion CNY that Ningxia province spent (The State Statistics Bureau 1996).

Figure 5: The Expenditure Per Capita for Public Security in Guangdong and Ningxia, 1995–2009



Source: The State Statistics Bureau 1996–2010.

The gap in domestic security expenditure between the relatively prosperous eastern coastal regions and the poorer provinces and areas of central and western China is, however, more accurately illustrated by examining spending per head of population. Figure 5 compares the per capita domestic security expenditure in Guangdong and Ningxia provinces. In 1995, the domestic security expenditure per capita in Ningxia was just 21.3 CNY, compared to Guangdong’s almost three times higher spend-

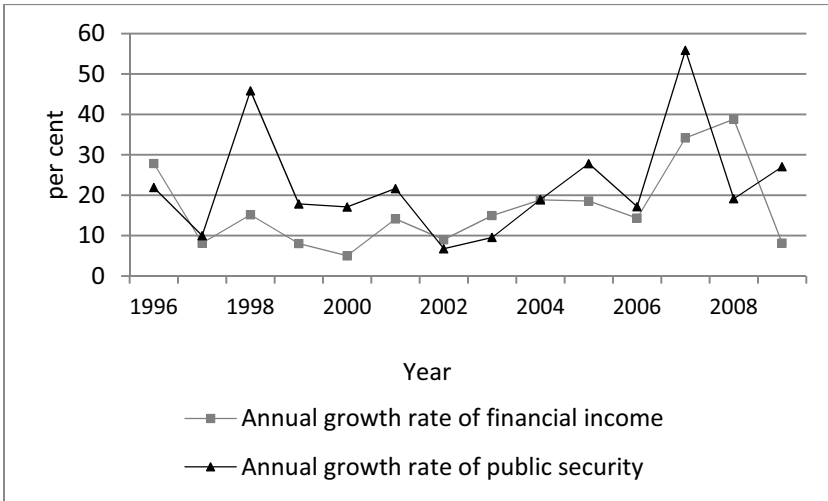
ing rate of 60.5 CNY per permanent resident. By 2003, the average per capita expenditure on domestic security had increased to 220 CNY in Guangdong compared to 91 CNY in Ningxia, and in 2009 the corresponding figures had grown to 449 CNY and 242 CNY for each province, respectively. In other words, through the reforms to domestic security budgets, the amount spent per capita on domestic security rose in both these two representative areas, while the per capita gap between the two remained at almost 2: 1 or higher, though the disparity was smaller after the reforms (The State Statistics Bureau 1996, 2004, 2010).

The gap in expenditure between developed and underdeveloped areas can also be examined by comparing how much revenue was spent on domestic security. Relative to provinces in developed areas, the governments in poorer regions have been forced to spend much more of their revenues on maintaining security. Figure 4 illustrates this point. In Ningxia and Qinghai provinces, over the years 1995 to 2009, the percentage of government revenues spent on domestic security was always higher than that of their wealthier counterparts, Jiangsu and Guangdong provinces. In 1995, 2003 and 2009, for example, Ningxia allocated 12.8 per cent, 17.6 per cent and 21.4 per cent of its budget, respectively, to domestic security, while in Jiangsu the percentages were 8.0 per cent, 10.8 per cent and 8.8 per cent, respectively, for the same three years. Qinghai was an extreme case. In the same three years, its domestic security spending accounted for 18.3 per cent, 22.6 per cent and 29.7 per cent of total budget outlays, respectively (The State Statistics Bureau 1996, 2004, 2010). Thus, the data shows that the financial burden of rising domestic security spending has in fact grown heavier for less developed provinces and regions.

This remains the case even when the rising fiscal income in those poorer provinces and regions is taken into account. Taking north-western Gansu province as an example, Figure 6 illustrates that from 1996 to 2009 there were eight years when the annual rate of increase for expenditure on domestic security was higher than the total revenue growth rate. In 1998 and 2009, for example, the annual growth rates for expenditure on public security were 45.9 per cent and 27.1 per cent, respectively, while the corresponding annual growth rates for fiscal revenues were 15.2 per cent and 8.2 per cent, respectively. It is evident then that the demands for increased spending on *weimen* or preserving stability have gone beyond the financial capacity of some underdeveloped areas in particular (The State Statistics Bureau 1998, 2010).



Figure 6: Annual Growth Rates of Security Expenditure and Fiscal Revenue in Gansu Province, 1996–2009



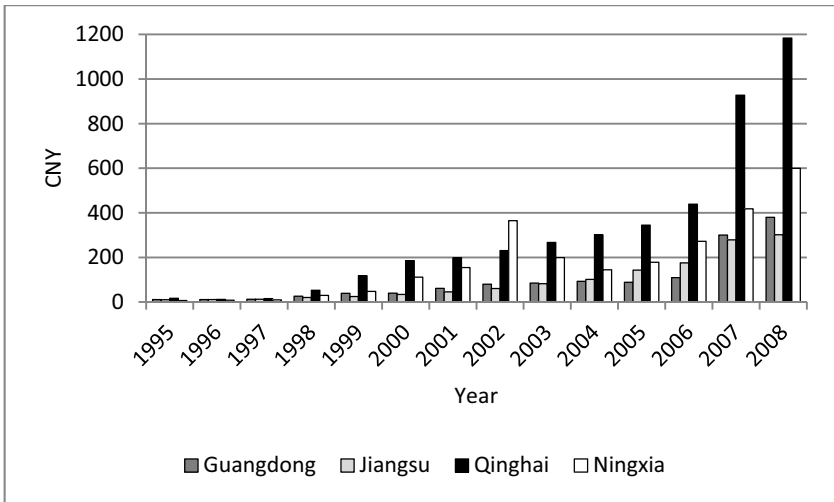
Source: The State Statistics Bureau 1996–2010.

In authoritarian states, such as China, government spending on social welfare is not generally viewed as a basic entitlement for citizens, but rather as one of the government’s measures to reduce potential political instability (Xie 2008). A comparison of spending on social welfare through various types of pensions and compensation for the unemployed could also help to further our understanding of the expenditure gap between developed and underdeveloped areas. Overall, an analysis of social welfare spending reveals that the cost per capita in the poorer areas was higher than that in the richer areas and thus, in the poorer areas, the share of social welfare outlay as a proportion of government revenues was much higher than in the relatively wealthy provinces.

Figure 7 demonstrates a somewhat confusing story with regard to Qinghai and Ningxia provinces, which belong to the poorer areas, but which have been maintaining a much higher per capita social welfare expenditure than wealthier provinces like Guangdong and Jiangsu. Moreover, just as under the financial reforms for public security, the gap between the poorer and richer provinces has widened year on year. Back in 1995, social welfare spending by Qinghai and Ningxia provinces was almost the same as that of Guangdong and Jiangsu. But by 1998, the former group’s social welfare spending had exceeded the latter. In that

year, Qinghai and Ningxia spent 52.4 CNY and 29.7 CNY on social welfare, respectively, while Guangdong and Jiangsu spent 25.8 CNY and 19.8 CNY, respectively. The gap became even wider one decade later. In 2008, the welfare expenditure in the two poorer provinces rose to 1,183.5 CNY and 599.4 CNY, respectively, while in the two richer provinces, it increased to 380.1 CNY and 301.5 CNY, respectively (The State Statistics Bureau 1996, 1999, 2009).

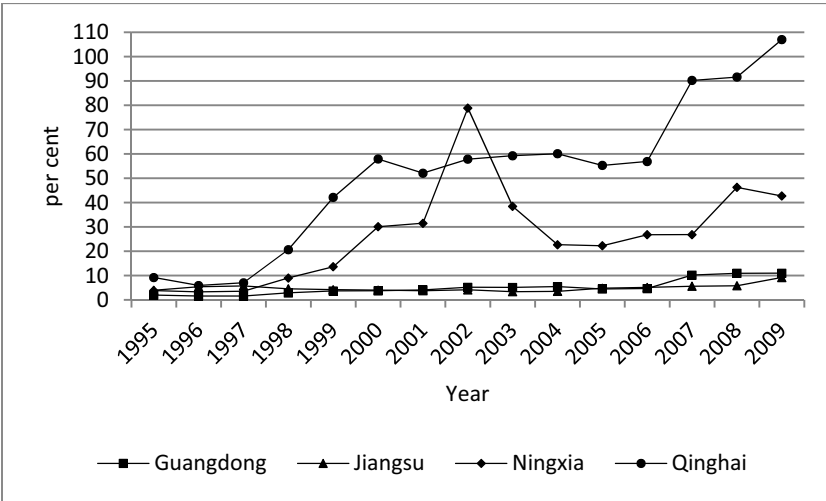
Figure 7: The Expenditure Per Capita of Social Welfare in Guangdong, Jiangsu, Qinghai and Ningxia, 1995–2008



Source: The State Statistics Bureau 1996–2009.

In the context of reduced fiscal income, higher social welfare spending meant that a larger amount of government revenue was being used as a means for reducing various kinds of pressure, including those possibly derived from social discontent. Figure 8 clearly shows that in the under-developed areas of Ningxia and Qinghai, the share of social welfare outlay as a proportion of government revenues has been much higher than in the relatively wealthy provinces of Guangdong and Jiangsu. In the north-western province of Qinghai, for example, in 2007, 2008 and 2009, social welfare outlay as a proportion of revenue reached a startling 90.3 per cent, 91.61 per cent and then 107.0 per cent (The State Statistics Bureau 2008, 2009, 2010).

Figure 8: Percentages of Expenditure for Social Welfare vs. Financial Income in Guangdong, Jiangsu, Qinghai and Ningxia, 1995–2008



Source: The State Statistics Bureau 1996–2010.

It is necessary to emphasise that, even considering the increase in the amount of funding transferred from central government for domestic security and social welfare purposes, it is still hard to bridge the gap between the poorer and the richer provinces. Public security financial reform is not dedicated to altering the structure of expenditure. The transfer payments from the central government are specified for fixed projects while employees’ salaries, the major component of domestic security costs, are the full responsibility of local governments. Similarly, the transfer payments from central government for social welfare are far less than local governments’ actual expenditure in that area. In 2003, for example, *The Yearbook of Statistics in China* (2004) released figures that revealed that the transfer payments for social welfare by the central government amounted to 0.5 billion CNY, whereas local governments actually spent 49.4 billion CNY on social welfare. Taking this into account, it may be concluded that public security financial reform has not helped much to narrow the gap. On the contrary, the situation has been exacerbated.

## So Why Has Increased Expenditure Failed to Improve Public Order?

There are a multitude of benchmarks to measure how effective the reform has been (Zhao 2010); however, the most vital issue here is whether or not the reform has enhanced the capacity of local governments to deal with the growing domestic public security expenditure. The analysis of the available data in the previous sections has reasonably illustrated that the expenditure goes far beyond the financial capacity of local governments, particularly in undeveloped areas. At least in the short run, this policy has been less effective in the poorer areas than in the richer ones.

Another critical benchmark for assessing the reform is the capacity of coercive departments to reduce crimes, handle disputes and manage social disorder. The CCP’s assumption about the reform was that increased expenditure in the area of public security should lead to less crime and less social instability; however, the available data has demonstrated that the increased expenditure has a very ambiguous or weak causal connection with the stable social order.

Taking Ningxia as an example, in Table 2, the number of civil and criminal cases accepted by the courts at all levels in Ningxia province in 2000 were 4,303 and 35,411, respectively, where “criminal cases” involved serious physical harm or damage to property, and “civil cases” included all other cases where the law had been broken; however, in 2009, when the reform was well underway, they had risen to 5,442 and 98,291, respectively.

**Table 2: Numbers of Criminal and Crime Cases Accepted on Court in Ningxia during 2000s**

	2000	2002	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Criminal cases	4,303	4,452	4,815	4,528	4,420	5,110	5,442
Crime cases	35,411	52,000	38,583	39,440	68,256	91,544	98,291

Note: “Criminal cases” are those involved in serious physical and property. “Crime case” includes all categories of suits at court.

Source: *The Yearbook of Ningxia*, 2001, 2003, 2006–2010, Yinchuan: The Chronicle Press (before 2009) and The People’s Press of Ningxia (in 2010).

Furthermore, the data from Ningxia province has also revealed a decline in the power of the courts. Table 3 shows that, since 2000, the courts in Ningxia have been accepting an increasing number of appeals and retrials, implying a gradual erosion of judicial authority. By contrast, however, the rate of enforcement in these retrials has been declining, which indicates that judicial capacity has been diminishing year on year. Before the financial reform, in 2000, the courts accepted 16,584 appeals or retrial cases involving plaintiffs who disputed a previous judicial outcome. Of these, 86.12 per cent were enforced by the courts. By 2008, the number of retrial cases had risen to 31,682, while the rate of enforcement decreased to 74.1 per cent (*The Yearbook of Ningxia* 2001-2003, 2006, 2009).

**Table 3: Numbers of Accepted Cases Appealing for Enforcement and Enforcement Ratios by Courts in Ningxia during 2000s**

	2000	2001	2002	2005	2006	2008
Accepted cases	16,584	17,001	16,600	16226	18,872	31,682
Enforcement ratio (in %)	86.12	85.88	82.56	78.04	79.58	74.10

Source: *The Yearbook of Ningxia*, 2001–2003, 2006–2007 and 2009.

On the basis of the reliable data given above, the question remains: what factors can reasonably explain why increased legal enforcement expenditure has failed to improve social order? The first factor is that the bulk of the increased expenditure went on personnel costs due to a rapid expansion in the number of staff in formal and informal police forces. Since the end of the 1980s, the Ministry of Public Security, China’s principal police and security authority, has been required to incorporate an increasingly diverse range of additional functions, protection of economic growth for instance (Wong 2009: 164–165). These added duties have generated the need to recruit more members of staff. For instance, China’s professional police force, including the people’s police (民警, *minjing*) within the public security bureaus, the judicial police (法警, *fajing*) within the courts and procuratorates, and the people’s armed police (武警, *wujing*), has increased in size over the years. In 1988, there were only 0.769 million members of the professional police service, but by 2008, the number had reached 2 million, representing an almost three-fold increase in 20 years (Editorial Board of Law Yearbook of China 1989, 2009; Xie and Yu 2008: 197–206). In 2009, 86 per cent of the profes-

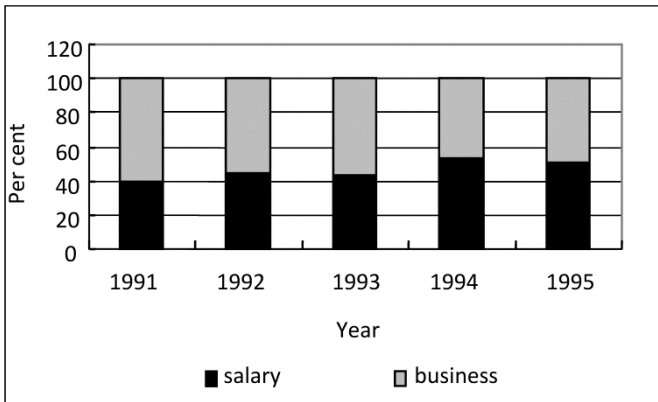
sional police force was employed in public security bureaus, with the remaining 14 per cent being employed in other departments (Wong 2009: 158). The people's armed police force, which has its origins as a branch of the military but was formally established in 1982, had reached 1.2 million strong by September 2006 or almost half the size of the military (Lü 2006).

In the context of decentralisation, the central government has been trying to control the number of local government staff by planning and distributing overall personnel quotas (编制, *bianzhi*); meanwhile, it has mandated that any moves to newly establish or resume internal units of public security must receive approval from the county-level government and higher-level coercive departments. The regulations, however, have not been enforced well at the county level (Tanner and Green 2007). The research by Tanner and Green shows that the components of the increased police staff numbers are extremely complicated, because they are hired under different titles. For example, the informal police forces include the roles of "contract police" (合同警, *hetongjing*) and "auxiliary police" (辅警, *fujing*) which are not subject to limitation by official personnel quotas. When the Ministry of Public Security endorsed local governments to establish "contract police" using local funds, the number of contract police had ballooned to over 100,000 nationwide by 1990 (Tanner and Green 2007). At present, as an alternative means of preventing contract police from abusing their power due to lack of training, local governments also recruit a large number of "assistant police" (协警, *xiejing*), another type of informal police personnel that is also not subject to the quota system. By 2009, altogether 1.5 million "assistant police" or "auxiliary police" had been hired in public security bureaus nationwide (Zhu, Du and Zhang 2009: 27–35). Moreover, in some places, the number of assistant and auxiliary police exceeded that of their professional counterparts, to a ratio of 3: 1 or even as high as 10: 1 (Yang 2010: 75–79). As for informal police, their salaries and welfare are paid for either through local government budget or by coercive departments.

Extensive recruitment by the coercive departments has meant that staff salary costs account for a large share of domestic security spending, as mentioned earlier. Figure 9 shows that between 1991 and 1995 nearly half of the total expenditure for public security, courts and other bodies under the CPLC went on salaries. There is no official data on spending patterns since 1995, but this pattern is unlikely to have changed much, particular in inland provinces and regions. In 2008, for example, of the

94.3 million CNY spent by courts in Bijie in south-western Guizhou province, 37.4 million CNY, or 39.6 per cent, went on salaries and welfare for employees. The following year, salaries as a share of total spending by courts in Bijie had risen to 44.0 per cent (Zhou 2010).

Figure 9: The Expenditure Structure of the CPL, 1995–2008



Source: The Ministry of Finance 1999: 167.

A second factor that complicates the scene is that the transfer payments from the central government to domestic security agencies have not been large enough to overcome the resulting fiscal burdens. Indeed, the conditions attached to the transfers have in some ways aggravated the fiscal shortfalls facing local governments. For local governments in poorer areas, the central government has set rules and targets to determine how much these governments should receive as transfers. However, as a result of these funding conditions, very few law-and-order agencies have been able to obtain sufficient transfers to cover the costs of dealing with cases and constructing facilities. In fact, most receive less than 50 per cent of their outlay in these categories from top-down transfers.

For instance, between 2009 and 2010, four county-level procuratorates in Ziyang city in Sichuan province, southwest China, collectively spent 8.9 million CNY and 10.3 million CNY on case handling and upgrading facilities, respectively; while the proportions they received in revenue transfers from the central and provincial government to meet expenditure in these two areas were 29.4 per cent and 31.9 per cent,

respectively (Jiang and Xie 2011). This implies that even with top-down transfers, county governments still have to shoulder a considerable fiscal burden. If we compare the top-down transfers with the total amount that the local law-and-order arms of government spent, the transfer contribution rate is much lower. In 2008, for instance, the operations of the public security bureaus, courts, procuratorates and other law-and-order departments in Pingchang County, Sichuan, cost 39.2 million CNY, of which just 4.1 million CNY came from central and provincial funding transfers (Liu 2009).

Paradoxically, even those top-down transfers mandated for upgrading the facilities of grassroots law-and-order agencies have in fact generated additional financial burdens on local governments. Since 2006, the central government has been using this measure to improve facilities, for instance by building police stations and detention centres, the so-called “two stations” (两所, *liangsuo*), for public security bureaus, and upgrading the judicial divisions and adjudication divisions of courts, the so-called “two divisions” (两庭, *liangting*), and facilities for procuratorates. In 2006 alone, the Ministry of Finance allocated 2.73 billion CNY for the rebuilding or repair of 5,944 courthouses, mainly in west of the country.

However, the financial burden on local government arises because, critically, the amount transferred by central and provincial government is far less than the total cost of the construction work demanded by the local government. In Xunyang County in Shanxi province in the northwest, for example, the budget for building one police station or judicial division ranged from 300,000 CNY to 400,000 CNY, yet central and provincial government transfers only provided 50,000 CNY for each facility. In 2009, Xunyang County planned to build 20 police stations and judicial divisions at a total cost of 7 million CNY, but it received only 1 million CNY from top-down transfers (The Financial Bureau of Xunyang 2010). In other words, local law enforcement facility improvement and construction projects generate a huge extra financial burden on many local governments. Similarly, the local government in Bijie, Guizhou province, faced a shortfall of 50 million CNY, at the end of 2009, for a program to rebuild its courts because each facility cost 250,000 CNY more than the central and provincial transfer payments provided (Zhou 2010).

Another factor undermining the increased domestic security spending and central- and provincial-level transfers is that many law-and-order agencies were carrying debts accumulated before the introduction of the



new funding reforms. During the 1990s and 2000s, law-and-order agencies across China spent heavily on the construction of office buildings, including some overly extravagant projects that went well beyond the financial capacity of these agencies, resulting in the accumulation of heavy debt. The debts become so widespread and serious that the central government stepped in to help (Zhou 2011). In spite of this, the problem of debt has persisted.

Examples abound. By the end of 2008, the total debt from law-and-order facility construction by the government of Pingchang County, Sichuan province, had reached 26 million CNY, of which 11.1 million CNY was owed by the public security bureau, 6.9 million CNY by the people's procuratorate, 6.0 million CNY by the people's court, and 1.9 million CNY was owed by the bureau of justice (Liu 2009). Likewise, the construction of office buildings also left the courts of Fanggang city in Guangxi and Yueyang City in Hunan mired in debt. In 2003, Fanggang began building a court complex covering 14,000 square meters that was budgeted to cost 27.1 million CNY. Three years later, when the project was nearly finished, the court had managed to pay off only 9.1 million CNY to the project contractor, leaving the remainder as debt (Gao 2007). In Yueyang, court officials built a spacious and luxurious building for themselves over 10,700 square meters. From the start of construction in 2000 to completion in 2005, the court paid just 6 million CNY of the 16 million CNY total cost (He 2011).

Not surprisingly, these heavy debts have encouraged local domestic security officials to misappropriate part of the additional growth in their budget allocations for paying off these loans, and this practice has become quite common, particularly across central and western China. Thus, when courts or public security bureaus have owed debts for building construction, the top-down transfers for office upgrades have often been used illegally to pay contractors for past work. As a result, the serious shortfalls in domestic security expenditure prior to the 2003 reforms have persisted and continue to trouble the operations of local government law enforcement institutions. In the case of Yueyang, described above, the debt of 12 million CNY impeded the normal operations of the court, as most of the increased budget allocation, including the top-down transfers, was used to pay off the construction debts, rather than covering salaries and other needs (He 2011).

Finally, county-level governments in poorer areas often channel "stability maintenance" transfers from the central and provincial gov-

ernments away from those areas mandated by higher level governments to meet their own spending priorities, undermining the state's goal of strengthening security maintenance at the grassroots. For example, even if some transfers are assigned as special funds for town-level governments, the county-level officials are still able to leave the money in their own coffers. The author's fieldwork in February 2011 found this to be a problem in Jiangsu province. In order to enhance grassroots capacity, the Jiangsu provincial government, in association with the central government, allocated special funding for town-level governments in the north of the province, which is historically the poorest part of Jiangsu. Gaoxu Town in Shuyang County in northern Jiangsu, which was the region studied by the author, was supposed to receive 400,000 CNY in 2010 under this program. However, interviewees said that the money was never transferred from the county government's bureau of finance (Anonymous 1). To avoid being punished by provincial auditors, the township government created a false accounting record to indicate that the money had been received. Township officials did not know how the stability maintenance transfer had actually been used, but interviewees said that the majority of domestic security expenditure in Gaoxu was covered through revenues raised by the township government itself, through taxing or charging farmers, or levying fees on businesses. Even with this illegal revenue generation for domestic security purposes, the resulting shortfall in funds meant that payments for security patrols and legal mediators were delayed or even abandoned outright.

## Conclusion

Over the past decade, the CCP has greatly increased its investment in public security within grassroots communities. However, the empirical analysis demonstrates that this additional central government expenditure has not performed as expected. Contrary to the expectation that this investment would ease financial hardship, the funding reform has paradoxically produced an even heavier financial burden on many local governments in the poorer central and western China, as the new funding usually engenders demands for matching investment from the local governments to complete designated projects. Furthermore, additional budgets allocated to coercive departments have achieved little in helping them to overcome serious financial shortages as they struggle to cope with rapidly growing duties and disputes. The social and political stability

in these areas has remained as fragile as before or has become even worse. In other words, the financial reform in public security has failed to produce the expected outcome.

This paper also attempted to explore the factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of the reform policy. Various possibilities, which are closely related to public security expenditure under the centre-local relationship, have been discussed. In financial terms, much of the increased funds has been used to pay off accumulated debts and salaries in arrears, leaving little to increase operational spending; the transfer payments for new initiatives and facilities from the central and provincial level governments usually only cover a small fraction of the actual costs, creating a burdensome financial black hole for grassroots governments. More fundamental, however, is the institutional factor, which involves the central-local relationship. According to the current decentralisation formula, local governments are responsible for the major part of the public security budget. While the central government is putting pressure on the local government one layer after another to take on the growing task of preserving stability, the increasing expenditure for *weimen* falls disproportionately onto the shoulders of the grassroots governments.

In a broader sense, the policy's poor performance originates from the nature of the one-party regime in China. The regime is pursuing economic reform and growth without implementing the corresponding political and legal changes to ease social and political tensions that are essentially the ingrained cause of instability. By enhancing coercive capacity to reduce social and political instability rather than moving forward to the rule of law and democracy, the CCP is shooting at the wrong target.

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