

Chapter VII Problems in Social Order

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Chapter VII

Problems in Social Order

Introduction

In the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in September 1997, the CPC decided to continue to “stress economic construction” under the “Deng Xiaoping Theory” of “construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics”. The CPC declared it would continue with and expand upon the “reform and opening-up policies” and the idea of a “socialist market economy”¹.

According to the report of Jiang Zemin at the Party Congress, “the fundamental task of socialism is to develop the productive forces.” The report defines China as still being in “the primary stage of socialism.” In the primary stage, the report continues, the principal contradiction in society is the one between the growing material and cultural needs of the people and the backward production. In order to eliminate this contradiction, the CPC and State have to devote their full resources to economic construction.

The CPC report defines “the main tasks” of the political reform as “to develop democracy, strengthen the legal system, separate government functions from enterprise management, streamline government organs, improve the democratic supervision system, and maintain stability and unity.” These tasks of the political reform, however, have to serve the “central task”, that is, economic construction. The political reform must maintain “stability & unity” in particular. Because it is not only an essential “task” for the CPC in its drive toward economic development, but it is a serious “task” for the “survival of the Party” as the CPC itself admits.

Feeling the importance of this, the CPC has been trying to improve social stability in order to maintain stability and unity. This is because “with the deepening of the reform and opening up and the readjustment of economic relations, many changes have taken place in the various contradictions in the economic and social life and, in particular, some contradictions concerning the people’s immediate interests are rather conspicuous”. Not only have these new changes in the situation and the contradictions arising from them obstructed the “people’s immediate interests”, but this situation is of “prime importance for the safety of people’s lives

and property as well as the reform, development, and stability”.

While the 15th Party Congress designated “economic construction” as the country’s “primary task”, it also called for creation of an environment conducive to this, that is, the creation of a “sound environment for public security”. This chapter will look at the recent trends in crime, which has a direct relation with the “safety of people’s lives and property”, in relation to the specific conditions under which this is one of a “sound environment for public security” was raised.

Up until now, when studying problems in social order and trends in crimes, it had been enough to study just the situation within the range of a single governing authority – particularly in the case of China. Today, however, where all sorts of activities are becoming borderless, the results of this type of study are gradually becoming less convincing. Although there are still limits to the geographical spread of activities and studies, this chapter recognizes the “Chinese world”, as places which historically share a single value system and have close cultural or political ties with China. The “Chinese world” consists of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, which are or were once under different governing authorities. This chapter attempts, though in a rudimentary fashion, to make a comparative study of these places with the trends in China. This comparative approach attempts to examine from a new perspective how social order in China will affect those in these regions, and vice versa, what relation they have with each other, and how they may be positioned vis-a-vis each other.

1. Recent Trends in Social Order in China

On November 11, after receiving the proposals of the 15th Party Congress, the Ministry of Public Security convened a “working conference for the public security organizations of the country to follow through on the spirit of the 15th Party Congress” in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. In the conference, Public Security Minister Tao Siju gave a keynote address calling for the participants to “seriously follow through on the spirit of the 15th Party

Congress and work for new public security work and construction of public security forces”.

In the address, Tao Siju summarized the general activities of the Ministry of Public Security since the 14th Party Congress and the main experiences learned through those activities. Tao declared that the Ministry of Public Security had played an effective role in maintaining social stability, and boasted that “the number of criminal cases in the country peaked in 1995, then dropped for the first time ever in 1996. The number has further fallen this year. Social order has been improved in the majority of regions throughout the country and there has been a clear improvement in the public’s sense of security in their daily lives”².

An incident suggesting something quite different from that described in the Public Security Minister’s address, however, had occurred at the session of the National Peoples Congress (NPC) held in March. At the NPC, over 30 percent of the delegates cast votes criticizing the reports of the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procurate - the two organizations with the highest responsibility over issues of social order. The highest ever critical vote, a resounding 40.4 percent, was cast against the report of the Supreme People’s Procurate³.

The gist of the criticism was that “the police bend the law for their own purposes”, “the legal authorities think twice when clamping down on high Party officials ignoring the law”, “the courts render severe decisions for minor crimes, but light decisions on serious matters”, and “the judges and prosecutors close their eyes to injustice to protect local interests” and thereby focused on unfair trials and unjust authorities. Criticism was also leveled at the gap between the reported results of police activities and the lack of improvement in the actual conditions. While this criticism was expressed by the NPC delegates, it could have represented the feeling of the general public.

According to the report of the Supreme People’s Procurate, which received the most criticism, the number of criminals prosecuted by the procurates in 1996 had risen 27.3 percent from the previous year. Further, the number punished for “crimes causing serious harm to social order (for example, murder, theft, rape, kidnaping and sale of women, prostitution, and bombings)” similarly rose by a high 17.3 percent. Further, it stated that there was a notable trend toward more malicious,

broader area, large scale, and more organized crimes⁴.

These increases in prosecution and punishment could be a result of the efforts of the authorities in repeated nationwide crackdowns in response to similar criticism at the 1995 NPC. While recognizing these efforts, a greater number of delegates probably cast critical votes because not only was China still far from achieving the social stability called for by the CPCCC in the 15th Party Congress as the most pressing task facing the country, but also the public was irritated over the lack of steps taken by the authorities to stop the continuing breakdown of public order. If this is so, then how should one interpret the report of the Minister of Public Security?

In the reports of the Supreme People’s Procurate and Supreme People’s Court before the NPC, like in all years, only major headings such as “crimes causing serious harm to public order” and limited statistics such as the number of people arrested and prosecuted and the number of court cases were announced. In order to obtain an overview of crime and in turn the state of social order, figures announced in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau and in Japan and other countries, for example, at least the total number of crimes and the incidence of the same, should be released. These types of figures are almost never released, however, so it is impossible for most people to obtain a grasp of the overall state of crime. Therefore, while Public Security Minister Tao Siju took the broad view that “the number (of crime) has further fallen this year (1997), social order has been improved in the majority of regions throughout the country, and there has been a clear improvement in the public’s sense of security in their daily lives”, there is some question as to if this declaration by the Minister of Public Security on the state of social order was convincing to anyone. Further, it will be interesting to see if the state of public order in 1997, upon which was freshly imprinted the terrorist bombing incident during the NPC, really gave the public a sense of security in their daily lives.

While the public security (police) authorities declared that the number of crimes had already peaked and was now falling and that there had been a remarkable improvement in public order and therefore the public sense of security, the delegates at the NPC cast the worst critical vote ever against the reports of the Procurate and Court in

charge of public order – showing that the people still did not feel safe. What caused this discrepancy between the somewhat optimistic outlook of the authorities over the state of public order and the dissatisfaction of the public, more exactly the public in the limited sense of the delegates to the NPC, due to its sense of crisis over the situation.

Table 1 shows the trends in crime in the past 10 years from the number of cases handled by the courts and the incidence of crimes (number of crimes per 100,000 population).

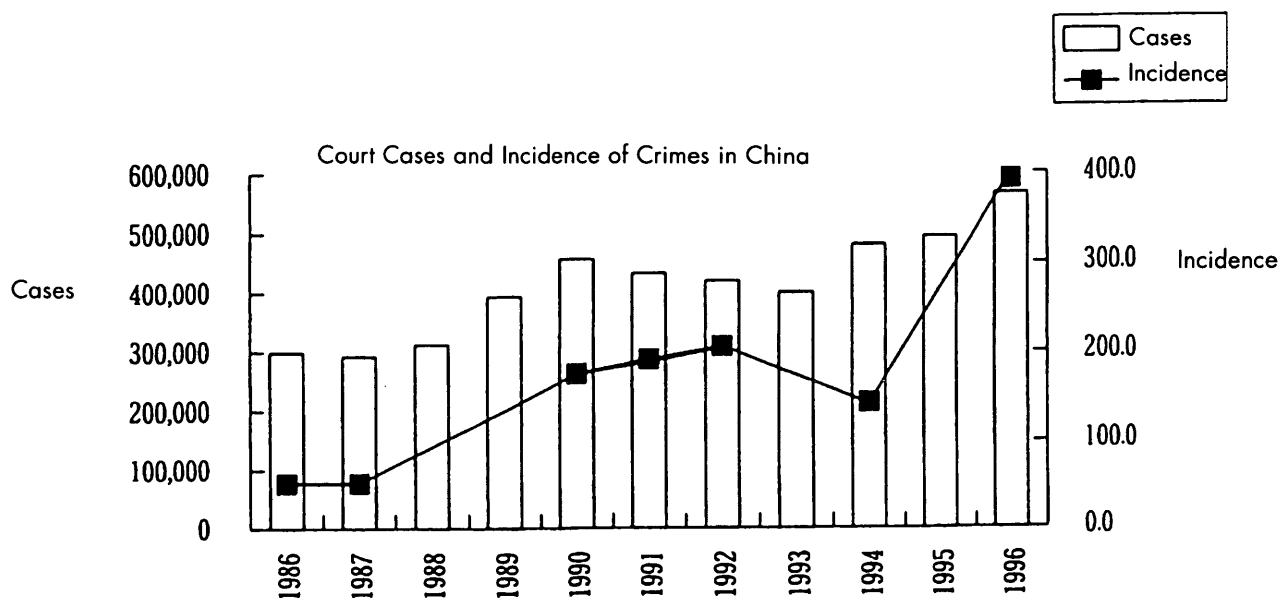
In Table 1, the trends in the incidence of crime cannot be accurately grasped since figures are not released every year. Official figures are available for 1986, 1987, 1990 to 1992, and 1994. The incidence of crime in 1996 was calculated by the author from the Hong Kong magazine *Zhengming* (April 1997).

A look at crime by the cases handled by the courts shows that crimes peaked in 1990, fell until 1993, rose past the 1990 level in 1994, and then continued rising and hit a historical high in 1996. By incidence rate, the rate of incidence was 52 in 1986 and 1987, but increased over three-fold to 176.7 in 1990 and passed 200 in 1992. While falling to 142 in 1994, it then soared to close to 400 in 1996. A study of these figures show that while there have been some ups and downs, the figures have risen as a

whole. In particular, the incidence rate has risen close to eight-fold when viewed from the available figures.

Looking at the figures for the two, while the number of court cases rose just under two-fold from the 298,000 or so of 1986 to the 572,000 or so of 1996, the incidence of crime increased close to eight-fold. The large number of critical votes cast against the reports of the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procurate at the NPC probably stemmed from this. The Public Security Minister stated that "the number of criminal cases in the country peaked in 1995, then dropped for the first time ever in 1996", but as clear from the figures, for what they are worth, there is a question as to if the authorities have taken sufficient action against the increase in crime and the breakdown of social order. This public dissatisfaction surfaced in the large number of critical votes cast by the delegates of the NPC. The various cases of corruption involving the authorities have only fanned this discontent. The Public Security Minister also stated that the public had become more secure due to the reduction in the amount of crime, but can this really be true? Judging from the figures, this statement is wrong.

Table 1. Recent Trends in Crime in China



Source: Prepared from *Peoples Daily*, NPC reports of every year since 1986, hearings at China's Public Security Ministry, etc.

2. Recent Trends in Social Order in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan

2-1. Trends in Hong Kong and Macau

Table 2 shows the trends in the number of crimes and the incidence of crime in Hong Kong from 1986 to 1996⁵.

Hong Kong society has undergone rapid change. The first wave came with the sharp rise in the population after the 1949 establishment of the PRC. It further changed rapidly along with the wave of industrialization which began in the 1960s and is continuing to evolve even now. In one year during this period, the number of students advancing to middle school rose 425 percent and the income of factory workers jumped as much as 20-fold. Unemployment remained at a mere 3 percent. While the increase in population and the industrialization made society richer, it also led to the worst state of social order ever. Theft and rape and other violent crimes increased by 3116 percent and 722 percent respectively. The number of juveniles arrested also rose 500 percent⁶.

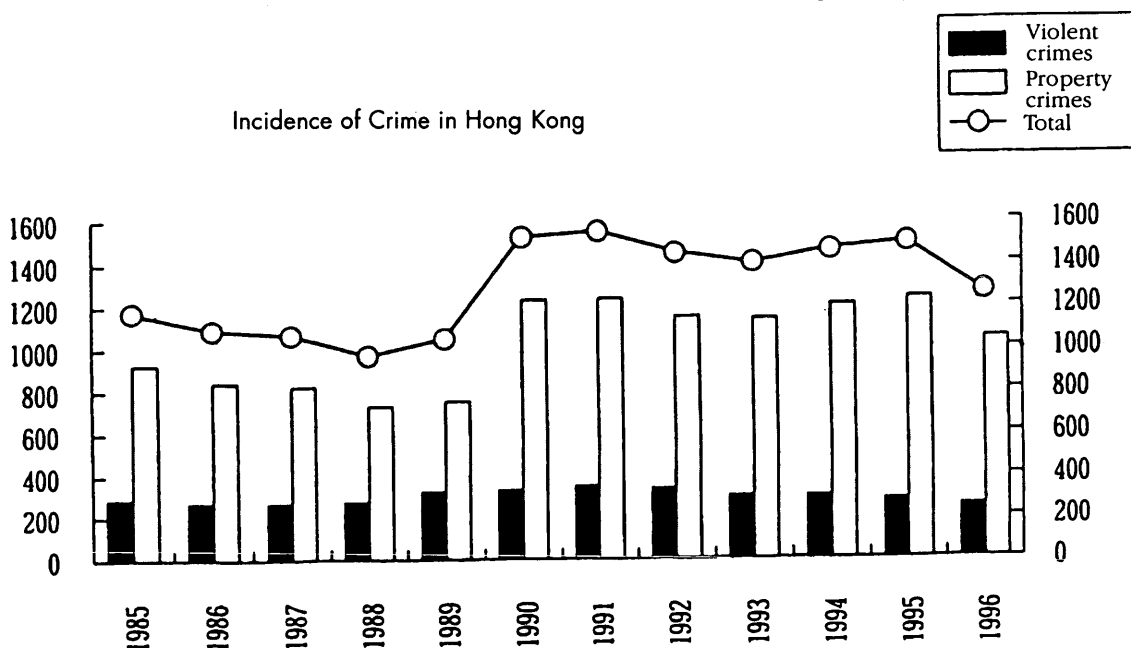
As seen from Table 2, the incidence of crime increased rapidly in 1990. This was mainly due to a rise in armed robbery (up 1,577 cases from the previous year) and a surge in auto thefts (up 44.6%

from the previous year). Crime in Hong Kong has become much more closely related to circumstances in China than ever before. Huge numbers of cars are being stolen for resale in China, while gangs of armed robbers frequently swoop in from China's Guangdong province, commit crimes in Hong Kong, and then retreat to Chinese territory. The increased crime is also due to the sharp rise in illegal immigrants from China.

The Chinese related crime should gradual decrease through the efforts of the Hong Kong authorities in cooperation with the Chinese government. Evidence of the decline is found in the 1252.6 rate of incidence of crime in 1996 – the lowest level recorded in the 1990s.

The trends in social order in Hong Kong, as seen from the crime figures, are thus not completely unrelated to the recent trends in social order in China. Unquestionably they are affected by the trends there to a certain extent. While the trends in crime since Hong Kong's reversion in July are not yet clear, the experience of Hong Kong in the 1960s was that crime increases in direct proportion to rapid urbanization and industrialization and social order breaks down accordingly. China has achieved rapid economic growth through the reform and opening-up policies since the end of the 1970s. Rapidly building close economic and political ties

Table 2. Recent Trends in Crime in Hong Kong



with China during that process, Hong Kong has managed to achieve even higher economic growth for itself than before. Looking at relations with China, the deterioration in social order in Hong Kong since 1990 was probably due to not only circumstances in Hong Kong itself, but also the direct impact of the greater flux in Chinese society caused by economic growth. As already seen, Hong Kong's experience shows that the breakdown of social order in China is mainly due to the economic growth. Hong Kong is also feeling the effects of these changes in China.

While the fall in the incidence of crime in 1996 could have been partially the result of a crackdown by the authorities, it may also be due to the social "stability" caused by the slowing of growth in the Hong Kong economy (where the GDP rose only a weak 2.7% in 1995 and 2.2% in 1996), that is, the fall in the economic growth rate. Still, undergoing remarkable "Sinitization" in various areas since reversion, there is no guarantee that Hong Kong will be able to insulate itself from the effects of the deterioration in social order in China as much as before. The breakdown of order in China will soon affect directly trends in social order in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's neighbor, Macau, illustrates this problem of integration.

Macau is a small enclave of about 400,000 people near Hong Kong administered by Portugal. It is a quiet spot making its living from by casinos and the tourist industry and is scheduled to revert to China in 1999 in the same way as with Hong Kong. Criminal organizations have been openly fighting each other over the rights to the casinos and have thrown the normally sleepy colony into an uproar.

Viewing this situation and looking ahead to reversion, the Chinese authorities have repeatedly asked Macau to take tougher steps to restore order⁷. In response to these requests from the Chinese, the Macau authorities have argued that China also has to take responsibility for cracking down on the contesting criminal organizations. Meanwhile, both have failed to take much positive action. How bad can the state of public order in Macau be that it forced the Chinese authorities to press for action? The following table shows the recent state of crime in Macau.

Table 3 only shows the trends in the three years from 1993. The table is not enough for a satisfactory study of the state of public order in

Macau, but it does provide a glimpse, though simple, into recent trends. At the very least the following can be read from the table: The incidence of crime has risen faster than that in Hong Kong in the same period, the incidence has been higher than Hong Kong's since 1994, and crimes of violence, which have been falling in Hong Kong, have conversely been rising in Macau. This is evidence of a rise in activity by organized crime explained above.

Faced with this situation, the Macau authorities have declared that the increase in crime was due to the influx of large numbers of criminals and criminal organizations from China. This is the basis for the Macau authorities' reference to China's "responsibility".

The Macau economy grew by a high 13.3 percent in 1993 and 12.9 percent in 1995 in terms of the GDP. Unemployment has been relatively stable at 2.1 percent to 3.6 percent during the same period. Macau can truly boast a high rate of economic growth like China. The rise in unemployment, though gradual, can be considered a cause of the increased incidence of crime. If so, then the grounds for the Macau authorities' assertion of Chinese responsibility become much more solid. Naturally, while this does not excuse the lack of action of the Macau authorities, Macau is feeling the direct effects of the breakdown in social order in the similarly fast growing China.

Table 3. Recent Trends in Crime in Macau

	Cases	Violent crimes	Others	Incidence
1993	5322	1037	3401	1346.3
1994	5966	1111	3744	1453.3
1995	7181	1365	4618	1692.0

Source: Prepared from Macau in Figures
<http://dsec.ctm.net>.

2-2. Trends in Taiwan

Relations between Taiwan and China entered a new phase with China's switch to the reform and opening-up policies, and Taiwan's lifting of martial law in 1987. Taiwan has continued to adhere to its policy of refusing direct links and talks with China even after lifting martial law, but has in practice allowed various types of exchanges with the main-

land. The amount of people and goods traveling between the two has been rising sharply each year. In particular, there has been a surge in direct investment from Taiwan to the mainland – in particular into Fujian province, which lies right across the Taiwan Straits and has close historical and cultural ties with Taiwan.

Taiwan started growing rapidly economically in the 1980s and along with this made great progress in democratization. The former single party rule by the Kuomintang has ended. As shown by the direct elections of the president and the large number of political parties, the political process has become democratic. The speed of economic development and democratization of Taiwan has given birth to the phrase “The Taiwan miracle” and has made Taiwan a driving force in the Asian economy. The island’s continued strength, despite the recent unprecedented plunge in the previously similarly growing economies of South Korea and Hong Kong, is due to its strong economic policies and excellent economic structure.

Let us then look at how society, in particular, social order, has changed in Taiwan in the midst of these major political and economic changes and what it is like today.

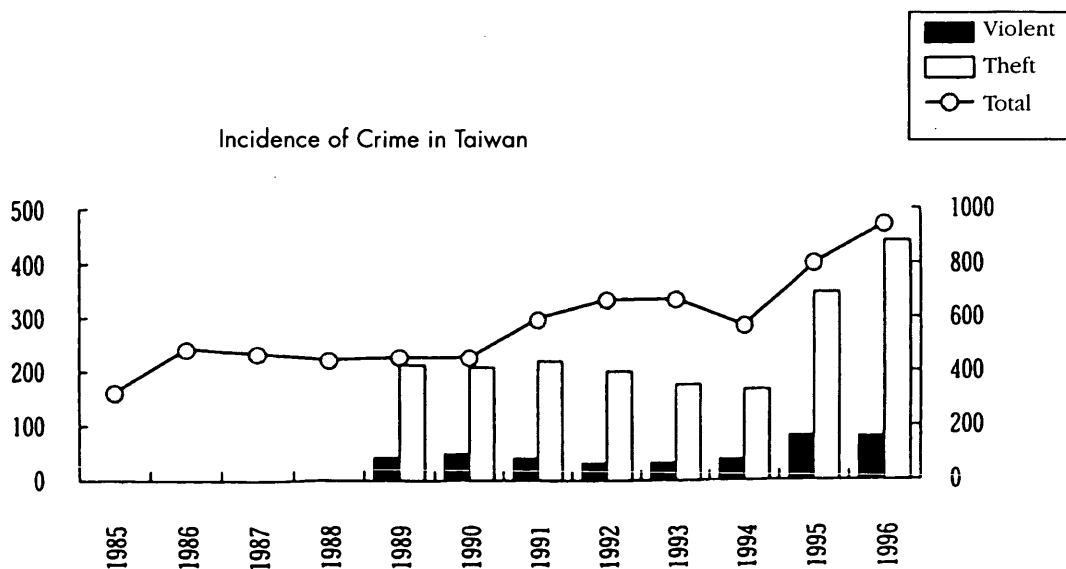
Table 4 shows the trend in crime by the trend in incidence for the same periods as those of China and Hong Kong above. The incidence of crime in Taiwan has been generally rising since 1985. In 1996, it reached 941.1 or over three times the 317.3 of 1985. Experiencing remarkable economic

growth, the incidence of crime in Taiwan has risen as seen in the case of Hong Kong.

The graph indicates that the incidence of crime increased 1.4-fold from 1985 to 1990 and two-fold from 1990 to 1996. Just like China, Taiwan’s rate of increase in the 1990s has been much higher than that in the past. In contrast with Hong Kong, the incidence in Taiwan has increased rapidly since 1994, and there have been two points where the incidence turned upward – common with the trends in China and Hong Kong and fairly much the same in timing as well.

One of the main reasons for the increase in crime in Taiwan in the 1990s has been the increase in the number of people from the mainland. Since martial law was lifted, there has been a sharp rise in the number of mainlanders being smuggled onto the island. Taiwan cannot work closely with the Chinese authorities to charge these illegal immigrants or crack down on criminals unlike Hong Kong. Further, one should not forget that with the single party rule by the Kuomintang ended, multiple parties formed, and rapid progress made in democratization, Taiwanese society is now in greater flux. This invites a breakdown of public order. While there is still room for more detailed study, it is likely that, as seen in China and Hong Kong, trends in social order in Taiwan, which is in the middle of a phase of strong economic growth known as “the Taiwanese miracle”, are determined by trends in the economy.

Table 4. Recent Trends in Crime in Taiwan



Source: Prepared from *Chunghwa minkuo nianchian*, 1996, criminal statistics of the Ministry of the Interior, 1997, etc.

Conclusion

At present, economic activities, such as urbanization, industrialization, and economic development, are spilling over national and regional boundaries. It is just as if there were no different governing authorities in these regions and nothing stopping these activities. If trends in social order are closely linked with such economic activities, it will be necessary to consider the question of social order across regional and national boundaries as well.

Seeking further economic development at the 15th Party Congress, China should learn from the experiences of Hong Kong and Taiwan, which have preceded it, on issues of social order. The experience, however, is the fact that economic development inevitably leads to a breakdown of social order. Further, it is necessary to realize that this breakdown, like economic activities, spills across national and regional boundaries and therefore goes beyond individual frameworks of authority.

Accordingly, it is necessary to watch trends both in China and in regions closely related with China, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Notes:

1. JIANG ZEMIN, "Gaoju deng xiaoping lilun weida

qishi, ba jianshe you zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi shiye quanmian tuixiang ershiyi shiji" (Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory for an All-Round Advancement of the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics Into the 21st Century), *Peoples Daily*, September 22, 1997.

2. "Duli kaichuang gongan gongzuo he gongan duiwu jianshe xin jumian" (Work to Establish Public Order Work and Public Order Troops to Create New Situation), *Renmin gonganbao*, November 13, 1997.
3. "Guanyu 'liangyuan' gongzuo baogao de shenji yijian" (Examination and Opinion Regarding Working Reports of Procurate and Court), *Peoples Daily*, March 13, 1997.
4. "Zuigao renmin jingchayuan gongzuo baogao" (Working Report of Supreme People's Procurate) and "Zuigao renmin fayuan gongzuo baogao" (Working Report of Supreme People's Court), *Peoples Daily*, March 21, 1997.
5. Prepared from Hong Kong government ed., *Hong Kong (Annual Report) 1991 and 1993* and *Hong Kong 1997* and TRAVER, H. and VAGG, J. eds., *Crime and Justice in Hong Kong*, Oxford University Press, 1993.
6. *Crime and Justice in Hong Kong*, pp. 10-11.
7. "Zhian jiju ehua, zhongtao geyou shuofa" (Order Rapidly Deteriorating, China and Portugal Both Have Explanations), *Jiushi niandai* (The 1990s), January 1997 issue.