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Popular Protest in Contemporary China: Complexity and Fluidity in Opportunities, Resources, Behavior, and Outcomes

Drawing on studies of collective contention in contemporary China and around the world, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for understanding opportunity structures, resources, behavior, and outcomes. Overall, the paper underscores the complexity of protest, suggesting that simple characterizations and explanations, including dichotomous analyses, may obscure more than they reveal. In reality, these variables are deeply intertwined and mutually influential. Comparing four contentious groups in China—Uighurs, Hong Kong residents, rank and file private sector workers, and well-off urban homeowners—the paper illustrates how protest opportunities, resources, behavior, and outcomes exist as fluid ranges and mixtures that exhibit multiple features simultaneously, instead of being separate factors with dichotomous features.

Over past three decades, scholars have heeded calls to expand the study of contentious politics from its early focus on Western advanced industrial liberal democracies to other regions and regime types.[1] These works have yielded new insights from a variety of contexts, but especially from Latin America, post-Soviet Russia and East/Central Europe, and the Middle East.[2] Meanwhile, the number of popular protests has exploded in China,[3] drawing the attention of China scholars and producing a rich array of research. Integrating insights from these bodies of literature, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for understanding protest opportunities, resources, behavior, and outcomes that aids in our understanding of collective contention in both China and other regions.

Overall, the inquiry herein underscores the complexity of popular protest, suggesting that simple characterizations and explanations, including dichotomous analyses, may obscure more than they reveal. Most fundamentally, the case of China indicates that opportunities, resources, behavior and outcomes are so intertwined and mutually influential that a separate focus on only one gives an incomplete picture. Relatedly, treating an "opportunity structure" as closed/open; societal resources as strong/weak; protest behavior as violent/nonviolent or law-abiding/extra-legal; and protest outcomes in terms of success/failure imposes more order and clarity than actually exists. A comparison of four contentious groups in China—Uighurs, Hong Kong residents, rank and file private sector workers, and well-off urban homeowners—illustrates how political opportunities, resources, protest behavior, and outcomes exist as fluid spectrums and mixtures that exhibit multiple features simultaneously, rather than as separate factors with dichotomous features.

At the same time, a comparison of these four groups reveals patterns and correlations that parallel those found in other contexts. With regard to opportunity structures, findings from both China and elsewhere illustrate the role of elite divisions and official laws and rhetoric in shaping—and being shaped by—a group's social resources, protest behavior, and outcomes. Turning to social resources, this examination shows how the Internet and social media, and networks (both among activists and between activists and NGOs and elites) both influence and are influenced by opportunities, protest behavior, and outcomes. Relatedly, a focus on contentious behavior reveals how protestors' combined use of legal/extra-legal and violent/non-violent actions is not only shaped by opportunities, resources and outcomes, but

also shapes them. Finally, looking at the mixed nature of protest outcomes reveals their complex intertwinement with opportunities, resources, and behavior.

Political opportunity structures, resources, behavior, and outcomes: complexity and interactivity

The literature on popular contention in China and in other regions and contexts contains numerous relevant findings regarding opportunity structures, resources, behavior, and outcomes. Drawing together and expanding on these insights, this paper argues for the utility of a conceptual framework emphasizing the complexity and interactivity of these variables.

Political opportunity structures

As explained by Meyer and Minkoff, the "basic premise" of the notion of political opportunity structures is that "exogenous factors enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others, for particular strategies of influence to be exercised, and for movements to affect mainstream institutional politics and policy."[4] To enhance the analytical clarity and accuracy of this approach, they argue that scholars need to focus not simply on the general "openness" of the polity but rather on the specific opportunity structures related to particular groups and issues, as perceived by those groups.[5] Further they emphasize that "different elements of political opportunities" have varied effects on different protest outcomes.[6] The conceptual framework proposed in this paper encompasses these points, but adds that resources, behavior and outcomes (all conceived in nuanced ways) have a reflexive influence on political opportunity structures as well.

In the Chinese case, two aspects of (perceived) political opportunity stand out: elite divisions, and official laws and rhetoric. By far the most influential theoretical insight provided by China scholars in this regard is O'Brien's path-breaking formulation of the concept of

"rightful resistance:" citizens taking seriously constitutional provisions and laws that purport to protect citizen rights, and challenging regime authorities to make good on these legal claims.[7] Underlying such actions are perceived divisions within the political elite—in particular, the belief that higher-level authorities support beneficial laws that lower-level officials have violated.

This paper proposes that elite divisions are most usefully conceptualized in terms of (i) divisions among central political elites, (ii) divisions between higher and lower level political elites, and (iii) divisions among local elites, with regard to a particular aggrieved group's protest behavior and goals. In the general literature on collective contention, divisions among central elites have received the most attention. Overall, these works find that movements benefit from such divisions and are stymied when such divisions are not present or disappear.[8]

The "rightful resistance" approach emphasizes divisions between higher and lower level political elites, arguing that when national political leaders are united on a particular issue or with regard to the activities of a given group, if lower-level leaders behave in a way that violates this central-level stance, aggrieved citizens may perceive an opening for successful protest. As further discussed below, this situation typically occurs when the central stance is enshrined in official laws, policies and pronouncements. Relatedly, in China since the late 1990s, officials from the local level through the provincial level have been reviewed annually according to their record of maintaining "social stability," including numerical measures such as how many collective petitions are lodged with higher-level authorities, and how many popular "disturbances" occur within a particular jurisdiction. If officials fail to achieve the goals outlined in these criteria, the evaluation guidelines clearly state that this will result in dismissal.

Conversely, promotions are to be given only to officials who meet or exceed these specific goals. Unfortunately, this reality often has led local officials to repress local protests and even use violence against protest leaders. However, these evaluation criteria also have given aggrieved citizens leverage, as they know that if word of local unrest gets out, the local officials' reviews will be tarnished.[9]

Looking at divisions among local elites, although lower-level officials typically make decisions with an eye to their evaluation in terms of economic growth and social stability, individual leaders have different preferences and values that lead to divergences in their response to protest. In China in recent years, in some cases local political officials have sympathized with and even have led protests, whereas in others they have responded with intransigence or repression. Further, political authorities at different levels and in different governmental bodies have varied perspectives deriving from their placement in the governing structure. In China these divisions have been used most effectively by environmental activists, as myriad government entities and various levels have power over projects and issues that are related to the environment. In addition, in China divisions among political elites derive from the regime's decentralization and fragmentation. China's top leaders in the post-Mao period have allowed provincial and local leaders a great deal of autonomy so that they can experiment with potential "best practices" in terms of economic, social, and political management. As a result, there has been a vast amount of local variation in terms of what citizens have been allowed to do.

Related to elite divisions, official laws, policies and rhetoric form important parts of the perceived political opportunity structure for a particular group and issue. As noted above, the

existence of favorable laws, policies, or official rhetoric is what enables "rightful resistance" to occur when lower-level leaders violate the prescriptions of by central authorities. Within this general understanding, it is critical to specify the exact laws and official statements that in the perception of an aggrieved group support the group's particular demand. This includes specification of which government authorities at which level are perceived to stand behind specific policies and statements. Further, it is important to address the interactive nature of this aspect of the political opportunity structure and the protest behavior of a group. Groups that are able to point to supportive laws and official rhetoric are more likely to employ legal and institutionalized protest strategies, and these efforts in turn are more likely to elicit sympathetic government responses, including the formulation of more beneficial policies. Among the cases reviewed in this paper, well-off urban homeowners present the clearest case of this dynamic. On the opposite end of the spectrum, China's Uighurs have faced unified political elites and have viewed national laws and practices as the *source* of their grievances, eliciting extra-legal resistance that in turn has spurred greater elite unification and more negative policies.

Social resources

Social movement theory has long drawn on the resource mobilization approach, which highlights the role of social resources available to an aggrieved group, including existent social organizations and interpersonal networks.[10] More recent work has highlighted the role of intercommunication technologies (ICTs) in enabling activists to not only communicate and organize with another, but to "become" the media, counter-spin official and privately-owned media outlet coverage, and engage in "communication practices that constitute protest and

resistance in their own right."[11] Research on popular protest in China has detailed the specific role of these factors in facilitating mobilization, shaping tactics and outcomes, and in turn being shaped by them.

Further, Chinese cases of collective contention underscore how the socioeconomic status of a group relates to the social resources available to it. Overall, protestors with more money, connections, education, and status have been the most successful, and the least likely to be subjected to violent treatment. This has been most notably the case with affluent urban homeowners, but also with relatively well-to-do environmental activists. These factors similarly have worked to the benefit of protestors in Hong Kong. Conversely, groups with lower socioeconomic status and fewer resources—particularly farmers, private sector workers, Uighurs, and Tibetans, have had less protest success, and have been more likely to be met with forceful repression. Nonetheless, even resource-poor marginalized groups, such as farmers and taxi-drivers, have been able to gain some redress through protest.[12]

Related to socioeconomic status is access to ICTs. Between 1998 and 2018, Internet use in mainland China went from virtually nil to roughly 58 percent of the population, and about 87 percent of Hong Kong residents. Further, as of late 2016 an estimated 98 percent of Chinese netizens accessed the Internet through mobile devices.[13] As in most countries, Internet use increases with level of education, and is much more common in urban areas than in rural. Relatedly, in order to use the Internet to aid in protest, it is important that users be literate— which again tracks with age, level of education, and urban residency. In the mainland PRC, wealthier urbanites that have engaged in homeowner and/or environmental protest have been most advantaged by their use of ICTs. ICTs also have been a key resource used by activists in

Hong Kong, where the per capita income ranks among the wealthiest tier of countries worldwide.

ICTs have facilitated the dissemination of information, providing knowledge about relevant laws and policies that protestors can use to their advantage. In addition, ICTs allow citizens to circulate information about international and domestic developments that have fueled grievances (as in the case of nationalistic protests) and have provided information about successful protest tactics elsewhere (as in environmental, homeowner, and private sector worker activism). In a number of cases (particularly affluent homeowner actions, environment-related protests, and protests in Hong Kong), activists have capitalized on contacts with media personnel as well as the profit orientation of media outlets to gain publicity for their cause. ICTs also have stimulated feelings of efficacy by making it easier to mobilize large numbers of people around common concerns. With the "cost" of networking made very low by social media and other electronic communication mechanisms, the perceived obstacles to rallying a crowd large enough to make an impact have all but disappeared. Yet, ICTs have been much more available to aggrieved citizens that are relatively educated and affluent, and live in cities. ICTs have been relatively unimportant in rural-based protests in the mainland PRC.

Under Xi Jinping, mainland-based Chinese citizens' ability to use the ICTs to aid in their protests has constricted.[14] In August 2013, Xi reportedly called on CCP cadres to "wage a war to win over public opinion" and "seize the ground of new media."[15] Shortly thereafter, individuals with large microblog followings were subjected to deletions, locked accounts, arrests, and interrogations. In addition, central authorities closed popular "public accounts" that comment on current events on WeChat.[16] Also in late 2013, China's top judicial officials announced that

online speech would be subject to more severe and expansive considerations of what constitutes a "criminal offense," and that criminal defamation charges could result from postings deemed to threaten "public order" or "state interests." If a post is determined to be "false" or "defamatory," and is viewed more than 5,000 times or reposted more than 500 times, the user can be sentenced to up to three years in prison. In this context, hundreds of social media users have been detained and interrogated. Further, in early 2015, Party-state authorities began to successfully interfere with the "virtual private networks" (VPNs) that many users have relied on to circumvent "Great Firewall" blockages. [17] Thus, at present, in the mainland PRC it has become more difficult and risky for even advantaged socioeconomic groups to use ICTs to facilitate protest success.

One reason that even disadvantaged groups have had some success in achieving their aims is the strength of their interpersonal connections. In the case of farmers, this comes from their residential proximity in rural villages. For rank and file private sector workers, this derives from their working alongside one another for upwards of ten hours a day and living in small, typically crowded dormitories and shared flats. In this respect, well-off urban homeowners living in new housing tracts actually have been at a disadvantage: because they commute to work in different locations and typically have lived in the tract for a relatively short time, they tend to not know one another well.[18]

In addition to networks within aggrieved groups, networks between members of aggrieved groups and NGOs and/or social or political elites (such as lawyers, journalists, and government officials) can serve as a beneficial resource. NGOs have been particularly helpful in environmental and private sector worker activism. Political leaders in China became more

tolerant of civic groups focused on environmental matters beginning around 2010; as a result, NGOs (some with funding from international environmental groups) have proliferated at the national, provincial and local levels.[19] These groups have published reports on pollution impacts on health, represented citizens in court, and reported legal violations by businesses to government offices and media outlets. China's Ministry of Environmental Protection seems to have welcomed NGO participation.[20] NGOs also have played an important role in facilitating private sector worker protest, as detailed below.

Connections with lawyers, journalists, and political officials also have served as important resources for aggrieved groups. Chinese NGO officers and staff members not infrequently have been trained journalists or editors, and/or have legal backgrounds.[21] Indeed, a prime function of labor NGOs in China has been to provide legal advice to disgruntled workers.[22] For affluent urban homeowners, personal connections with academics, journalists, and political officials have worked to their advantage.

At the same time, social resources both affect and are affected by political opportunity structures, protest behavior, and protest outcomes. For example, Yuen finds that NGOs' success in "service activism" in Guangdong province is "determined by their degree of embeddedness in the local state and the nature of their advocacy strategies"—but that the strategies they choose in part as a result of their degree of embeddedness also effect outcomes, including their future embeddedness.[23] Looking at NGO actions in a case of environmental protest in the city of Kunming, Sun et al. point to similar dynamics wherein opportunities affect behavior, which in turn affect government responses and change prior opportunity structures.[24]

Protest behavior

Numerous studies examine the causes and consequences of protest behavior, both in China and in other regions and contexts. My own comparative study of the 1989 student movement in China and the 1990 student movement in Taiwan argues that student protest behavior emerged in response to specific opportunity structures, and that this behavior in turn affected each movement's outcomes.[25] More recently, White et al.'s research on popular campaigns against nondemocratic regimes in the former Soviet Union finds that a movement's choice of violent or nonviolent tactics is shaped by the perceived effectiveness of each given perceived political opportunity structures and the types of resources available to a particular group.[26]

A major focus of the existing literature on protest behavior focuses on the choice and effectiveness of violent versus nonviolent tactics, or legal versus extra-legal tactics.[27] Perhaps the most widely-read recent work on the subject is Chenoweth and Stephan's quantitative analysis of over 300 protests, which divides the cases into categories of "violent" and "non-violent" and finds that the latter have met with more success.[28] However, as Lehoucq argues, the dichotomous categorization of protest movements masks the reality that virtually all include a variety of tactics and behaviors and that these mixed actions change over time.[29] Research on collective contention in China underscores Lehoucq's point, suggesting that it is more accurate to view protest behavior as a complex and fluid combination of tactics that change and are changed by the responses of the protest target. The best theoretical articulation of this understanding is O'Brien's discussion of "boundary-spanning" collective contention that is neither entirely "contained" by Chinese ruling elites nor wholly "transgressive" of rules/laws made by political authorities.[30] As detailed below, these dynamics

are particularly apparent in mainland Chinese protests by affluent urban homeowners and rank and file private sector workers, but can also be seen in the activism of Hong Kong residents.

Protest outcomes

Regardless of specific focus, all studies of collective contention are interested in outcomes—what works and what does not? As seen in research on tactics, outcomes often are described in dichotomous terms such as success versus failure, or accommodation versus repression. Yet, as with tactics, the case of China indicates that outcomes are best conceived as mixed and fluid. For example, protest leaders often are fired or detained even when protest demands are addressed. Or, the goals of the protestors are achieved in the short term (e.g., an unwanted construction project is halted) only to be revived in the future. Relatedly, protest "success" can mean a variety of things, ranging from specific demands being partially or fully addressed to broader policy change. Similarly, "failure" can span from demands being partially or wholly unaddressed, to threats, harassment, job loss, detention, arrest, beatings, and death—for one or any number of participants.

In sum, although it might be easier to view the variables related to collective contention in simple dichotomous terms that more readily can be assessed in a "scientific" fashion, doing so obscures the complex and fluid interplay of political opportunity structures, social resources, protest behavior, and protest outcomes. A better framework treats these variables as ranges, where specific events and movements can shift over time, and can exhibit multiple characteristics simultaneously. At the same time, although neat scientific answers may be elusive, correlations and patterns may be observed that help us to better understand what in reality is a messy, unpredictable realm of human activity.

Illustrative cases

The four illustrative cases chosen here illuminate the complexity and interactivity of political opportunities, social resources, protest behavior, and protest outcomes, while also revealing a number of general correlations and patterns. They form useful comparative reference points due to their similarities in some respects but differences in others.

The case of Uighur activism exemplifies the least favorable circumstances of the four cases: elites are united in their opposition to Uighur demands, and Uighurs have few social resources to draw on. Their tactical options have been highly constrained, contributing to behavior that has elicited only further elite opposition.

For activists in Hong Kong, the situation has been better, but not ideal: central elites increasingly have opposed Hong Kongers' demands, but some lower-level political leaders have been supportive. Relevant laws have been hotly contested, providing the potential for "rightful resistance" while simultaneously undermining it. Some social resources have been beneficial, while others have been lacking. These factors have shaped and been shaped by a mixture of law-abiding and "transgressive" behavior that has prompted and also has been transformed by varied governmental reactions.

Mainland Chinese private sector workers have enjoyed a more advantageous position than Uighurs in all respects, but have been simultaneously more and less disadvantaged than Hong Kong protestors and mainland Chinese affluent homeowners, depending on the variable considered. Private sector workers have been able to capitalize on central elite sympathy and supportive national laws, while local authorities have evidenced varied stances toward worker complaints, in part tracking with geographical location. In terms of resources, private sector

workers have not been able to benefit from ICTs to the same degree that Hong Kongers and affluent mainland homeowners have, but private sector workers have enjoyed stronger within-group cohesion. In turn, private sector workers' contentious behavior has evidenced mixed tactics and results, which have in turn influenced private sector workers' opportunity structures and resources.

Affluent urban homeowners in mainland China have enjoyed the most favorable position of the four cases studied here, with central elites and laws on their side and an array of beneficial resources to draw on—enabling a greater ability to achieve the satisfaction of their demands through more law-abiding, institutionalized behavior. In contrast to the case of Uighurs, where the combination of factors has precipitated a destructive cycle, the case of affluent urban homeowner activism represents a constructive cycle. The pages that follow provide a more detailed discussion of each.

Well-off urban homeowners

Among the four cases examined in this paper, affluent urban homeowner activism illustrates the most propitious combination of opportunity structures, resources, behavior, and outcomes.[31] Collective contention on the part of well-off homeowners arose alongside the hastened construction of residential tracts beginning around the turn of the millennium.[32] The vast majority of these sites are exclusive/gated, with security guards to ensure that outsiders are denied entrance, and community amenities such as parks and recreational centers.

Homeowner grievances and collective actions have been shaped by divisions among political elites and the existence of supportive laws. The private developers that build the tracts, the private management companies that manage the site once completed, and local

political officials share a common goal: to profit from the newly-constructed developments. As a result, they not infrequently have promised home buyers desirable features and services, but then fail to deliver them, or take them away when a new opportunity for profit emerges. When residents and developers and/or private management companies have disputed these actions, local authorities often have sided with the latter.[33]

Official directives and regulations have helped to spur these homeowners to protest, but also have been changed in response to their activism. These developments are related to local governing structures in urban areas. The lowest formal government body in urban neighborhoods is the Residents' Committee (RC), which is designated as an elected body, but in reality typically has been chosen and controlled by higher-level political leaders. One step up from the RC is the Street Office, which oversees multiple RCs. In 1994, the central Ministry of Construction (MOC) directed the owners and residents of urban residential tracts to elect "homeowner associations" (*yezhu weiyuanhui*; hereafter HOA) with the rights to establish a "management charter," and to represent and "uphold the legal rights and interests" of the owners and occupants. The HOA also was given the power to hire and fire the private management company that oversees the daily operation of the tract.[34] However, the directive left unclear the relationship among HOAs, RCs, and Street Offices.

In 2003, China's central State Council updated the 1994 MOC regulations, attempting to draw clear boundaries around the power of the HOAs, and to re-assert the primacy of government bodies (particularly RCs and Street Offices) in overseeing private housing tracts. The 2003 stipulations refer to HOAs as "executive" rather than "representative" bodies, and lay out their "responsibilities" rather than their "rights." The regulations also suggest that HOA

powers "should be confined to the hiring and firing of a management company," and "reiterate[] in several places that [HOAs] are to be subordinate to government authorities."[35] Further, the document requires that any action or decision undertaken by an HOA must first be approved by a homeowner assembly (*yezhu dahui*) that includes all residents/owners. Moreover, the regulations stipulate that dismissing a management company requires a two-thirds vote of the homeowner assembly—a very high bar that is difficult to meet, particularly in large tracts with thousands of residents, and also given that most residents work full time and some owners do not reside in the tract.[36]

Simultaneously, central authorities have demonstrated support for the interests of urban homeowners. Most importantly, in 2007, a new law was issued that for the first time in the history of the PRC protects private property rights. In addition, the law formally recognizes the "collective property rights of homeowners to common areas in their communities" and the "right of collective governance either through general meetings…or by forming a homeowners' association with a corresponding board of directors." Thus, the law provides "strong legal support for homeowners who seek to litigate against the infringement of their property rights."[37] As discussed in more detail below, homeowners actively participated in the consultation process that preceded the promulgation of this law. Meanwhile, lower-level authorities have issued regulations that have both shaped and been influenced by homeowner activism.

Turning to social resources, the internal cohesion of new residential community members has varied, but generally has been low. In developments where a problem or violation has affected all or most owners and has been seen as a serious or grave matter, cross-

community connections have developed. Community cohesion also has varied according to the percentage of residents that are both the actual unit owners and Chinese nationals (as opposed to expatriate foreigners). Further, cohesion has been greater in smaller or moderately-sized tracts than in large developments. In smaller tracts, communication and mobilization are easier, and the prevalence of "free-riding" (not participating but gaining the benefits from others' collective action) is less severe. Given that the average new residential compound houses 2,000-3,000 families that do not know one another before moving in, these problems are common.[38]

At the same time, the affluence of these homeowners has translated into other kinds of social resources. Individuals with the wherewithal to purchase units in new developments typically have a college education and work in "white collar" jobs. Their employment tends to be stable, flexible, and well-paid, such that they have the ability to invest substantial amounts of time in their activism—including hiring domestic help for their family members' basic needs. The leaders of homeowner protest in new tracts have been relatively young, and a notably high proportion has been women—including stay-at-home wives/mothers who do not need to work for pay outside the home. Also, many have had experience living abroad.[39]

Looking at behavior, homeowners in new residential communities have referenced the law in their collective actions, and have portrayed themselves as being loyal to the central government. Their resistance typically has begun with voicing their grievances through legal, institutionalized channels, such as filing collective lawsuits and submitting collective petitions to "letters and visits" offices. Since the late 1990s, such actions have been common. When legal channels have failed (as often has been the case), they have turned to non-institutionalized

methods. Some of these actions have been physical, including both non-violent hunger strikes and occasionally more violent acts, such as destroying buildings whose construction they oppose.[40] Other tactics employed by affluent homeowners have capitalized on their privileged socio-economic status. Because virtually all new housing tracts have Internet connections, residents in many developments have established listservs and blog sites for the community, thus enabling virtual discussion of common issues as well as mobilization for potential collective actions. Indeed, HOA blogs are among the largest on the Chinese Internet.[41] Another tactic distinctive to these communities is refusing to pay management company fees until the issue is resolved. In addition, some disgruntled residents have skirted official prohibitions on street gatherings by engaging in "driving" or "parking" protests in their cars, with banners and/or broadcasted messages voicing their displeasure. This method of protest displays the affluence of these homeowners, as only a small minority of Chinense citizens are wealthy enough to own their own vehicles. Further, some homeowners in new residential communities have used their connections with academic institutions to procure data to support their claims.

A unique—and significant—feature of homeowner activism in new residential communities has been the rise of cross-community organization. Illustrating how opportunity structures can both give rise to collective action and be shaped by it, these associations have used existing laws to justify their formation, and then have worked to further change the law to better protect their interests. United groups of HOAs have emerged in a number of cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. They have arisen due to homeowner activists' perception that concerted action will give them more strength vis-à-vis their opponents, and to their belief that the only way to resolve the many specific problems facing

individual communities is to modify the law.[42] Most have not been officially approved as "legal"

organizations. Yet in a number of cases, they have operated relatively openly, and have

maintained regular communication with local officials. At the same time, the leaders of the

various HOAs that are part of these alliances have shared information and provided advice to

one another. Further, in some instances they have worked together to formulate and submit

suggestions to government agencies, in a form of political lobbying.[43] In addition, they have

worked to mobilize and advise homeowner groups and cross-city associations in other

locations, such as Xian and Anhui. In some cases, they have received advice from local scholars.

Some also have created websites, and have successfully worked with local media outlets to

publicize homeowner mistreatment by management companies. Finally, some of these activists

have been elected to the district-level government bodies. In Guangzhou, a group leader quit

his job in order to devote his time to the cause.[44]

The official response to protests by homeowners in new residential communities has

varied, including intransigence and at times the use of force by local economic and political

elites, and sympathetic treatment from central authorities. In some cases, developers and

private management companies have threatened homeowner activists, and have hired thugs to

beat them. Local political leaders, who have tended to see their interests as being intertwined

with those of the companies, often have worked in tandem with them to tamp down

homeowner activism. RC leaders have contacted residents who are CCP members, pressuring

them to oppose homeowner activists; have prevented activists from contacting residents (e.g.,

tearing down posters, removing material from mailboxes, and refusing to provide contact lists);

and have meddled in HOA elections to ensure that the HOA will be obedient to the RC. Overall,

however, local economic and political elites have been less prone to use violence toward affluent homeowners than they have been with regard to other kinds of protestors. Further, activist HOA leaders generally have not been subjected to detention, arrest, or other kinds of legal punishment.[45]

When protests among residents of new housing tracts have become so widespread and serious that they have come to the attention of higher-level authorities, central leaders have issued new laws and policies designed to address the underlying problem. Moreover, in some important instances—such as the lengthy consultation process that preceded the passage of the 2007 private property law—governing officials have incorporated the input of HOA activists. In this respect, political elites have been receptive to a form of political lobbying on the part of affluent homeowners.[46]

Overall, affluent urban homeowner activism displays a relatively constructive cycle of protest and response. Simultaneously, this case illustrates the mixed and intertwined nature of opportunities, resources, behavior, and outcomes.

Rank and file private sector workers

For rank and file private sector workers, changes in opportunity structures beginning in the early 1990s have coincided with rising labor activism. Policy shifts in the early 1990s led to an exponential rise in the number of private sector employees in China—from nearly 22 million in 1989 to more than 200 million in 2006.[47] Most of these workers have been young women from rural inland regions who have taken jobs in manufacturing, textile, and garment firms in coastal areas.[48]

Similar to affluent urban homeowners, central political authorities have evidenced sympathy with private sector workers, and have made statements and passed favorable laws that workers have been able to reference when their employers (often with the support of local political authorities) have violated them. In 1994, a new national Labor Law stipulated that laborers in state, private, and foreign enterprises were subject to the same employment standards in terms of hours, rest periods, overtime, and minimum pay. Simultaneously, the law required that private sector workers sign contracts delineating their terms of employment and job termination. Further, beginning in the late 1990s, central political elites became more willing to pressure foreign-invested firms to comply with Chinese labor laws.[49]

In the first decade of the 2000s, government rhetoric and policies more explicitly addressed the economic grievances of private sector employees. In 2003, central authorities demanded that migrant workers be paid more regularly. In 2004, city government officials in Beijing guaranteed legal rights to timely pay and improved working conditions for migrant workers.[50] Also in 2004, the CCP Central Committee voiced a new and sympathetic assessment of worker protests, acknowledging that they "were not necessarily anti-government or politically motivated," but rather occurred because "the masses believe their rights have been violated."[51] In 2005, national political leaders demanded that employers pay their workers "fully and on time," and instructed local governments to set aside contingency funds to prevent wage arrears.[52] In 2006, the State Council issued a document calling for "'fair and equal treatment without discrimination' for migrant workers," and outlining "specific solutions to the problems of low wages, wages in arrears, long work days, poor safety conditions, lack of social security, high rates of work-related illness and accidents, and the need for employment

training, housing as well as schooling for the children of migrant workers."[53] In 2008, central

authorities passed the Labor Contract Law, which stipulated that workers completing two short-

term contracts be granted full-time status and permanent benefits; empowered workers to

bargain collectively with employers; and required that dismissed workers be given one month's

severance pay for each year worked. The same year, a new Labor Dispute Mediation and

Arbitration Law simplified labor dispute settlement procedures, extended the statute of

limitations for labor violations, and reduced labor dispute settlement fees.[54]

These changes represented government responses to worker protests that had emerged

throughout the period.[55] Even when the specific grievances articulated in a particular strike or

labor action were not addressed, central authorities reviewed data collected by lower-level

offices on the frequency, type, and demands of worker protests, and then based on this

information formulated policies and laws and made public statements designed to ameliorate

the causes of worker dissatisfaction and protest.

Yet the passage of these laws have not led to the disappearance of labor grievances.

For, employers routinely have violated labor laws. In surveys conducted in 2006, for example,

only about half of private enterprise workers had signed job contracts, and a substantial portion

had never heard of a job contract. Those who had signed contracts often were not allowed to

see the terms stipulated in the document.[56] A 2001 survey of migrant workers in Guangdong

province found that 80 percent worked more than ten hours per day, and more than 50 percent

worked twelve to fourteen hours. Nearly half rarely had a day off.[57] Private sector factory

workers also have faced stringent workplace regulations and steep fines.[58] Concomitantly,

private sector employers regularly have withheld worker pay for long periods, have not paid

extra for overtime, and/or have failed to provide wages at previously stipulated rates. These violations have remained prevalent despite the passage of the 2008 Labor Contract Law. Indeed, since the passage of that law, private businesses increasingly have hired employees through short-term subcontracting, which has enabled employers to avoid many of the Labor Contract Law's stipulations. Amendments to the law that took effect in July 2014 were designed to limit the use of subcontractors, but have had little apparent effect.[59]

To the degree that private sector workers have been aware of labor laws, they have felt that their legal rights have been violated. Further, they have believed that since higher-level authorities passed the laws, those authorities are likely to side with workers in cases where workers protest against the violation of the law. Moreover, inasmuch as workers have been aware that higher-level authorities have done so in the past, workers have been more likely to feel that their protest has some likelihood of success.

In terms of resources, because private sector workers are poor, they have few connections with elites such as journalists and political officials, and less access to ICTs than do wealthier groups. In this sense, these workers are disadvantaged relative to affluent homeowners. Yet rank and file private sector workers simultaneously have an advantage in terms of internal cohesion, as they typically live together in crowded dorms or flats, often in the same building where they work alongside one another for nearly all of their waking hours.

In addition, private sector workers have benefited from the establishment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to workers' rights. In 2008, there were estimated to be more than thirty of them in the Pearl River Delta area of Guangdong province.[60] Labor NGOs also have emerged and operated in virtually every other area of China that has large

numbers of migrant workers. These groups have been key in educating private sector workers about relevant laws, and in providing them with advice regarding strategies that have been used to effectively advocate for workers' interests.

The legal status of labor NGOs has varied by group and by location. Although central policy forbids the establishment of labor unions that are not affiliated with the government-affiliated All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), there is no national law expressly banning the creation of NGOs devoted to labor issues. In order to have official legal status, such a group must register with the government. If the group wishes to be designated a "social organization" (*shehui tuanti*), it must find a government-affiliated department (such as Human Resources and Social Security) or "mass" organization (such as the ACFTU, the All-China Women's Federation, or the Communist Youth League) to sponsor it. In addition, the group must register with the local Civil Affairs office. Few labor NGOs have been able to succeed at these tasks. Consequently, most have either foregone registration altogether, or have registered as for-profit enterprises with the departments of industry and commerce. Those that have taken the former path in many cases have been tolerated by local authorities, and in some instances have been quite active and open in their activities. However, their lack of legal status has put them in a vulnerable position. Studies of labor NGOs in the 2000s have found that although the core service of these groups has been to assist migrant workers in labor disputes with their employers, the groups have been careful to portray their actions as law-abiding and intended to help local officials achieve their policy goals.[61] Through the first decade of the 2000s, labor NGOs that were seen in this light by political authorities generally did not face any official harassment. To the contrary, many enjoyed positive relationships with local officials,

and regularly visited government offices to report on and discuss their activities. During this period, typically only groups that overtly violated the law (such as by trying to establish independent labor unions) faced punishment.[62]

Since 2015, however, party-state authorities have demonstrated much less tolerance toward labor NGOs and their leaders; in contrast with earlier years, dozens of labor activists have been arrested, detained, and/or harassed. In December 2015, eighteen labor activists were detained and nearly twenty-four more were interrogated in Guangdong province alone, "contributing to an overall climate of fear" in the region. The charges against them included "inciting crowds to disrupt public order." As a result, "many [labor] NGOs have found it almost impossible to carry out their work."[63]

Regarding behavior, the disjuncture between the law and reality with regard to private sector workers has led workers to focus their ire on their employers, and on occasion on local political authorities who support employers, but almost never on China's national leaders or overall political system. Because of this focus, nearly all private sector worker protests have been small-scale and localized in nature. Further, workers' complaints have been almost entirely material, focusing on compensation, wage arrears, pay increases, social insurance, overtime, management practices, and working conditions.[64]

Turning to outcomes, almost without exception, private business owners and managers have responded to workers' collective actions with threats and harassment, and not infrequently physical violence. The response of local political officials has varied. In some geographic regions (such as Guangzhou), local authorities have learned over time that worker protests end best when police intervention is avoided. However, even in these localities, public

security forces have been known to use strong-arm tactics when local officials believe that worker protests are "disrupting social order."[65] Further, in some cases this intervention has resulted in violent conflicts between police and protesters, and the arrest of protest leaders. However, when national political authorities have become involved in resolving labor disputes (something that has occurred only when protests have grown sufficiently in size, intensity, and duration) central elites usually have sided with the protestors.

In 2008, as private sector protests spiked in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics, political authorities increasingly began to provide restive workers with financial compensation. Officials even coined a slogan to describe this practice: "buying peace with money."[66] Private sector strike activity increased again in 2010. These protest actions occurred in the context of a tightening labor market as export growth surged and domestic demand increased. In order to attract labor, Guangdong political authorities raised the minimum wage by over 20 percent. At the same time, working conditions in most private sector businesses did not improve. To the contrary, conditions in many cases worsened as workers faced higher production demands. When reports emerged of worker suicides at a Foxconn factory (a major supplier to Apple, Hewlett Packard, Nintendo and Sony), Chinese government officials publicly criticized Foxconn management, and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao told a group of young private sector factory workers that "migrant workers are the mainstay of China's industrial workforce. Our society's wealth [is a] distillation[] of your hard work and sweat. Your labor is glorious and should be respected by society at large."[67]

Since late 2014, private sector worker strikes again have increased. This development has been spurred by a significant slowdown in the Chinese economy, which has led many

private employers to lay off workers, withhold their wages and benefits, or shut down entirely.[68] In the numerous labor disputes that have arisen during this period, workers have highlighted the illegal nature of employer practices. [69] Chinese political authorities have responded to this rise in worker protests with a mixture of repression and concession. As discussed above, much more than in the past, national leaders have condoned and even pressed for the arrest of labor activists, and have publicized their punishment.[70] In addition, in early 2016 some central party-state officials publicly expressed the view that China's labor laws are overprotective of workers, and should be reconsidered.[71] Simultaneously, however, political elites have pressured private employers to settle disputes through labor concessions.[72]

Overall, compared with the more constructive cycle of protest and response enjoyed by affluent homeowners, private sector worker activism has displayed a more mixed dynamic.

Hong Kong residents

Collective contention on the part of Hong Kong residents also displays mixed dynamics, with the combined features of opportunity structures, resources, behavior, and outcomes evidencing both similarities and differences with those seen in the cases of homeowner and private sector worker protests.

In some basic ways, Hong Kong residents engage more favorable political opportunity structures than has been the case for mainland Chinese private sector workers and affluent homeowners, including a quasi-democratic "hybrid regime" with a semi-independent judiciary, a relatively free mass media system, and an elected legislature.[73] In terms of elite divisions, however, Hong Kongers' situation is not clearly more favorable. Most importantly, central PRC elites have been united in opposition to most of Hong Kong residents' recent political demands.

At the same time, divisions among political elites with authority positions at lower levels, and between some local political officials and national elites, have worked to the benefit of Hong Kong activists. In terms of social resources, Hong Kong residents, like mainland Chinese urban homeowners, have benefited from their prosperity in terms of ICT availability and connections with journalists, academics, and political elites (in turn related to Hong Kong's relatively "open" and "democratic" political opportunity structures). Their activism also has been facilitated by the existence of civil society groups, including religious organizations and student associations. Influenced by these factors (but also influencing them in return), Hong Kongers' protest behavior has been mostly law-abiding, but has displayed "boundary-transgressing" features as well. Similarly, protest outcomes have been mixed, and have had a reflexive effect on opportunity structures, resources, and activist behavior.

For the first five years after Hong Kong was "returned" to China in in 1997 (following roughly one hundred years of British rule), PRC authorities allowed the political status quo to persist: civil liberties were respected, the judiciary was allowed to act independently, and the legislature continued to hold a critical mass of democratically-elected representatives and liberal democratic activists. Moreover, mainland CCP leaders did not meddle in Hong Kong affairs. From 2002-2012 (under the PRC's Hu Jintao administration), central PRC leaders made strong moves to assert dominance over Hong Kong, but largely were rebuffed in their efforts as Hong Kong residents capitalized on the territory's relatively democratic political opportunity structures and sympathetic local political officials. In 2002, PRC elites directed Hong Kong's Chief Executive to create a new "subversion" law for the territory. Citizens organized large scale street rallies to oppose this move, and supportive representatives in Hong Kong's legislature

worked to block and/or change the bill. When it became clear that the law did not have the

votes to gain approval in Hong Kong's legislature, discussion of the bill was postponed. Buoyed

by this success, Hong Kongers began to push for direct election of Hong Kong's Chief Executive

and legislature.[74] CCP leaders on the mainland and pro-Beijing officials in Hong Kong

attempted—through legal mechanisms—to assert greater control, and increasingly prosecuted

the leaders of street protests.[75] The biggest subsequent demonstrations of this period occurred

in 2012, in response to a proposed National Education curriculum for Hong Kong students.

Opposition to the plan was led by high school students, but included a wide array of civic

groups. Along with collecting roughly 100,000 signatures on a petition to revoke the proposal,

citizens held marches, occupations, and sit-ins. Their efforts were successful; the curriculum

plan was put on hold.[76]

From 2013 through the present (under the administration of PRC leader Xi Jinping),

central authorities have continued to assert control over Hong Kong, but have exercised caution

in using force. Illustrating this combination of factors was the massive "Umbrella Movement"

that arose in Hong Kong in 2014. These protests were sparked when central CCP leaders ruled

that Hong Kong's Chief Executive election of 2017 would not feature universal suffrage. For

nearly eighty days, massive marches, demonstrations and occupations swept the territory,

including Hong Kong residents from nearly all walks of life. Although there were some instances

of violence on the part of local authorities and some protest leaders were arrested, in general

the PRC leadership (and its political representatives in Hong Kong) refrained from responding.

In the end, the protests waned without national or local CCP-affiliated leaders acceding to any

of the activists' demands. From 2015 through the time of this writing, tensions have been high

in Hong Kong and the political environment unsettled.

Uighurs

Of the four cases highlighted in this paper, Uighur activism is characterized by the most

disadvantageous combination of opportunity structures, resources, behavior, and outcomes,

resulting in a destructive protest cycle that has been damaging to all involved. China's Uighurs

are ethnic minorities within a nationwide population that is over ninety-one percent of Han

ethnicity. The vast majority of China's Uighurs reside in the vast "Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous

Region" (XUAR) that borders eight of China's fifteen neighbors over nearly 5,600 kilometers.

This region also has immense energy resources, and includes an international pipeline that

became active in 2005.[77] Consequently, central PRC authorities see the region as being of

critical strategic importance. At the same time, Uighurs have had a long history of conflict with

Chinese authorities that has bred numerous still-unresolved grievances. What is now the XUAR

was added to Chinese territory relatively late, under China's last dynasty, the Qing. From that

time through the early 1900s, violent conflicts between Xinjiang residents and Chinese political

leaders erupted almost every other year. Between 1944 and 1949, parts of Xinjiang were ruled

by the Eastern Turkestan Republic. Xinjiang formally became a province of the PRC in 1949.

From the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s, unrest was relatively rare, but when it occurred,

featured separatist demands.

A key shift in Chinese Uighurs' political opportunity structures occurred in the early

1990s, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the rise of independent Central Asian

states. This not only instilled Uighurs with renewed hope for the possibility of establishing an

independent Eastern Turkestan, but also gave aggrieved Uighurs in China potential foreign allies

and sources of support. Capitalizing on this new opportunity, between 1990 and 2001, "'East

Turkistan' forces inside and outside China" were involved in more than two hundred "bloody

incidents," including "explosions, assassinations of government officials, poisoning, arson,

attacking government buildings, riots and assaults."[78] The government responded with harsh

punishment, arresting and executing numerous Uighurs, closing an airport, imposing curfews,

barring visitors to certain cities, and stationing armored troops in sites of contention.[79]

Top CCP leaders also reacted by cultivating positive diplomatic relations with the Central

Asian states, and by the turn of the millennium had succeeded in diminishing foreign support

for Uighur activism. In addition, the September 2001 attacks in the U.S. brought greater

international attention to countering "Islamic terrorism," leading U.S. government officials to

seek greater cooperation with China on "counter-terrorism" efforts and to show less interest in

supporting Uighur activism. In 2002, the United Nations Security Council added the "East

Turkistan Islamic Movement" to its sanctioned list of terrorist groups.[80]

From the turn of the millennium through the present, this more constricted opportunity

structure for Uighur activists has coincided with decreased activism within the XUAR, but an

uptick in violence outside of the region.[81] Around the start of the Beijing Olympics in 2008,

Uighur activists on at least two occasions used vehicles to ram a group of soldiers and throw

explosives at police vehicles and government buildings, resulting in numerous fatalities and

injuries.[82] In 2009, multi-day riots broke out between Uighurs and Han Chinese in Guangdong

province and the city of Urumqi in Xinjiang, related to a dispute between Uighur and Han

workers at a Guangdong factory. Altogether, nearly 200 were killed and over 1700 were

injured. Thousands of vehicles were destroyed, police barricades were overturned, and numerous government buildings were damaged.[83] The government response was harsh; large numbers of Uighurs were arrested, and many were sentenced to death. Government authorities also tried to block outside communications.[84]

Under Xi Jinping, tensions have only mounted. In 2014, eight Uighurs stabbed to death more than thirty Han civilians at a train station in the southwestern city of Kunming. Four of the assailants were killed by police, and the other four were arrested. Government authorities have since called for heightened restrictions on religious practice in Xinjiang, including a ban on wearing veils or beards, giving children "Islamic" or "splittist" names, or using religious procedures for marriage, divorce, and funerals. They also have sent "thousands of heavily armed police" to parade through Xinjiang's major cities. Further, government officials have outlawed not only group prayer services led by non-government-approved imams, but also prayer within the home. Cadres regularly have visited Uighur households to enforce these edicts, and those found to be in violation have been sentenced to up to twelve years in prison. These restrictions and punishments have only further angered Uighurs, engendering more violent attacks. In February 2017, for example, three Uighurs in the Xinjiang city of Hotan, who were outraged by local officials' threats to punish their families for praying, attacked government cadres and passersby with knives, killing five and wounding five.[85] Central PRC authorities have responded with even more extreme repression: since 2017, upwards of one million Uighurs have been forced into extrajudicial detention camps as part of the government's "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Extremism."[86] Overall, the case of Uighur

activism illustrates a vicious cycle of violent conflict that shows no sign of diminishing, and in recent years has worsened.

Conclusion

This comparison of activism on the part of affluent urban homeowners, rank and file private sector workers, Hong Kong residents, and ethnic minority Uighurs illustrates the difficulty of reaching simple conclusions about opportunity structures, resources, behavior, and outcomes. Unfortunately for social scientists, it is impossible to neatly disentangle these factors and their reflexive effects. It is more accurate to view each variable as ranges of possible configurations that shift over time, and exhibit multiple characteristics simultaneously. Even so, it is possible to find correlations and patterns amidst this complexity, and to place the various configurations that appear in real-world cases along a spectrum from "more" to "less" favorable. Of the cases studied herein, China's affluent urban homeowners have been the closest to the "more favorable" end of the spectrum, and China's Uighurs have been closest to the "less favorable" end. Private sector workers and Hong Kong residents have been somewhere in between. At the same time, even those that might be placed closer to the "less favorable" end may enjoy some advantages. A clear example of this is private sector workers, whose workplace and residential proximity constitutes an important social resource.

The positive upshot of these conclusions is that there is always a possibility for protest success. Configurations continually shift through iterative processes of action, response, and learning, and can move in a direction that makes constructive results more likely. Further, outcomes are rarely purely positive or negative, successful or unsuccessful; and, even small areas of success can later elicit broader changes. Finally, even poor and marginalized groups

have the ability to gain redress through collective contention. Although to social scientists the

complexity and flux that characterize popular protest are a challenge, to activists these features

are a cause for optimism.

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[7] Kevin O'Brien, "Rightful Resistance," *World Politics* 49:1 (Oct. 1996): 31. See also Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Kevin O'Brien, "Rightful Resistance Revisited," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40:6 (2013): 1051-1062.

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