



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 30, 2011

Communist Chinese Official Warns of More Uprisings Over Government Corruption

Zhu Mingguo, a deputy Communist Party secretary in the Guangdong province, led a team that met with Wukan village residents who had taken over the community in protest over a lack of compensation for lands co-opted by local government leaders. They also demanded an investigation into the death of one of the protest leaders while he was in police custody. According to [Reuters News Service](#), for over a week the residents “had fended off police with barricades and held protests over the death in police custody of activist Xue Jinbo, whose family rejects the government’s position that he died of natural causes, and against the seizure of farmland for development.”



On December 21, following the meeting with Zhu and other provincial officials, leaders of the protests told residents to take down barriers and allow government officials into the village. For their part, the provincial government officials agreed to take a closer look at the dealings of local Communist Party bureaucrats in the sale of farmland to developers, as well as investigate the death of Xue Jinbo.

Chinese experts estimates that such “mass incidents” by unhappy Chinese citizens have risen to tens of thousands per year, usually in response to low wages, inadequate living conditions, and corruption by local government, such as land grabs justified in the name of local development.

While most protests are small and easily quashed by police, the Wukan protest has been noted for its size and for the inability of government and police to stop it. A [BBC report](#) said that the conflict appeared to be “larger and more intense than many others” over the last year or two, with residents showing that “they are willing to take on the authorities.” Similarly, the [New York Times](#) called the Wukan protests “unusual for their longevity — and for the brazenness of the villagers as they call attention to their frustrations.” And the [Wall Street Journal](#) announced that the revolt by the village was the year’s “most serious case of mass unrest in China.”

But Zhu Mingguo, the top lieutenant to Guangdong’s Communist Party secretary Wang Yang, went even farther, warning officials that such large-scale protests may become more common, citing increasingly abusive local government bureaucracies, which he said are like apples that are red and appealing on the outside, but which are rotten to the core.

Speaking at a meeting called to address civic unrest, Zhu criticized the intransigent response from the officials in Wukan, a community that had enjoyed a reputation for civic harmony. He pointed out that “there were many problems that were not swiftly identified,” and when local residents responded, the true colors of the local bureaucrats showed, he said. “Like apples, their hearts were rotten even if their skins were red, and when the skins broke, there was a real mess.”



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Zhu noted that local officials had sold more than two-thirds of the village's land, without a thought to the welfare of the residents. "Now, where are the state cadres who remember that farmers don't have land for their food?" he asked. "When do they think of the hardships of ordinary people? If these complaints had been dealt with sooner, would they have ever caused such a big ruckus?"

He warned that the awareness by local residents of rights abuses "is constantly strengthening, and their corresponding demands are growing." He added that public concern over the defense of rights "is growing, and the means used to defend rights are increasingly intense. Their channels for voicing grievances are diverse, and there is a tendency for conflicts to become more intense."

In a [New York Times analysis](#) of the Wukan revolt, the *Times* China bureau chief Michael Wines estimated that there are "at least 625,000 potential Wukans across China, all small, locally run villages that frequently suffer the sorts of injustices that prompted the outburst this month in Wukan."

One China expert told Wines that the conflict that boiled over in Wukan "is nothing new. It's all across the country." According to another Beijing-based analyst, 50 to 60 percent of Chinese villages struggle with governance and accountability issues similar to those faced by Wukan residents.

The heart of the problem appears to be the way in which local government bureaucrats sell local lands, ostensibly to raise funds for such government services as sanitation and local welfare. As with any government entity that lacks oversight, corruption and coverup appear to be significant problems, as witnessed in Wukan, where lucrative government posts were reportedly bought for hundreds of thousands of dollars, and where five of the nine village officers had been in power since the system had been set up under Mao Tse-Tung's successor, Deng Xiaoping. Similarly, before being replaced amid the uprising, Wukan's Communist Party secretary had held his position for over 40 years.

Under a Communist Party-controlled system of back-scratching, back-room deals, and threats to those who asked questions, "the village committee sold off or granted long-term leases to nearly 60 percent of the village's 11 square miles over an 18-year period beginning in 1993," reported Wines. "The sales were said to include roughly four-fifths of the village's 1.5 square miles of farmland and much of its forests."

The lands, which were dispatched without the requisite approval of local residents, "went to hotels, homes, factories, power companies and even private funerary temples," noted Wines. "One wealthy villager, Chen Wenqing, gained a business interest in Wukan's harbor and a 50-year lease on a large tract of land used as a pig farm."

But plans to confiscate the pig farm, along with the farmlands of other village residents, led to the revolt and overthrow of the villages officials who had enjoyed unchallenged reign for decades.

As the extent of the corruption became known, villagers complained that there were significant amounts of money that were unaccounted for. "From 1993 onward, not one time were we told" what was being done with the proceeds of land sales, one of the protestors, Lin Zuluan, told the *New York Times*. "No voting, no compensation, nothing. We didn't even know what was going on."

While it seems clear to most observers that only a thorough house-cleaning of the country's system of local government will remedy ongoing corruption, Wines pointed out that, according to China insiders, "almost nobody benefits from a housecleaning — not village leaders or township and county officials enriched by land sales and other corrupt deals. And not higher officials whose influence is only diminished if they get rid of lower-level supplicants."



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Most likely, the Wukan debacle will serve as a wakeup call to high-level Chinese officials to prepare to deal with future Wukan-inspired uprisings in the old-fashioned Communist Chinese fashion, with a slap on the wrist to long-time party functionaries, and a Chairman Mao-style iron fist to audacious protestors.

Photo of Wukan protest: AP Images



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