

CHINA
: TALKING ABOUT
A (CHEAP) REVOLUTION

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pic: <http://ht.ly/iahTV>

1. WARNING FROM THE TOP

Wang Qishan, standing committee member of the politburo, one of the seven most powerful men in China, recommended the book "The Old Regime and the Revolution" by French historian Alexis de Tocqueville, according to the People's Daily in January 2013

Based on other accounts, Wang recommended the book to many officials in different occasions



pic: <http://dui.lu/index.php/detail/show/1180982>

2. HISTORICAL FRANCE AND CONTEMPORARY CHINA

What does the book say and why did Wang recommend it?

The book surveyed the political scene in late 18th century France under Louis XVI and examined the most bloody revolution in French history (1789 - 1799)



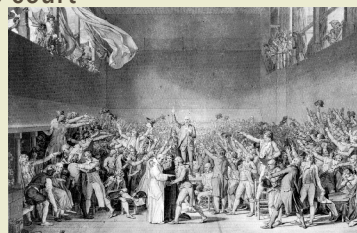
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3. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Striking similarities between 18th century France under King Louis XVI and 21st century China under Communist Party of China

- A. highly centralised political power and a strong regime ("Divine Right Monarchy" with absolute power)
- B. the "middle level" of society is no longer able to check and balance the power of the King and the court
- C. collapse of the traditional social structure at the bottom meant that individuals lack proper social protection and can be radicalised easily

In other words, revolution was and is in the air



pic: <http://ht.ly/iaplN>

4. SOCIAL UNREST ON THE RISE

- # Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, CASS published the "Blue Book of China's Society: Society of China Analysis and Forecast 2013" in December 2012
- # It claimed that over the recent period, there were tens of thousand even hundreds of thousand cases of social unrest (群体性事件)
- # In its 2005 edition, CASS claimed that over the period between 1993 to 2003, such social unrest increased from 10,000 incidents a year to 60,000 incidents a year, involving a total of over 3 million people. It ceased to provide actual figure since.



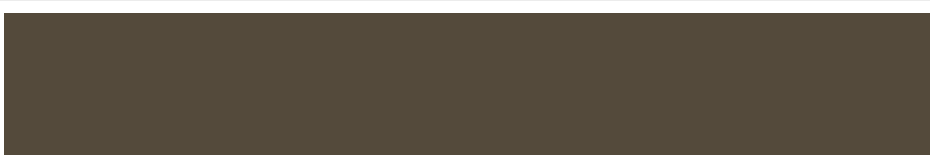
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5. A CASE IN POINT

- # Qidong city, Jiangsu Province, 28 July 2012
- Occupation of the municipal government building by 20,000 to 30,000 angry mob opposing a plan by Japanese paper manufacturer 王子製紙 (Prince Paper) to build a plant for fear of water pollution



pic: <http://ht.ly/iqDhY>



local Party Boss Sun Jianhua (孙建华) was stripped and Mayor Xu Feng (徐峰) was forced to put on a T-shirt denouncing 王子製紙



pic: <http://ht.ly/iasRE>



Riot police did not intervene due to the huge size of the crowd. They were simply outnumbered.



<http://ht.ly/iasPj>

6. REVOLUTION IS GETTING CHEAPER I

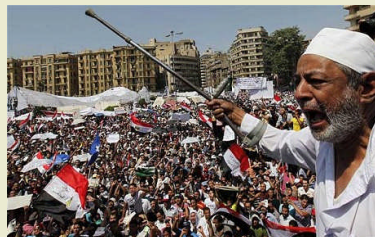
Prof Zheng Yongnian, Director of East Asian Institute, published a thesis on 联合早报 on 22 January 2013 asking: Will "Cheap Revolution" happen in China ?



pic: <http://ht.ly/iasN6>

By "cheap revolution", Prof Zheng meant

- A, a sudden and violent change of regime that is destructive but does not move the society forward. Dynastic change without improvement in political ideas or institutions.
- B, internet technology especially smartphone, twitter, facebook etc have made information flow and mobilisation of the masses so much cheaper. Arab Spring is a classic example.



pic: <http://ht.ly/iasBM>

7. REVOLUTION IS GETTING CHEAPER II

Interestingly, Prof Zheng also quoted de Tocqueville, and claimed that the ruling class has a choice in avoiding revolution

He compared late Qing China and Meiji Japan. Chinese court refused to reform and eventually led to revolution while Japan underwent reform and modernisation and eventually defeated China in 1895 without going through domestic revolution.

He warned that the Communist Party has to be decisive in its reform. Otherwise, the future is bleak.

pic: <http://ht.ly/iasBM>

8. REVOLUTION IN THE MAKING?

As of January 2013:

China's netizens amounted to 564 million



<http://ht.ly/ijPk6>

74.5% of them (420 million) use smartphone to surf internet



pic: <http://ht.ly/ijPLk>

Internet penetration rate is 42.1%

309 million are Weibo (Chinese version of Twitter) users

Out of which two thirds (202 million) use smartphone to access Weibo

Implications?

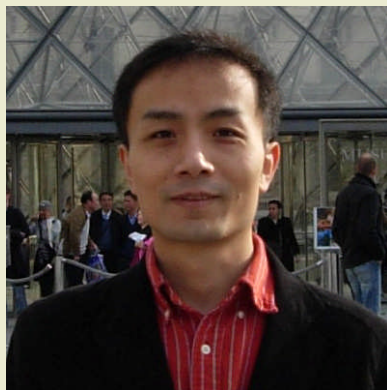
Masses can be mobilised easily



pic: <http://ht.ly/ijQ0j>

9. POSTPONING THE INEVITABLE?

Micheal Anti, a prominent Chinese political observer, maintained that the Communist Party has successfully found a way to avoid a revolution, for the moment.



pic: <http://ht.ly/iavUB>

The magic bullet is none other than Weibo



pic: <http://ht.ly/iawFI>

10. THE MAGIC BULLET

The Great Firewall of China blocked "dangerous" information from the outside world



pic: <http://ht.ly/ijQeC>

All of China's internet servers are controlled by Beijing



pic: <http://ht.ly/ijQz5>

- # They have developed sophisticated software to track dissidents and are able to isolate them in an instance to prevent leadership of mass movements



pic: <http://ht.ly/ijRjw>

11. CONCLUSION: SITTING ATOP AN ACTIVE VOLCANOE

- # The magic bullet can only buy time for political reform
- # WSJ March 2012 report: Internal Security expenditure exceeded Defence expenditure
- # Internal Security has become an industry



pic: <http://ht.ly/ijSTG>

This is Unsustainable

Without meaningful reform, revolution may be inevitable