Summary: Not only did the Beijing rainstorm reveal the lack of infrastructure development in China, but it also showed the world that people in China are losing trust in China’s government. Moreover, they are taking action, and not just talking, to express their distrust.
The Chinese People Don’t Just Distrust the Government; They Take Action

*Chinascope* recently published a commentary written by an expert on China issues, Dr. Shizhong Chen, titled, “The Mirror of China’s Failing State.” Dr. Chen observed that what the Chinese government claimed to be a ‘once-in-60-years’ rainstorm in Beijing has led the Western media to start looking beyond the China’s economic illusion to see the real China: an economic prosperity “at the expense of internal necessities that include infrastructure, education, and healthcare.” [1]

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**China Is Submerged in Distrust**

Despite the year over year economic growth in China, the Chinese people themselves have already begun to look beyond the government’s self proclaimed eulogies and its international façade of success. Many of them have lost trust in the government. In April 2011, *Chinascope* published a report titled, “The Credibility of China’s Government Is Dangerously Low.” [2] One year later, that credibility has sunk even lower.

One prominent example is the death of Zhou Kehua, which was a hot topic on the Chinese Internet in August. Zhou was China’s most-wanted serial-killer. He was said to have killed ten people in ten crimes in three provinces (Jiangsu, Hunan, and Sichuan) over the past eight years. On August 14, 2012, the Chongqing police released a photo of him and claimed that they had killed Zhou.

However, many people questioned the account that the police gave: Did the police actually kill Zhou, did he kill himself, or was he even killed at all?

As the pressure grew, the Chongqing police had to publish a microblog to reassure people that Zhou Kehua was indeed dead. [3]

Even the media joined the netizens in their scrutiny of the Chongqing Police. *Hunan Economy Television* produced a near-20 minutes video casting doubt from many angles on the account that the Chongqing Police gave. [4]
Xinhua republished an article by *Legal Daily*: “Having doubt is not a bad thing. Every citizen has the right to have doubt. Everyone has had, has, and will have doubt (about something). Having doubt is because people care. Having doubt is because there are suspicious issues. Having doubt is because their questions are not answered.” [5]

These days, the Chinese people have doubts about almost everything, especially the government.

After China sent Shenzhou-9 into space, netizens discovered that the official picture of China’s first female astronaut, Liu Yang in an astronaut suit, was a fake picture. Liu Yang’s head was copied from another picture of her and put on top of an astronaut’s space suit. Netizens were confused, “Why is there a need to even fake a picture?” [6]

On June 21, 2012, a person won the Beijing Lottery of 570 million yuan (US$90 million), the highest amount in China’s lottery history. People asked questions about his lottery ticket, but the Beijing government announced that they wouldn’t respond to any question. Several Chinese media, including *People's Daily* joined netizens in requesting answers. [7]

Liu Xiang, a national hero and gold medal favorite, fell after the first hurdle in the 110-meter preliminaries at the London Olympics. After people found out that the government knew about Liu Xiang’s foot injury before the game, Internet discussion exploded about whether the government arranged a show to have Liu Xiang fake his fall in order to fool the public. [8] “Reports that the entire send-off was premeditated began to emerge … when the head of CCTV’s on-air commentary unit admitted to the *Nanjing Oriental Guardian* that the group had four scripted Liu endings. Eventually, the primary commentator for the event, Yang Jian, employed the most dramatic possible conclusion, with Liu limping to the final hurdle to finish a race in which he had not crossed a finish line during his final two Olympic Games.” [9]

The Internet also exploded with suspicion over the government’s hasty murder trial of Gu Kailai, wife of Chongqing’s ousted Communist Party chief Bo Xilai.

As their distrust of the government grows, the Chinese people are no longer just talking on the Internet; they are confronting the government.

**Confronting the Government in the Beijing Rainstorm Donation Campaign**

On July 21, 2012, a rainstorm devastated Beijing. According to the government, it created a huge flood, overwhelmed Beijing’s drainage network, and (in many minds unnecessarily) claimed 77 lives. Chinese media called the rainstorm the “7-21
Catastrophic Natural Disaster.” The Beijing government decided to let Major Guo Jinlong champion a donation campaign. The campaign “called for all citizens in Beijing to unite together and take practical action to participate in the disaster relief work.” [10] The government published donation hotlines and accounts.

However, within two hours of the opening of the donation account, the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau, the government body that handled the donation, received over 70,000 replies, most of which used abusive, slandering language (in the category of four letter words). One of the most popular replies was “donate your sister.” [11]

Within a day, the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau received over 200,000 messages of “donate your sister,” 140,000 “get lost,” and 80,000 with the “F” word. [12]

These replies, however small they may seem to be, have a significant meaning. People are bringing their distrust of the government to a new level. They are confronting the government, sending messages to the government, and expressing their anger at the government.

An Internet posting in China explained people’s distrust of and unhappiness with the government:

“First, this donation proposal lacks public support. For natural disasters, from the Wenchuan earthquake to the Yushu earthquake, the public has donated a lot and demonstrated their love and caring for others, but Beijing’s rainstorm is quite different. Not only is the disaster level different (much smaller), but as the nation’s capital, Beijing itself is quite different from those remote areas. Its own financial capability should be strong enough to cover this. It is not at the point that it needs people to open their wallets to help.

“The weirdest thing is that, Beijing this time is calling all citizens in the city to donate to the victims. However, Beijing citizens themselves are the victims. Having victims donate money to themselves, doesn’t that sound ridiculous?” [13]

Where Government Money Goes: So Many Incredible Examples

Commentator Chen Weijian posted a commentary on the overseas media Boxun.com: “The public cursed the government instead of donating money. It is not that people are bad, but the government has done so many incredible things. On China’s foreign diplomacy, in July, at the Fifth Conference of Ministers of China-Africa Cooperation Forum, China offered Africa concession loans of US$20 billion. The government also waived Vietnam’s US$50 billion loan which is due now and gave the Philippines
US$110 million to improve its water supply. Some netizen calculated that China provided 123 billion yuan (US$20 billion) in foreign aid just in July. [14]

“What about internal corruption? Bo Xilai’s corruption was estimated at US$ 6.8 billion. Huang Sheng, Deputy Governor of Shandong Province, took in US$ 9 billion. Then in the infamous Guo Meimei’s case last year people saw corruption in the largest charitable organization in China (the Red Cross of China). [15] A recent estimate of government officials spending of public money on their own transportation, food, and travel was 900 billion yuan (US$143 billion). Just looking at the examples above, it is no longer an easy matter for the government to ask people to donate money. Therefore, when the Beijing government ignored the extravagances and how the people’s funds were squandered, and proceeded with a donation appeal, it was understandable that people responded with insults.”

“Actually, Beijing government’s call for flood relief donations unintentionally initiated a public referendum on the government. The government, not expecting this result, was embarrassed and angry. It is not that Communist officials know nothing about the world. They have been abroad many times. They know that even countries in Africa have adopted the one-person-one-vote system. If this donation protest were considered a vote of trust in the government, they would all have to step down. So (to them), democracy should definitely be avoided in China.”

Farewell to Ding Zhijian

Ding Zhijian’s death provides a prime example of government action leading to distrust.

Ding Zhijian was an editor at the “A-A Bear,” a publication for children. His car was trapped in the water on the highway in the Guangqumen section of Beijing. Tengshun (QQ.com) produced a seven-minute video, “Helpless People in the Rainstorm: Farewell at Guangqumen.” [16] In the video, Ding Zhijian’s wife Qiu Yan talked about how she repeatedly begged the government workers to save her husband. For two and half hours, they took no action. By the time they got to him, he was already dead. The video is banned in China.

The opening of the video said, “We dedicate this short video to those helpless people in the 7-21 catastrophic rainstorms and to our questions and reflections about what they experienced.” The latter part of the sentence is a Chinese way of criticizing the government.
In the video, Qiu Yan said that around 7:40 p.m. on July 21, 2012, she received a call from her husband Ding Zhijian. He said, “(My car) is under the flyover bridge. There is water… I can’t open the door… I called 110 (China’s equivalent of the U.S. 911) but I can’t get through.” After a moment, Ding Zhijian called for the last time, “Quick, please come to rescue me. I can’t open the door. There is no longer enough air in the car.”

Qiu Yan brought a hammer and rushed to the site around 8:10 p.m. She asked a policeman, “I beg you. There is a person in the car.” He responded, “It’s not my business. Go talk to the firefighters.” She then ran to a fire truck and told the firefighters, “There is a person in the car.” All she got was the response, “OK” but no action. She kept asking and begging for help: “There is a person in the car!” The firefighters went on the flyover bridge to look. Then they went to the service road which was also under water and stopped there.

Qiu Yan pleaded with them. The firefighters told her, “We are doing rescue work. Don’t you see there are people (in the water)?” Eventually, a firefighter came and said manager so and so was coming. Then all of sudden, all firefighters started working. In ten minutes, two fire engines came out. They pulled Ding Zhijian’s car out of the water, but Ding was already dead.

Qiu Yan noted that it was at least two and half hours before the real rescue work even started. She thought the firefighters did the rescue work merely for show (as their manager had arrived).

Qiu Yan also asked people at the scene to save his husband. A young man took off his clothes and jumped into the water, trying to swim to the car, but the firefighters wouldn’t even give him a life jacket or life buoy!

When it comes to human life, government employees and the people’s responses differ dramatically.

It is quite sad to watch the video. With repeated examples such as this, how can people trust the government?

Confronting the Government in Shifang and Qidong

Because of the growing distrust in the government, people no longer rely on the government. Instead, they stand up to the government to demand their rights. In December 2011, “Wukan villagers staged anti-corruption protests that quickly developed a national and supportive online constituency. The Party responded with
elections for new local leaders.” [17] Two recent events at Shifang, Sichuan Province and Qidong, Jiangsu Province provide further examples.

The people of Shifang learned that the government approved the Hongda smelting plant project, which would bring dangerous amounts of pollution to the city. On July 1, 2012, tens of thousands of citizens protested against the project. The government sent police, armed police, and anti-riot police to the site. The protesters and the police clashed; there were some injuries; but in the end, the Shifang government agreed to stop the smelting project. [18]

On July 28, 2012, the citizens of Qidong protested against a project for the Nippon Paper Group’s plant to build a system to discharge waste water into the sea. People were concerned that this would result in substantial pollution. During the protest, thousands of people entered the municipal government building and searched the officials’ offices. They found luxury goods and exposed them publicly. A thousand police arrived but didn’t take action against the protesters. The government gave in to the people’s demand and announced that they would forever cancel this waste water discharge project. [19]

During the event, the protesters held Qidong Party Secretary Sun Jianhua and Major Xu Feng captive and beat them. They focused mainly on Sun Jianhua because he signed for the government on the waste water discharge project. They took his T-shirt and one protester handed him a T-shirt with “Resist Nippon Paper” written on it. Sun chose to remain shirtless. [20]

Asian Times observed that “a most interesting and important element of the Shifang and Qidong actions is the prominence of a confrontational vanguard of young people - high school students and twenty-somethings (collectively known as ‘after 80s’ and ‘after 90s’ for their birth years) who appear quite happy to mix it up violently with the cops and cadres.” [21]

Again, people had reason to express anger toward the government. Qidong citizens found a lot of interesting things in the official’s offices: ginseng, Zhonghua cigarettes (the best national cigarette brand in China), Wuliangye white spirits (one of the two best wines in China), and top-brand red wines. People also found a “Price List for Business Trips to Taiwan.” The list showed that it would cost the government 13,000 yuan (US$2,000) to pay for a public servant’s trip to Taiwan; the official would stay at a five-star hotel, and would receive a per diem of 450 yuan (US$71).

The T-shirt that Sun Jianhua wore was a Lozio, an expensive Italian fashion brand. A Lozio T-shirt costs over 2,000 yuan (US$320) in China. As a reference, many Chinese
earn less than 2,000 yuan per month and migrant workers earn only 800 to 1,000 yuan per month.

People also found a lot of condoms in the officials’ offices. An article explained why there were so many condoms.

“All actually many Chinese don’t know that the offices of many Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials have two rooms. The inside room is for the official to rest. It has a bed, so it is not hard to figure out how many officials start their journey toward corruption on this bed. The most infamous one is the former CCP head Jiang Zemin. When he was the Minister of the Electronics Industry, he often had secret meetings with his subordinate Huang Liman in his office during the midday rest.

“When a Shenzhen Stability Preservation official harassed his female subordinate it was also in his office. The Sansui County Executive, Guizhou Province, who was exposed in 2011 for having AIDS and having sexual relations with over 30 female officials, also is reputed to have used his office. The condoms in the Qidong Party Secretary’s and Major’s offices, as well as women’s undergarments found in the office of Luo Yingguo, the Maoming City Party Secretary of Guangdong Province, further demonstrated that, in addition to the well-known fact that CCP officials have mistresses, they also use their offices to trade in sex.” [22]

Regarding the Shifang and Qidong cases, even the state media Huanqiu couldn’t help commenting: [23]

“Some people go to the street because they don’t trust the local government. They don’t trust that they can resolve their issues through normal channels. The quick shutdown of the two projects at Shifang and Qidong suggests that the people are right in their distrust.”

Tang Taizong, the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty, liked to quote Xun Zi (313 B.C. – 238 B.C.), a philosopher from the Warring States period, “The Emperor is the boat and the people are the water. Water can carry the boat, and also capsize the boat.” [24] If the Chinese people continue to distrust their government and actions against the government intensify, it may be inevitable for the CCP boat to capsize.

**Endnotes:**


her wealth on the Internet. This caused public to doubt the integrity of the Red Cross of China.

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