ANNOUNCER
Major funding for China From the Inside has been provided by the Corporation For Public Broadcasting. Additional funding is provided by the KQED Campaign for the Future Program Venture Fund; individuals, foundations and corporations committed to the production and acquisition of quality programs; by David and Cecilia Lee, and others - a complete list is available from PBS; and by contributions to your PBS station from viewers like you. Thank you.

NARRATOR
Chinese people confront police over the right to impeach crooked officials. China’s becoming polarised as prosperity benefits some and bypasses others. How can people with a grievance negotiate with the state?

Professor CHENG JIE, Tsinghua University Law School
If Chinese people are unhappy that they can’t participate in elections, or are unhappy with their legislature, and have lots of complaints, and are hoping for others to help them change the situation, then I think this is unrealistic. This is a kind of slave mentality. Ultimately the people need to know their rights and take up the sword and fight for these rights.

NARRATOR
This may be China’s century. She’s growing richer. Growing stronger. And the process is taking her people through momentous upheavals. This television series has had exceptional access to the country, her institutions and people – at a critical time. This is China From the Inside.

How free are the Chinese people? How free to worship as they please? To learn the truth from the media? To hear the truth from the Communist Party and the government?

Dr GAO YAOJIE, AIDS awareness activist
The main thing is to speak the truth. Why should a nation be drowned in lies? Look, in the days of the emperor, whoever lied to him would be killed for disrespect. But now the liars get promoted as officials - get rich. Now rich people’s dogs live better than the peasants.

NARRATOR
It’s no longer a question of how much freedom the people are being granted, but how much they want for themselves. There are new ideas in China, some from the intelligensia, some bubbling up from the grass-roots and some from progressive thinkers in the Party itself. Ideas about social justice and the rule of law, about public participation in politics and protecting people’s rights. Ideas for building what some call a civil society.

Professor WANG XIXIN, Beijing University Law School
Civil society is like a seed. As long as it’s in the soil, as long as the conditions are right - climate, water, and sunshine - then it’ll grow. The seed may be weak, but the
force of its growth is strong. It needs to grow. You may want to stop it, but the clever leaders will realize that this is a new force.

NARRATOR
Bumpa Ri – a sacred mountain decked in prayer flags - overlooks Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. The scraps of paper are called wind-horses - sacred texts which ride the wind, bringing good luck. 8.30 in the morning – Tsangkhung Nunnery is summoned to prayer. It’s a special day. The monthly service for the deity Naljorma has coincided with the 600th anniversary of the death of Tsong Khapa, a founder of the major school of Tibetan Buddhism. Yak butter tea sustains the nuns during this long winter’s day of prayer.

CHOENYI, Buddhist nun
Only when we’ve finished reciting the required set of prayers do they pour the tea. And after it’s served, we have to say the ‘Tea Grace’. Only then, are we allowed to drink it. And with the weather so cold, you really crave hot tea.

NARRATOR
China’s Constitution protects what it calls ‘normal religious practices’. Throughout the service, pilgrims come and go. Every winter, when there’s less work for farmer and nomad, they converge on the holy places of Lhasa. Some have been on the road a year, walking a thousand miles to make donations and pray. Important though today’s ceremony is, the Director of the nunnery, Tenzin Sangmo, does not attend.

TENZIN SANGMO, Director, Tsangkhung Nunnery
I am the oldest and now can’t sit cross-legged for long. Anyway, I never had the chance like the other nuns to study and practice these prayers and rituals, because I’ve been too busy working. I’ve had my hands full renovating the nunnery and restoring the holy statues. I’ve had to run around getting hold of people, petitioning the authorities, managing our budget. These have been my worries.

NARRATOR
It isn’t natural decay to old buildings that’s kept temple leaders so busy, but the effects of the Communist Party’s long struggle to control faith in Tibet. Since Tibet’s rebellion against China in 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled into exile, religious buildings have been razed to the ground; monks and nuns imprisoned. And thousands of Tibet’s monasteries were devastated in the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution.

TENZIN SANGMO
It was terrifying during the Cultural Revolution. Because all the sacred objects were destroyed. That wasn’t unique to our nunnery. It happened across the country. Nothing was left. Not even a stick of incense.

NARRATOR
It is because faith is so central to the lives of Tibetans, and so closely entwined with their national identity that it worries the Chinese state, of which Tibet is a part. The atheist Communist Party exercises religious tolerance as a function of political control.

NYIMA TSERING, Deputy Governor, Tibet
Some people with insidious aims use religion to carry out activities to overthrow, to split China. Such things do happen. So we must heighten our vigilance. We have a strict line on this. The Party has a policy of respecting religious freedom. If you go in for religion, your beliefs should be respected and protected. But if you use religion as a cover to try to split China, or harm national security then you’re breaking the law. It’s not allowed.

NARRATOR
Violent clashes in 1988 between the police and Tibetan monks. Buddhism has been feared as a rallying point and cover for Tibetan independence. Clampdowns have alternated with concessions. Tolerance with repression. Today, Tibetan Buddhism is permitted on the Party’s strict terms – neither government employees nor students are allowed to practice. The state micro-manages religion.

TENZIN SANGMO, Director, Tsangkhung Nunnery
We get many applications at our nunnery for acceptance as a nun. But we can’t just enrol people as and when we like. There’s a limit set by the Party, and that dictates our decision-making.

NARRATOR
The Communist Party isn’t just worried about numbers. It also requires all applicants to be vetted. There’s a spiritual vacuum in Tibet. The Dalai Lama has been away nearly half a century. Just displaying his photo can lead to arrest. It’s hard to know what the pilgrims feel about their long-absent spiritual leader. Hard to know how they’d respond to his possible return, because, tellingly, it’s not safe for them to discuss it. Deputy Governor Nyima Tsering believes Tibetans increasingly share the Party view.

NYIMA TSERING
More and more of the people realize what kind of person the Dalai really is. He is false and deceitful. You could say that in recent years profound changes have occurred in Tibet. More and more of the masses realize what kind of person the Dalai is. Draped in the cloak of religion he tries to promote Tibetan independence. So ordinary people see ever more clearly that he’s trying to split the Motherland and make Tibet independent.

NARRATOR
Under the ‘patriotic education’ policy monks and nuns must sign a statement renouncing the Dalai Lama and acknowledging Tibet as an integral part of China. Some have refused, and have been arrested or expelled from the monastery. Religion in China is administered by the state from the Beijing palace where the last emperor was born. All religions are alien to Communism, but Christianity has particular echoes for the Party.

YE XIAOWEN, Director, State Administration of Religion
The Chinese say Buddhism came in peace to China, on elephants and white horses. But the Christian God came to China riding on a cannon-ball. Ordinary Chinese people call Christianity ‘the foreign religion’ and naturally associate it with a history of bullying and looting China.

NARRATOR
Christianity has been adapted for China. Removed of what Ye Xiaowen has called its ‘Western Taint’. Xishiku is the largest Catholic church in Beijing. This is
Catholicism, but it isn’t orthodox Roman Catholicism. Overseeing the Patriotic Catholic Association of China is not the Pope 5000 miles away in the Vatican, but the Chinese Communist Party.

LIU YONGBIN, Catholic priest
It’s the principle of every citizen to uphold the Party’s leadership. As citizens we cannot call this into question. They are the ruling Party. Our relationship with the Party is that they lead, we follow. We enjoy respect in terms of our faith and the constitution specifically protects our beliefs. For all this the Catholic Church thanks the Chinese Communist Party.

NARRATOR
The State limits the number of churches, Catholic and Protestant, approves the appointment and dismissal of clergy, monitors the printing and distribution of bibles. Perhaps twenty million worship in the officially approved churches, but some Chinese don’t want anything between them and their God, least of all the avowedly atheist Communist Party. In the hour before it opens, a public swimming bath becomes a place of baptism.

MAN BEING BAPTISED

PRIEST (Subtitles)
I baptise you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

NARRATOR
This is a rare glimpse into the hidden world of unregistered or ‘house’ churches in China. Zhang Qianjin is a preacher in the Protestant house church. Around 40 million Chinese of different denominations worship quietly in anonymous buildings and people’s homes.

ZHANG QIANJIN, Preacher, Protestant house church
We just read the Bible, study God’s words and worship God together. Why do we have to be managed by a government organisation? The Bible tells us we only have one Lord: Jesus Christ. There should not be a secular administrative body that manages the church above the Lord.

NARRATOR
Why does the Director of Religious Administration think people go outside the law to attend house churches?

YE XIAOWEN, Director, State Administration of Religion
Maybe because the church is too far away, or transport’s not good, or because it feels more intimate to worship at home with family - and of course we can’t exclude some very special, complicated reasons. Some people want to make their own sect, form their own team, attract their own believers. This happens. It’s not a big problem.

NARRATOR
Police jostle with believers as the authorities demolish a house church. Local policy is inconsistent. Officials in some places turn a blind eye to the house churches; elsewhere they are persecuted. For the Chinese state, there’s something innately
suspicious about any group of people that openly shuns state control. Falun Gong, a meditative sect practising healing exercises, was only branded a dangerous cult when in 1999 ten thousand practitioners from across China suddenly appeared on the pavement outside Party Headquarters in Beijing. Their protest for recognition was silent and peaceful but this power to mobilise the masses greatly alarmed the Party. A year later a Falun Gong protest in Tiananmen Square crushed by police and plainclothes men. In the draconian suppression of Falun Gong, many believers including the middle-aged and elderly, were arrested, beaten, sent to labour camps.

DAI QING, Journalist and activist
The government really dislikes protest. According to Chinese law, you must apply for a permit to organize protests or public gatherings to speak your mind. And they can just turn you down.

NARRATOR
An angry demonstration in Beijing, but the police simply stand around, watching.

DEMONSTRATORS WITH BANNER
PROTESTERS (Subtitles)
Sneaky Japanese government!
Down with the Japanese fascists!

NARRATOR
It all depends on who is protesting about what. Irritated by Japanese claims over some disputed islands, the Chinese government allows a group of nationalists to harangue the Japanese Embassy.

LU YUNFEI, Chinese nationalist
This event is being conducted in accordance with Chinese law. Before coming here we fulfilled the relevant registration requirements. We’ve given the police the name of the person in charge and detailed notes on today’s event.

NARRATOR
Vital to the protest’s effectiveness is the presence of another key group of players in China – the media. By allowing the protest and letting the media cover it, the Chinese government conveyed a message of defiance to Japan. Managing the media has always been a priority for the Communist Party. Just once a year, the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao holds a press conference. Shouldering the main burden of delivering the official message is the state broadcaster, China Central Television.

LUO MING, Deputy Director, CCTV
As the Chinese Communist Party is our ruling party, we as a TV station, publicise the Party line and its policies to the letter. In propaganda terms, at home we represent the Party and government, and abroad the country and the Chinese race. An extremely important function is to relay the voice, the ideas of our ruling party.

WEN JIABAO AT PRESS CONFERENCE
WEN JIABAO (Subtitles)
Our country has never sent a single soldier abroad... to occupy an inch of foreign soil. Taiwan is a domestic issue for China alone. We brook no interference from any foreign country.
NARRATOR
The Prime Minister’s defiant stand on Taiwan brings a loyal round of applause from the press. But there’s more to the media in China than deference and propaganda. Conventional journalism and the internet have exposed injustice and created debates in China about social issues, public health, pollution and civil rights. The government lets some investigative journalism flourish, then clamps down. Editors are fired. Websites blocked. Newspapers closed. Journalists imprisoned.

DAI QING, Journalist and activist
The Party thinks that if people speak out, they’ll all say “down with the Communist Party”. In fact we’ve lots of suggestions. We often want to praise officials who are doing well. But they’re too scared. They’ve no self-confidence. So they use the simple control of not letting you speak. This is plain stupid.

NARRATOR
But the market is creating more and more choices – and people who can choose don’t necessarily buy propaganda. The magazine South Wind Window in Guangzhou sells 200,000 copies every two weeks.

CHEN ZHONG, Editor, South Wind Window
Although here in China, we’re in a country with a one-party system, we still maintain our own standpoint whether in monitoring the government or relaying information from society. Our magazine carries lots of stories reflecting what we call “the base of society”. This is our speciality; our strength. The base of society includes farmers and miners. We’ve written about them in the current issue. Here, have a look at the miners. They work in really tough conditions. Anti-corruption is another big issue. The politics of the environment is one of China’s most discussed topics.

MAGAZINE SPREAD & SARS CRISIS ARTICLE
CHEN ZHONG
This is the SARS crisis and this is about the effect of AIDS on China.

NARRATOR
AIDS has been one of the most difficult subjects in China for journalists to cover. Dong Zhanhai is dying. But he didn’t contract AIDS from unprotected sex, nor is he a needle-sharing drug addict. AIDS in Henan and nearby provinces is a story of poverty, corruption, cover-up. A tragedy of people shunned by the state.

Dr GAO YAOJIE, AIDS awareness activist
I once went into a village and heard a child’s voice in the distance, calling, “Come down, come down”. It turned out two people had met through blood-selling, got married and had a child. The child was born with AIDS and the father died. The mother couldn’t go on and hanged herself. The child didn’t understand what had happened to his mother, and just hugged her feet, crying “come down”.

NARRATOR
Dr Gao has become a heroine in China for her pioneering work promoting AIDS awareness. She categorises the tragedy as one of China’s ‘black holes.’ Neglected by government and media.
Shuangmiao Village, Henan Province in January 2005. - the night before yet another funeral. Yang Guixiang strokes the photo of her deceased husband Zhu Jinzhong, propped up against his coffin. He’d sold his blood to commercial blood-collecting clinics to raise extra money to support her and their two children. But for years, HIV contaminated blood had been passing into the population through unsafe transfusion practices and unsterilized equipment. What makes Yang Guixiang’s grief so poignant is that her husband’s death, like the deaths of thousands in Henan Province, was avoidable. Some officials knew the blood collection procedures were spreading disease, but kept quiet.

Professor GUI XI’EN, AIDS Research Centre, Wuhan University
Some officials are reluctant to publicise AIDS because they’re worried there’ll be discrimination against the area, that economic development will be affected; no one will buy their products; no one will come and invest. Some areas still have these reservations. So it’s possible that in a minority of places, the full extent of the epidemic has not been reported.

NARRATOR
The next day, people flock to Zhu Jinzhong’s funeral. There’ve been over 150 AIDS funerals in Shuangmiao Village, but Zhu Jinzhong was a hero. After he was diagnosed, he cared for over 50 children orphaned by AIDS in the village. Then he was featured in a programme by China Central Television and the donations flooded in. That’s when local government became interested. They deemed him unfit because he had AIDS, closed the orphanage, took the children away and appropriated the money. Official figures say 69,000 have contracted AIDS from blood-selling. Activists fear the figures could be much higher. A third of mothers with HIV from blood-selling in Henan are passing it on to their babies. And by covering up the problem, officials ensured AIDS would claim still more victims.

Professor GUI XI’EN, AIDS Research Centre, Wuhan University
I’ve known people who sold blood before 1996 and were infected. But in ‘97 and ‘98 they were still being invited back to hospital to donate their blood for transfusions. The problem was the local doctors didn’t know there was AIDS in the area. So the disease was still being spread.

NARRATOR
Central government is belatedly providing resources and support. But some local officials have embezzled money, blankets and food intended for victims. They chase away doctors and journalists from AIDS villages. And, although unsafe blood collection practices were made illegal in 1996, Dr Gao is sure the lethal trade continues.

Dr GAO YAOJIE, Aids awareness activist
Those officials who encouraged blood selling should be locked up – even executed. Look: we’ve had a blood transfusion law for ten years! How can they still encourage the illegal blood trade? What are these vampires doing in power, why are they still alive?

NARRATOR
Family and villagers start to dig Zhu Jinzhong’s grave. It’s frosty, and the ground is hard, but they are used to it. The frustration of AIDS victims at inadequate medical care and government indifference has led to violent clashes. A news item, filmed off the television, shows the Communist Party and police sending a force of 600 against
just 15 AIDS activists in Xiongqiao Village in Henan. A dozen villagers were injured including an eight year old boy trying to defend his sick mother.

NEWSREADER (Subtitles)
Members of Party organisations took part in the frontline war. The operation was quick decisive and orderly... and achieved the predicted result. The arrests terrified criminals and were good for society.

NARRATOR
AIDS victims are just part of a growing under-class whose demands for social justice are intensifying. There's a deep gulf between rich and poor – with most of the poor in the countryside. China’s economic miracle has stranded over 300 million people at the margins.

Minister ZHAO QIZHENG, State Council Information Office
If this inequality persists in the long-term, and if people continue to be marginalised, then of course it’s worrying. The thing is, now we’ve recognised this phenomenon, we can’t ignore it. We hope we have the sensitivity to face up to the problems and solve them.

NARRATOR
A group of farmers in Tibet measure what’s left of their fields after construction of the new railway linking Lhasa to the rest of China. They are being given compensation, but they're worried. They know about farming, not business.

JAMPA
They say the construction will be very good for Tibet’s development. As for the fields, there’s been immeasurable loss.

LOBSANG
It’s hard to say if it’s been good, sir, because our very livelihood is in these fields. We’ve lost large tracts of agricultural land for which we've been told we'll be given due compensation. Now, if we have the know-how then this money can be invested in a business and make some returns. All well and good. But, if that doesn’t happen and the money is used up for short-term needs, then that could mean bankruptcy for later generations. It’s hard to see this as a good thing. The land may not be that fertile, but at least it gives us food, year in, year out. That money isn’t going to last a lifetime, if investment returns aren’t generated.

TENZIN
If you’re good with money and do well, it’ll be fine. If you don’t spend it wisely, then you’ll become a beggar, for sure.

NARRATOR
Land grabbing causes deepest resentment when developers and officials strike deals behind people’s backs – and then pocket the compensation. And this doesn't just happen in the countryside. Chongqing in Western China is a booming industrial city of 6 million people. A property company plans to demolish old apartment complexes along the Jialing River to make way for new development. But there’s been no sign of any compensation for the inhabitants. They put up a poster appealing to
municipal government for help, but have heard nothing. The community fears that officials are on the developers' side, not theirs.

YOUNG MAN
It’s forced resettlement. Corruption! Corruption!

2ND MAN
Forced demolition. The company didn’t give the money to the ordinary people.

YOUNG MAN
It was embezzled by officials.

MAN IN CAP
The government feels threatened. They won’t let people talk.

OLDER MAN
It’s my home. We haven’t seen a penny. They exploit us - the working people. There’s no other country in the world like this.

NARRATOR
Shengyou, a hundred miles from Beijing – farmers are attacked by armed thugs working for corrupt local officials who want to grab the fields for a state-owned power station. This was one of 87,000 officially recognised cases of public disorder in 2005. Six farmers were murdered. Villagers placed the bodies outside local Party Headquarters with a flag bearing the word ‘injustice’.

Professor KANG XIAOGUANG, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
The key problem is injustice. An unjust society lacks both a moral foundation, and political legitimacy, so there’s nothing to hold it together. It’s as if all 1.3 billion of us are making a cake together. When it’s baked, will the slice I get meet my minimum requirements? If it can’t even do that, then society is in danger. So for China’s political stability, justice is extremely important.

NARRATOR
Haidian People’s Court in Beijing proclaims the primacy of the law with extracts from China’s constitution carved in marble across its lobby. People’s Congress Deputy Wu Qing goes one better. She keeps a copy with her at all times.

WU QING, Deputy, Beijing People’s Congress
Wherever I go, I really do carry the constitution. I quote Article 5 a lot: “The People’s Republic of China is ruled according to the law...”. “No organisation or individual can be above the constitution and the law”. This includes the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

JUDGE ENTERS COURTROOM AND WALKS TO BENCH
COURT OFFICIAL (Subtitles)
The judge is in court.

JUDGE (Subtitles)
All sit.
NARRATOR
A judge in Jiangsu Province is hearing a dispute over obstructed access to natural light.

JUDGE ADDRESSES COURT
JUDGE (Subtitles)
I hope everyone will seek truth from facts... and try to resolve the conflict

Judge WU PING
When I was young, I always respected judges. Just as I was finishing middle school, our country was going through legal reform. So the court needed lots of people. I came to work as clerk of the court and worked my way up.

NARRATOR
Some judges started off as caretakers or cleaners in the court, but now qualifications are needed. Even so, in 2005 49 percent of judges still had no college degree.

WU PING
I haven't reached a high standard, a scholarly standard. I also feel that I haven't fully mastered some of the new laws and regulations. That's why it's so necessary for us to study.

NARRATOR
Whom does Wu Ping feel she is serving in her judge's robes?

WU PING
I am a judge. At the same time, I am also a Communist Party member. So as a Communist Party member, I must do my duty. I work for the people. And I am their servant.

HOU WENZHUO, Human rights activist
All positions in the courts are controlled by the Communist Party. So it's impossible for the courts to be free from the control of the Party.

WU PING
Our court has always heard cases independently. No Party or government organisations have ever interfered.

NARRATOR
But Party officials often decide major cases in advance. And courts rarely take on tough ones, like those brought by victims of pollution, dispossession, corruption, cases of abuse by the authorities.

Professor CHENG JIE, Tsinghua University Law School
The independence of the judiciary is now most urgent. If a judge knows that the result of taking on a case is that he'll be punished by city leaders and that he'll lose his job and his comfortable lifestyle over it, then we would effectively be asking him to sacrifice himself. Can we ask him to make this sacrifice? If someone did it, I'd
think he was a great man, but it’s hard for us to encourage a judge to sacrifice himself.

NARRATOR
Hundreds of thousands of people look, not to the courts to secure justice, but to the ancient Chinese right to petition. Many travel long, hard journeys to Beijing, living rough in a makeshift community near the office where petitions to the government are submitted.

STREET VENDOR OF LAW DOCUMENTS TALKING TO HANDICAPPED MAN
STREET VENDOR (Subtitles)
You’ll need to get that photocopied.

NARRATOR
To strengthen their cases, they spend precious money buying copies of China’s laws from street vendors. Their quest for justice comes to dominate their lives. A woman whose son has been murdered by police. A pupil horrifically abused by his principal, who then beat up the boy’s father. A mother whose son has been executed but is being denied access to his body for burial. Many become frustrated and disillusioned. In 2005 the Chinese authorities admitted that 80% of petitioners’ cases are legitimate.

Professor WANG XIXIN, Beijing University Law School
If 80 per cent of people’s petitions are justified, and the government and the law can’t help them solve their problems, then the danger to society is very clear. The people don’t trust their local governments. They don’t believe in them.

NARRATOR
According to one official survey, only a fraction of 1% of petitioners receive satisfaction. Officials mostly see them as a threat and embarrassment and send them off home. Or worse. China has a complete penal system devoted to re-education through labour. The women in this model camp outside Beijing have had no trial, or legal defence, but have simply been sentenced in a police station for up to four years in labour camp. Their offences have involved drugs or sex or property. And some have caused what are called ‘social disturbances.’

HOU WENZHUO, Human rights activist
The system of re-education through labour is aimed at petitioners, Falun Gong practitioners as well as petty criminals. Some of the people incarcerated in China have indeed done damage to society. At the same time, the people who have the strongest social conscience in China – the people with the greatest sense of justice – are also locked up.

NARRATOR
There’s an ideological dimension to the rehabilitation process. The idea that re-educated offenders will emerge from the camps remoulded as new people.

MUSIC (Communist Party reform song)
SONG (Subtitles)
Without the Communist Party there’d be no new China.

The Communist Party has saved China.
It guided the people to liberation.
It leads China towards enlightenment.
It has brought so many benefits to the people.

NARRATOR
There is talk about reforming the re-education through labour system, but new camps are being built alongside this one. Progressive people in the Party have no illusions about the divisive problems facing China and know that, after years of boom, fresh answers are needed.

Deputy Minister PAN YUE Environmental Protection Administration
Economic growth alone cannot solve our increasingly serious social problems. Cannot stop the polarisation of society, or narrow the rich-poor divide. Pure economic growth cannot solve our problems of political reform. If our political reform can’t keep up, then the faster the economy develops, the more political problems there are likely to be.

NARRATOR
At the National People’s Congress in 2006 the Prime Minister Wen Jiabao acknowledged the problems facing China’s rural population.

WEN JIABAO (Subtitles)
The public is worried about the difficulty and cost...of getting healthcare and education. Land requisitioning, evictions the reform of industry...and environmental pollution still harm the public interest...where laws and policies are not being followed.

NARRATOR
The Party’s answer is to build what it calls a ‘New Socialist Countryside’. There'll be free education, improved healthcare, no agricultural tax and an extra six billion dollars invested. But will the money and the measures reach the people?

Minister ZHAO QIZHENG, State Council Information Office
There are cases where good policy from the centre is not correctly implemented at local level. There are several reasons for this. One is that they might not understand the policy. Another is they may find that the policy doesn’t suit local interests. The third is the problem of individual morality. There’s corruption among individuals implementing policy from the centre. This includes some high-ranking officials.

NARRATOR
A litmus test for freedom and justice in China is: what happens when peaceable, patriotic people take Beijing at its word and use the law to take on local misrule and corruption?

Professor WANG XIXIN, Beijing University Law School
When we talk about civil society we think of each individual, each member of society having their rights. By exercising these rights they can limit the power of the state.

NARRATOR
Taishi Village in Guangdong Province is in a development zone. The soil is fertile. But its 2,000 villagers have been getting poorer, not richer. Their land’s been
grabbed for industry with local officials pocketing some of the compensation. But the people of Taishi invoked the law to oust the village committee. A film was made to record the events for posterity.

OLD WOMAN (Subtitles)
We want to get our rights back. We're not afraid today.

NARRATOR
But local government responded in force.

PROTESTERS (Subtitles)
The police are coming! You’re just trying to frighten us! It’s so awful. We’ve no comeback!

YOUNG MAN (Subtitles)
Don’t fight the law enforcement people – reason with them. Let’s be civilised villagers. Leave the violence to them.

NARRATOR
Hundreds of riot police swarmed over Taishi. They stole the account books containing evidence of wrongdoing. The villagers became increasingly appalled and angry.

MAN (Subtitles)
An official with any sense of justice could settle this easily. Are they even members of the Communist Party?

2ND ANGRY MAN (Subtitles)
I’m a Party member, and I’m furious with those corrupt bastards.

NARRATOR
Many villagers, including the elderly, were beaten and arrested...

WOMAN (Subtitles)
Those bastard police just hit out with their truncheons. They broke my mum’s arm. My own mum.

NARRATOR
For two months, Taishi became a magnet for journalists. Some took the side of local government, others were gripped by the story of ordinary people invoking the law against corrupt officials.

WOMAN (Subtitles)
We hope you media people can tell the world about us. Please alert central government leaders. We villagers are really helpless.

NARRATOR
Lawyers and academics gave the villagers free advice and helped spread the story. The villagers insisted on their rights, voted out the old guard and elected a new committee. The results were accepted as legal and valid. China’s Party newspaper, People’s Daily, praised the Taishi impeachment as “a model for village autonomy,” showing the “signs of a democracy controlled by legal process.” But then local government moved police and thugs back into the village to re-assert its authority. Supportive, sympathetic outsiders were chased away or, like this People’s Congress
Deputy, removed by force. The last thing the authorities want is for anyone to connect the dots between disaffected people across China.

WOMAN (Subtitles)
Don't hit the police back!

NARRATOR
With militia crawling all over the village, the newly elected committee stepped down on grounds of ill-health. The bad old officials were reinstated, with an even tighter grip on Taisha village.

WOMAN (Subtitles)
Give Taishi village back its freedom...or our lives will be in their hands. We'll be finished. They ignore the law and justice. With one hand they cover up the sky. They tyrannize us. They're lawless, unreasonable, unjust. We villagers all go by the law.

NARRATOR
Some think government backed bad officials against good villagers because it feared setting a dangerous precedent. There have been successful impeachments of village leaders, but what would happen to China's stability and Communist Party rule if everyone with a grievance took action in pursuit of justice?

DAI QING Journalist and activist
I don’t think revolution would bring any good to this land. It would only create chances for opportunists. I think China needs to change slowly. The change must start from people’s heads and their behaviour. This way the country, its environment and resources, will change too. But I don’t think we have enough time.

Professor WANG XIXIN, Beijing University Law School
I can understand it when the government, or some officials in the government, are not happy to see the growth of civil society, the awakening consciousness of individual rights, the emergence of groups with their own interests. It’s understandable. But on the other hand, we need to see that society is changing. Everyone yearns for rights, yearns for respect, yearns for some control over their lives. When the conditions are right everyone will make these demands.

END

ANNOUNCER
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