Chapter 1

Studying Contention in Contemporary China

Kevin J. O'Brien and Rachel E. Stern

Do ideas drawn from the social movement literature travel well once we leave the democratic West? In recent years, there has been a chorus of calls to look beyond the United States and Western Europe to explore how popular contention unfolds in places where freedom of speech and assembly are tightly controlled.[1] But research on the staples of contentious politics, such as "political opportunity" and "framing," remains more suggestive than comprehensive, both in illiberal states[2] and in Asia.[3]

The essays in this volume were all written by students of Chinese politics and society. Each author, however, has taken up the challenge to reach out to people interested in other regions and regime types. In so doing, the contributors are part of a trend that has been apparent for some years, as changes in academia have encouraged area specialists to speak to their home disciplines and changes in China have made it more comparable. On topics as distinct as political economy, law and society, and nationalism, Sinologists have ventured provocative comparisons, engaged colleagues who work on other countries, and done their best to de-exoticize China.

Among observers of contentious politics, the events surrounding June 4th 1989 generated an outpouring of analysis, both by long-time China hands[4] and social movement theorists.[5] With worldwide attention riveted on unrest in China, in a way that it had not been since the Cultural Revolution, China experts and newcomers alike

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weighed in with fine-grained analysis of what transpired as well as efforts to say what it meant for contentious politics. By the mid-1990s, it was clear that protest in China — or at least the events of 1989 — had theoretical as well as historical significance.

With the exception of Falun Gong's rise and suppression at the turn of the century, popular action in China seldom garners the international attention it did in 1989. Still, unrest has grown of late.[6] In 1993, official Chinese statistics counted 8,700 "collective incidents" (*quntixing shijian*) (i.e., protests, demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, group complaints, and so on); a dozen years later, the number of such incidents had, by government measures, surged to over 87,000 — nearly 250 per day (Cai, chapter 9). And China scholars, led by the authors in this volume, continued to quietly chronicle clashes over pensions, layoffs, corruption, land seizures, taxes, elections, and environmental degradation. By 2005, it had become easy to offer a semester-long course on collective action in contemporary China.[7]

Recent studies of China often touch on concepts from the contentious politics literature. Over the last decade, Thornton, Chen, and Mertha have discussed protest frames;[8] Wright examined opportunities;[9] Zhao and Cai looked at mobilizing structures;[10] and Chen and Perry considered repertoires of contention and their historical roots.[11] Others examined a range of concepts,[12] whereas still others gave voice to notable "silences"[13] in the literature, including emotions,[14] grievances,[15] and leadership.[16] Explicitly (or more often implicitly), these authors all questioned the assumption of Chinese uniqueness, and instead suggested that ideas inspired by the movements of the 1960s could also help explain collective action in China and make it more legible to others.

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Research on China, however, remains far from fully integrated into the study of popular protest. Much of the work mentioned above has only engaged social movement theory in passing. For a person interested in, for example, the outcomes of contention, searching for the wider implications of rich, on-the-ground findings has turned into more of a mind-reading exercise than it needed to be. Moreover, most analyses of Chinese collective action have appeared in area studies journals or books pitched to a China audience, leaving readers of journals such as *Mobilization* (or other contentious politics favorites) largely unaware of what has been happening in China, let alone its broader significance.

This suggests an opportunity, particularly at a time when the study of contentious politics has opened up to those who do not study industrialized democracies. Debates between the structurally-inclined pioneers of the field[17] and more culturally-minded critics[18] have led to an effort to recast concepts and mechanisms in less context-specific ways. This has created more room to consider culture, history, biography, and ideas — all daily fare for China specialists, out in the field, grappling with the transformation of grievances into collective action. Staying attuned to these factors has also cleared the way to interrogate the usefulness of established concepts in a country with a vastly different heritage and history of class and state formation than the capitalist West (Perry, chapter 11).[19]

With these thoughts in mind, this book aims to nudge the study of contentious politics and China a step closer together. In October 2006, The Center for Chinese Studies and The Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley hosted a conference on popular contention in China. Participants were asked to link their

findings with concepts and theories drawn from the literature on contentious politics, and two leading figures from that field (David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow) were on-hand to help us stay on course. Paper-writers could discuss any social group and anything related to the origins, dynamics, or results of contention, so long as they pursued theoretical implications wherever possible. The goal was not only to apply familiar concepts to China, but to modify or question ideas that do not square with the reality of an authoritarian, non-western state. This volume, the product of that conference, thus showcases a group of China specialists who are not only speaking to the contentious politics literature, but deploying old concepts and theories in fresh ways.

Contributions to Contentious Politics

The organization of this book will be familiar to anyone who has read an edited volume on contentious politics. Like many previous collections, the chapters are grouped conceptually. Although this sometimes meant shoehorning wide-reaching essays into a single category, our hope is that the currency of these concepts will make it easy for readers to discover how findings from China relate to a particular interest. In the rest of this introduction, we highlight what we see to be the broadest payoffs of studying popular protest in China: new ways of thinking about political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and frames. Then, we conclude with some thoughts on three other topics — activism and the upwardly-mobile, international influences, and repression — that China specialists are well-placed to address, but have yet to examine closely.

Political Opportunity

Above all, research on China demonstrates that "political opportunity" — external factors that facilitate or impede claims-making — must be disaggregated (Wright, chapter 2; Sun and Zhao, chapter 8). There is not one unitary, national opportunity structure, but multiple, cross-cutting openings and obstacles to mobilization. This diversity points to a natural advantage that all Sinologists enjoy: China's size and internal variation. Instead of falling into whole-nation bias, China scholars are ideally situated to explain how opportunities vary across group, space, and issue.[20] As the essays in this volume show, political opportunity in China depends (at a minimum) on the identity of the participants, the region, the grievance at hand, and the level of government engaged.

The most obvious way to unpack opportunity is by social group. A firmly-established history of student protest, for example, affords Chinese students great latitude for complaint. Students, in Jeffrey Wasserstrom's words, have "have long served as a klaxon on public issues."[21] Even after the 1989 protest movement, "dissenting workers generally were treated more harshly than dissenting intellectuals" (Wright, chapter 2). Protests launched in the name of subsistence have also always had a certain legitimacy, which partly explains why aggrieved workers and peasants often receive a more measured response than groups like Falun Gong.[22]

Opportunity also varies by region and issue. As William Hurst (chapter 4) points out, how local elites view workers' contention depends on a region's political economy. Officials in the Stalinist rust belt empathize with workers' clams much more than their counterparts in booming Shanghai. Guobin Yang (chapter 7) also suggests that government attitudes toward popular action depend on the issue. Less sensitive themes,

such as anti-Japanese nationalism, the rights of the vulnerable, and local corruption, enjoy a degree of tolerance or, at least, indifference.

Another way to unpack opportunity is by level of government. O'Brien and Li's "rightful resistance" hinges on protesters locating support at higher levels for their efforts to check local misconduct. The Chinese state, in their words, is not a "monolith," but a "hodgepodge of disparate actors," an "attractive, multi-dimensional target."[23] Opportunities arise in part from "the central-local divide," as activists use the threat of (further) disruption to "increase the possibility of intervention from above" (Cai, chapter 9). Along these lines, Zhao and Sun's account of environmental contention (chapter 8) also uncovers fissures between support for environmental protection at the Center and local concerns with growth. Environmental NGOs, aware of this tension, cultivate highly-placed allies in the State Environmental Protection Agency and urge them to put pressure on grassroots officials. This strategy sometimes works, provided environmentalists do not become ensnarled in local politics and limit their challenges to low-level adversaries.

Still, Sinologists and other students of contentious politics could undertake a more thorough "anthropology of the state."[24] From the commanding heights to the humblest field office, where exactly do openings lie? Shi and Cai suggest that a fragmented state, combined with differing priorities throughout the government hierarchy, provides multiple openings for resistance, especially for activists whose social networks include upper-level officials and contacts in the media.[25] Sun and Zhao's essay (chapter 8) takes this argument a step further, noting that county and prefectural leaders are less formidable opponents than provincial officials, at least on environmental issues. Others have observed that rural activists frequently find townships to be tenacious opponents whereas

counties are often "paper tigers."[26] Much more research is needed to discover how cohesive authoritarian systems are, and what features of otherwise impressive edifices of power encourage activists to "venue shop,"[27] as they search for pressure points where elite unity crumbles.

Collective action in China also offers insight into how openings arise and disappear in non-democratic states. Students of contentious politics commonly advocate a dynamic approach to opportunity, where openings emerge, fade, and re-form over time.[28] The literature suggests several sources of change. In democracies, elections periodically alter the political landscape. The ascendancy of labor-friendly parties in the 1930s, for example, led to industrial insurgency in France and the United States even as British and German labor remained quiescent.[29] In this way of thinking, openings, like a stretchy fabric, are slow to close. Success, especially for iconic challenges like the American civil rights movement, legitimizes claims and tactics for successors.[30] In illiberal polities, new openings typically stem from either regime liberalization or state weakness. Liberalization, such as Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy, can lead to an explosion of public critique and demonstration.[31] Signs of frailty, in an authoritarian state, can likewise embolden challengers or revolutionaries.[32]

Useful as they are, none of these ideas explain how opportunity has changed in contemporary China. China lacks a system of meaningful elections or any recent memory of a successful social movement. The state is strong and the top leadership is not inclined towards political liberalization. If anything, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao's early years at the top have shown them to be less tolerant of dissent than their predecessors. Without

significant political reform or elections, how do opportunities shift enough to enable widespread protest to occur?

Whereas none of the essays in this volume address this head-on, three of them touch on how opportunities can change, at least on a modest scale, without major political realignments. Xi Chen (chapter 3) looks at the connection between "institutional conversion" and changes in opportunity. He argues that the decline of the work unit (*danwei*) and newly-built coalitions between petitioners and higher authorities encouraged the growth of collective petitions. Unrelated reforms and savvy complainants, in other words, led to a change in one dimension of political opportunity — the extent to which the regime facilitates or represses collective claims-making.[33] The implication here is that researchers should plumb how activists exploit (and sometimes urge along) beneficial institutional change. How are other organizations, such as courts or the police, adapting to and being transformed by contentious bargaining and pressures to take on participatory as well as control functions?

Guobin Yang's essay (chapter 7) illuminates how the internet has generated new opportunities. Keen to promote economic growth, the Chinese government allows and even encourages internet use. Yet just as the internet facilitates business and diverts gamers, it also creates new openings for political actors — another dimension of political opportunity — and so promotes collective claims making.[34] At times, as the case of a murdered Beijing University student shows (Yang, chapter 7), water-cooler grumbling can escalate into powerful, collective demands. "Internet contention," to use Yang's term, can create a cadre of anonymous netizens whose posts both demand and receive government response.[35]

Patricia Thornton's essay (chapter 10) examines how transnational ties influence political opportunities. Whereas transnational activism was once an understudied backwater of contentious politics,[36] researchers are now quite interested in "what happens when domestic activists 'go external.'[37] In China, as elsewhere, globalization offers new access to influential, international allies. Exiled leaders possess resources that enable them to provide financial and spiritual support to their followers. Movement media outlets, like Falun Gong's *Epoch Times* organize popular action from afar. Just as American and Mexican labor organizers coordinated strikes and media blitzes against unscrupulous practices in border factories,[38] *The Epoch Times* sought to orchestrate a mass resignation from the Chinese Communist Party (Thornton, chapter 10). Engineering such events from abroad can produce a boomerang of transnational support and help manufacture dissent, though high-profile activities may also backfire, if scandals or negative press tarnish the reputation of domestic activists and their international backers.

Lastly, Teresa Wright's essay (chapter 2) reminds us that after acknowledging that opportunities are cross-cutting and evolving, opportunity structures can be compared. Wright explores how specific features of two illiberal regimes, including their propensity for repression and control over information, led to fear and distrust among protesters in China and Taiwan. Fear and distrust, in turn, affected the willingness of student leaders to compromise and made broad-based mobilization nearly impossible.[39] Authoritarianism influenced relations between participants and each movement's reach. It affected not only the volume of mobilization but the form that it took.

Mobilizing Structures

Mobilizing structures — the ties that connect individuals to groups that organize action — come in many forms. NGOs, community associations, and work or friendship can bring people together to make claims. In democracies, social movement organizations, often run by professional activists, do much of the coordinating. When a state limits association, however, enterprising activists need to find different ways to inspire and organize contention. A sizable body of research shows that pre-existing networks nurture critical thinking and incubate resistance in illiberal regimes.[40] In difficult circumstances, prior ties take the place of more formal structures and reduce barriers to participation "by opening channels for uncensored materials to circulate, diffusing the risks of association, and, most broadly, substituting for a public sphere" (Vala and O'Brien, chapter 6). Social bonds also enhance solidarity and offer leaders opportunities to apply subtle forms of pressure on followers ("If you go, I'll go, too") (Vala and O'Brien, chapter 6).

Several of the contributions to this volume examine the importance of personal ties while offering new perspectives on how social networks, and the trust they are built on, come into play. Trust, a touchstone for organizers, need not be synonymous with long-standing association or friendship. At times, as in the 1989 student movement, activists only recruited friends because they feared infiltration by state agents (Wright, chapter 2). But there are many ways to increase trust without relying on one's intimates. As Vala and O'Brien show (chapter 6), strangers can be drawn to a movement and bonds can develop over time. Common identities, facilitated by shared background and constructed (or discovered) affinities, can build trust quickly and substitute for friendship. When risks are not too high (as they were during the 1989 student movement),

"homophily" (using like to mobilize like), and recruitment techniques that rapidly create a sense of community (Vala and O'Brien, chapter 6) may simply be different ways to create trust.[41] Shared experiences, like being laid off with virtually all your co-workers (Hurst, chapter 4), can enhance trust among acquaintances and strangers alike, and thereby aid organizing. The many paths to trust deserve more attention in studies of mobilizing structures.[42]

In this day and age, mobilization need not rely on physical proximity. As Guobin Yang (chapter 7) shows, activism can spring from virtual ties. Internet chat rooms and popular websites create hubs of information that foster solidarity and aggregate claims, even though users never meet in person. Virtual contention can spill over into the media, influence public opinion, and affect policies. Even exile is ineffective when, as in Thornton's essay (chapter 10), organizers use cyberspace to reach across the Pacific Ocean to stage-manage spectacles arranged by devoted followers.

Space affects mobilizing structures in other ways, too. As others have observed, physical environments play a crucial role in shaping mobilization.[43] The layout of Beijing University, for example, eased organization for students in 1989. Protest leaders only needed to "put several posters at the Triangle, write down the time, location of gathering, and purposes of the demonstration and slogans to be used" and wait for their classmates to show up.[44] Sometimes, however, finding a place to approach participants requires more effort. Vala and O'Brien (chapter 6) suggest that by contacting targets in the ordinary flow of life and fashioning appeals using resonant language, Protestant evangelists have become adept at creating or appropriating "safe-enough spaces" in the creases of a corroding Leninist regime. Proselytizers take advantage of an increasingly porous state

and exploit public and private spaces that are at least temporarily shielded from state control.[45] But Vala and O'Brien leave other questions unanswered. How safe do safe-enough spaces need to be? What, in an authoritarian context, makes a space safe-enough? What intrinsic limits on policing[46] allow "havens"[47] to emerge, even in repressive states?

Like political opportunity, mobilizing structures take a distinct shape in illiberal circumstances, as activists adapt to a shifting and often unforgiving environment. Institutions as different as letters and visits bureaus (Chen, chapter 3), social networks (Vala and O'Brien, chapter 6) and environmental NGOs (Sun and Zhao, chapter 8) can serve as proxies for social movement organizations, insofar as they help people attribute blame and suggest solutions.[48] Authoritarian settings offer insight into just how varied both opportunities and organizational forms can be.

Framing

In China, real (and potential) surveillance renders the usual business of framing particularly fraught. How are collective action frames — shared understandings of a problem and a possible solution — negotiated when freedom of speech and assembly are limited? When the marketplace for ideas is sparse and state-monitored, how can activists gauge whether frames strike a chord?

William Hurst's "mass frames" (chapter 4) offer an explanation of frame resonance that goes beyond the common sense understanding that effective frames somehow tap into the zeitgeist. Mass frames, by definition, are compelling because they dovetail with collective life experiences of social groups. Northeastern rust belt workers yearn for the security of Maoism whereas their Shanghai counterparts tend to blame

themselves for their troubles.[49] Individuals are not amenable to any picture of reality, but have coherent, structurally-rooted world views that sometimes precipitate action. At other times, shared dispositions, shaped by the local environment, leave the disgruntled content to keep their heads down and muddle through.

If frames resonate because of the broader social arena, activists have limited leeway to fashion new frames out of whole cloth.[50] Indeed, in Feng Chen's essay (chapter 5), organizers draw heavily on the rhetoric of Maoism and class struggle to frame grievances. Still, for Chen, leaders play a much more active role than they do for Hurst. Framing is a stirring up process that must be undertaken by agents. Even if mass frames explain the persistence of certain leitmotifs, contention requires agitators to articulate, adapt, and market frames. These two studies taken together remind us that discussions of framing must always keep one eye on leaders who voice claims and the other on participants who are moved to action (Hurst, chapter 4).

The contrast between Hurst and Chen's essays also suggests that, like political opportunity, stirring up may vary from place to place. Northeastern workers, driven by deep proletarian disappointment, may not need as much prodding as Central Coast workers. But when mass frames promote complacency, how can activists inspire people to take to the streets? Much as James Scott's "hidden transcripts"[51] are often more telling than what is heard in public, there may sometimes be a gap between frames that publicly reaffirm state power and ideas that privately induce the aggrieved to act up. Organizers, at least in insecure states, often need "innocuous frames that support regime interests or power," if they are to secure elite allies.[52] As one worker's poster put it, "only the Communist Party can save China!" (Chen, chapter 5). Sometimes, participants truly hold

such views. At other times, however, mobilization may rest on a different, private rationale. As Vala and O'Brien's essay (chapter 6) suggests, sub rosa conversations can be seductive. Protestant evangelists in urban China often rely on the appeal of Western culture — hardly an approved theme in a proud, socialist state — to spark initial interest, as framing upwards and downwards diverge. Once again, authoritarianism and a tightly-controlled public sphere are sources of creativity, as activists work the system and repackage claims for different audiences.

Future Directions

The essays in this book are all designed to provide a springboard for new research. An extension of William Hurst's chapter, for example, might look at when mass frames are most salient and how they change. Or, building on Guobin Yang's study, when does internet contention move offline and into the streets? Or, following Yongshun Cai's lead, which of the three factors he isolates — number of participants, media exposure, or casualties — are most important for producing results, and do his findings about the effectiveness of disruption apply equally to all social groups and perhaps other authoritarian regimes?

As a whole, however, this volume suggests three gaps in the study of Chinese collective action and places where future research can make a contribution to understandings of contentious politics: 1) activism and the upwardly-mobile, 2) international influences, and 3) repression.

Activism and the Upwardly-Mobile

So far, research on Chinese contention has zeroed in on the down-and-out: dislocated peasants, laid-off workers, unpaid pensioners, and tax-burdened farmers. These are the weak and disadvantaged left behind by China's economic boom. President Hu Jintao's vision of a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*) tacitly acknowledges that the authorities need to play a role in lifting them up. But where, with the exception of Sun and Zhao's environmental activists, is the upwardly-mobile middle class? Are China's better-off content with their lot or, more likely, do they act up in other ways?[53]

Social class should influence thinking about which tactics offer the best chance of success. Greater access to the internet and news from the outside world may, for example, affect the repertoire of contention for urban cosmopolitans. Some of the disgruntled may find that disruption pays off, as in Cai's essay (chapter 9), whereas others — perhaps those with more resources — may stick to polite, more institutionalized types of contention. Deciding among contained, transgressive or boundary-spanning forms of claims-making is always crucial,[54] and what leads the aggrieved to turn to the courts or the streets is just one issue that research on China's upwardly-mobile is well-suited to address.

Class may also offer insights into new types of grievances that are coming into view. To date, most contention in China has centered on material loss. For suburban farmers, this might mean fighting land expropriation. For homeowners, this might involve not-in-my-backyard efforts to protect property values endangered by a new highway.[55] Is, however, post-material protest creeping onto the agenda in China and, if so, what issues attract attention? Are a goodly number of academics, journalists, and

crusading lawyers pushing causes like environmentalism and AIDS prevention, or are most too busy getting ahead and looking out for their own interests?[56]

Along these lines, the recent emergence of a "rights protection" (*weiquan*) movement, a loosely-connected collection of lawyers and public intellectuals who use the law in defense of social and political rights, is starting to attract attention.[57] In a legal system with weak courts and little tradition of public interest litigation, it is not yet clear why attorneys and others have deployed the "weapon of the law" to protect citizens and push for change. Nor do we know when this strategy produces results or when it simply lands an activist in jail. Moving forward, researchers will want to unpack "rights protection," a broad, ambiguous term, in search of a more nuanced treatment of how rights protectors with different agendas operate. Much more work is also needed on why their actions are sometimes tolerated, and why, more often, they are not.

International Influences

China scholars are just beginning to consider international influences on contention. Like Thornton's and Sun and Zhao's essays in this volume (chapters 8 and 10), future researchers will want to examine how external allies supply activists with resources and pressure opponents for change. But beyond this "boomerang effect,"[58] in what other ways do the aggrieved and their overseas backers find each other and work together?

In China, one under-researched type of transnational activism is democracy promotion. Since Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" rejuvenated economic reform in 1992, China has attracted unprecedented attention from NGOs, foundations, and foreign

governments anxious to foster democratization or — given the realities of a one-party state — values like transparency, public participation, and respect for rights.[59] These days, everyone from the U.S. Department of State to George Soros' Open Society Institute is funding programs in China, many of which are aimed at developing Chinese civil society.[60] The international community, in other words, has taken to heart the notion that civil society, characterized by vibrant associations (a la Alexis de Tocqueville) and a large middle class (a la Barrington Moore), will lay the foundation for democratic change. Thanks to the size and number of these programs, China offers an unusual opportunity to examine the relationship between funding and contention. Is international aid amplifying domestic calls for liberalization and boosting democratic consciousness? Or, as in the states descended from the Soviet Union, are overseas organizations supporting a few iconoclasts who struggle to find a following?[61] The sheer amount of cash up for grabs[62] calls for close attention to power dynamics between funders and funded, sometimes a blind spot in the literature on transnational activism.[63]

China's heterogeneity also offers an opportunity to pinpoint how international support affects contention in different regions and among different groups. Just as Africa is divided into "mineral-extraction enclaves" and "humanitarian hinterlands" reliant on NGO assistance, [64] there are multiple Chinas, connected to the outside world in many ways. Frames and tactics, for instance, may look different to Yang's technology-literate, Google-searching complainants and Chen's and Hurst's workers, most of whom are isolated from the international labor movement. Globalization, even in post-WTO China, is lumpy, uneven and contingent. The challenge is to begin asking where, if at all,

transnational influences — anything from collective viewing of the film *Erin Brokovitch* to a US $200,000 Ford Foundation grant — shift perceptions and ultimately action.

Repression

Integrating China studies and contentious politics also means comparing China to other authoritarian states. The next generation of research on Chinese protest may look more like Wright's essay (chapter 2): a side-by-side comparison of the dynamics of mobilization in two illiberal regimes. At the very least, China specialists need to read work from the Middle East, Latin America and other places where limited opportunity and state surveillance shape collective action. In this introduction we have made occasional reference to other countries, but there is much more to be done.

The good news is that China scholars are already accustomed to viewing collective action from the vantage point of the authorities. When studying China, all contention reflects political constraints, and negotiates and contests these constraints (Yang, chapter 7). Popular action in China is a call-and-response, in which complainants take cues from officialdom, even as institutions are evolving in response to bottom-up pressure. Chinese approaches to public security, for instance, have been altered both by increased exposure to contention and signals from the top.[65] Nowadays, police reports often describe protesters not as class enemies, but as "exploited," "marginalized" and "socially disadvantaged."[66]

Yet, for all the advantages of a state-centric approach (Xi Chen, chapter 3), China specialists tend to focus on a thin slice of repression. Most research on Chinese contention touches on repression — how could the topic be avoided? — but repression is

often distilled to crackdowns against protesters. There is room for a much more expansive notion of how collective action is suppressed. The most obvious starting point is to move beyond instances of ex-post repression to examine ex-ante suppression through socialization. In China, uncertainty and self-censorship play a key role in discouraging contention. The very arbitrariness of state control of the media, to take one example, cows most journalists into limited coverage of dissent.[67] A more nuanced understanding of repression would give China specialists another entry point into the contentious politics literature, where analysts now use the term "protest control," and recognize that repression varies according to the amount of coercion, the form it takes, the audience for it, and the identity of the repressor.[68]

Conclusion

Thinking about contention in today's China takes us beyond massive eruptions, like the Communist Revolution and the popular movement of 1989, into the quotidian world of resistance and response. Here, protest is rich and varied, encompassing camouflaged dissent, such as subversive doorway couplets,[69] and boisterous demonstrations, such as traffic blockades by retirees who have lost their pensions.[70] In this volume alone, the disgruntled are found writing collective petitions (Chen, chapter 3, Sun and Zhao, chapter 8), making claims on the internet (Yang, chapter 7), leafletting fellow workers (Chen, chapter 5) and taking to the streets (Wright, chapter 2), often quite disruptively (Cai, chapter 9). China offers a full palette of claims-making; episodes of contention that might go unremarked upon in an open, pluralist system illustrate much in

a place where opportunities are limited, mobilizing structures must leave a faint footprint, and framing requires a deft touch.

The prominence of the words opportunity, mobilizing structures, and framing throughout this collection underscores the mainstreaming of China studies. Although this trend has fragmented the China field to a degree (we no longer all meet in *China Quarterly* or *China Journal* to the extent we once did), it also provides an opportunity to make research on Chinese contention difficult for other social scientists to ignore. As China specialists contribute to wider conversations, there is much to be learned about how varieties of authoritarianism and domestic variation shape collective action. The essays that follow aim to bring research on China deeper into the study of contentious politics. We hope that some readers of this volume will take this venture a step further.

Notes

[1] Doug McAdam, "Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions," in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xiii. See also Maryjane Osa and Cristina Corduneanu-Huci, "Running Uphill: Political Opportunity in Non-democracies," *Comparative Sociology* 2:4 (2003), 606; Carrie Rosefky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam:* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 5; Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory," in Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 4.

[2] But see Charles Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979," *American Sociological Review* 61:1 (1996): 153-170; Anthony Oberschall, "Opportunities and Framing in the Eastern European Revolts of 1989" and Elena Zdravomyslova, "Opportunities and Framing in the Transition to Democracy," both in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*; Charles D. Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence in Central America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[3] Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2007), 196. But see Kurt Schock, "People Power and Political Opportunities: Social Movement Mobilization and Outcomes in the Philippines and in Burma," *Social Problems* 46:3 (1999): 355-375; Doowon Suh, "How Do Political Opportunities Matter for Social Movements? Political Opportunity, Misframing, Pseudosuccess, and Pseudofailure," *Sociological Quarterly* 43:2 (2001): 437-460; Vince Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[4] Joseph Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Acting Out Democracy: Political Theater in Modern China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 49:4 (1990): 835-866; Daniel Kelliher, "Keeping Democracy Safe From the Masses: Intellectuals and Elitism in the Chinese Protest Movement," *Comparative Politics* 25:4 (July 1993): 379-396; Elizabeth J. Perry, "Casting a Chinese 'Democracy' Movement: The Roles of Students, Workers, and Entrepreneurs," in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds. *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China,* 2nd edition (Boulder, CO, Westview, 1994): 74-92; Teresa Wright, "State Repression and Student Protest in Contemporary China," *China Quarterly* 157 (1999): 142-172; Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[5] Craig Calhoun, *Neither Gods nor Emperors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Jiping Zuo and Robert D. Benford, "Mobilization Processes and the 1989 Democracy Movement," *Sociological Quarterly* 36:1 (1995): 131-56; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 215-225.

[6] Zhongyang Zhengfawei Yanjiushi, *Weihu Shehui Wending Diaoyan Wenji (Collected Essays on Maintaining Social Stability)* (Beijing, China: Zhongguo Falü Chubanshe, 2001); Kevin J. O'Brien, "Collective Action in the Chinese Countryside," *China Journal* 48 (2002): 139-154; Thomas P. Bernstein and Xiaobo Lü, *Taxation Without Representation in Contemporary China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Murray Scot Tanner, "China Rethinks Unrest," *Washington Quarterly* 27:3 (2004): 137-156; Carl F. Minzner, "Xinfang: An Alternative to Formal Chinese Legal Institutions," *Stanford Journal of International* Law 42 (2006): 103-179. In 2006, there was apparently

a downturn in collective incidents, partly because the term was re-defined, partly for unknown reasons.

[7] "Faculty in Political Science," polisci.berkeley.edu/faculty/bio/permanent/OBrien,K/syllabi/ps244d-fl05.pdf (accessed, June 29 2007).

[8] Patricia Thornton, "Framing Dissent in Contemporary China: Irony, Ambiguity and Metonymy," *China Quarterly* 171 (2002): 661-681; Feng Chen, "Industrial Restructuring and Workers' Resistance in China," *Modern China* 29:2 (2003): 237-262; Andrew C. Mertha, *Water Warriors*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

[9] Wright, "State Repression and Student Protest."

[10] Dingxin Zhao, "Ecologies of Social Movements: Student Mobilization during the 1989 Prodemocracy Movement in Beijing," *American Journal of Sociology* 103:6 (1998): 1493-1529; Yongshun Cai, "The Resistance of Chinese Laid-Off Workers in the Reform Period," *China Quarterly* 172 (2002): 327-344.

[11] Elizabeth J. Perry*, Challenging the Mandate of Heaven* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003); Xi Chen, "Chinese Petitioners' Tactics and Their Efficacy" (paper delivered at the Conference on Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China, Fairbank Center, Harvard University, 2004).

[12] William Hurst, "Understanding Contentious Collective Action by Chinese Laid-Off Workers: The Importance of Regional Political Economy," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 39:2 (2002): 94-120; Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[13] Ronald R. Aminzade et al., *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

[14] Elizabeth J. Perry, "Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in the Chinese Revolution," *Mobilization* 7:2 (2002): 111-128; Peter Hays Gries, "Tears of Rage: Chinese Nationalist Reactions to the Belgrade Embassy Bombing," *China Journal* 46 (2003): 267-295; Guobin Yang, "Emotional Events and the Transformation of Collective Action," in Helena Flam and Debra King eds., *Emotions and Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 2005): 79-95.

[15] Feng Chen, "Subsistence Crises, Managerial Corruption and Labor Protests in China," *The China Journal* 44 (2000): 41-63; William Hurst and Kevin J. O'Brien, "China's Contentious Pensioners," *China Quarterly* 170 (2002): 345-360. Ethan Michelson, "Climbing the Dispute Pagoda: Grievances and Appeals to the Official Justice System in Rural China," *American Sociological Review* 72 (June 2007): 459-485.

[16] Bernstein and Lü, *Taxation Without Representation*; Cai, "The Resistance of Chinese Laid-Off Workers," Fayong Shi and Yongshun Cai, "Disaggregating the State: Networks and Collective Action in Shanghai, *China Quarterly* 186 (June 2006): 314-332; Lianjiang Li and Kevin J. O'Brien, "Protest Leadership in Rural China," *China Quarterly*, forthcoming.

[17] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

[18] James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory," *Sociological Forum* 14:1 (1999): 27-53.

[19] The Berkeley conference was not the first to address these issues. The Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University convened a conference in 2000 on "Contentious Politics in the 'Developing' World: Theory, Culture, and History."

[20] "Windows of opportunity for mobilization and policy reform need not be either open or closed, but may be partly opened, and opportunities may vary across political issues and constituencies over time." Traci M. Sawyers and David S. Meyer, "Missed Opportunities: Social Movement Abeyance and Public Policy," *Social Problems* 46:2 (1999), 189. "What provokes mobilization for one movement or constituency may depress mobilization of another, and be completely irrelevant to a third." David S. Meyer and Debra C. Minkoff, "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity," *Social Forces* 82:4 (2004), 1461.

[21] Jeffery N. Wasserstrom, "Student Protests in Fin-de-Siècle China," *New Left Review* 237 (1999): 56. Also see Zuo and Benford, "Mobilizing Processes," 136.

[22] Perry, "*Challenging the Mandate of Heaven,* xiii-xiv.

[23] O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance*, 66, 51.

[24] Joel S. Migdal, *State-In-Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Neil. J. Diamant, Stanley B. Lubman, and Kevin J. O'Brien, "Law and Society in the People's Republic of China," in Diamant, Lubman, and O'Brien eds., *Engaging the Law in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 19.

[25] Shi and Cai, "Disaggregating the State."

[26] O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance*, 66.

[27] Thomas R. Rochon, *Culture Moves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 237.

[28] McAdam, "Conceptual Origins," 37; David S. Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 140; Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence*, 15.

[29] Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 73.

[30] Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," 140-141.

[31] Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 73-76. See also Hank Johnston, "'Let's Get Small': The Dynamics of (Small) Contention in Repressive States," *Mobilization* 11:2 (2006): 197.

[32] McAdam, "Conceptual Origins," 24; Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[33] Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 57.

[34] Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 57.

[35] At the Berkeley conference, David Meyer posed a timely question about internet contention: "Is a single website the tip of an iceberg or just an ice cube?" Sidney Tarrow also wondered about the relationship between online and offline activity in China, especially whether talking among internet activists led to challenging the authorities.

[36] McAdam, "Conceptual Origins," 34.

[37] Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160. See also Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Sanjeev Khagram, *Dams and Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[38] Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, 156-158.

[39] For a different perspective on the Chinese movement, see Perry, "Casting a Chinese 'Democracy' Movement," and Kelliher, "Keeping Democracy Safe."

[40] Zuo and Benford, "Mobilizing Processes"; Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The Salafi Movement in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32:2 (2000): 219-240; Osa and Corduneanu-Huci, "Running Uphill"; Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*; Diane Singerman, "The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements," in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism*, 143-163.

[41] The cultural meanings encoded in networks and the messages transmitted across them may be more important than the networks themselves. See Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 76; Anne Mische, "Cross-talk in Movements: Reconceiving the Culture-Network Link," in Mario Diani and Doug McAdam eds., *Social Movements and Networks* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003): 258-59.

[42] For research that points in this direction, see Zhao, "Ecologies of Social Movements," 1512; Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Christian Smith, "Rethinking Recruitment to High-Risk/Cost Activism: The Case of Nicaragua Exchange," *Mobilization* 4:1 (1999): 33-34; Florence Passy, "Social Networks Matter. But How?" in Diani and McAdam, *Social Movements and Networks*, 33, 41.

[43] Wiktorowicz, "The Salafi Movement," 233. See also William H. Sewell Jr., "Space in Contentious Politics," in Aminzade et al., *Silence and Voice*: 89-125.

[44] Zhao, "Ecologies of Social Movements," 1509.

[45] See William A. Gamson, "Safe Spaces and Social Movements," *Perspectives on Social Problems* 8 (1996): 27.

[46] Sewell, "Space," 68-70.

[47] Eric L. Hirsch, "Protest Movements and Urban Theory," in Ray Hutchinson, ed., *Urban Sociology in Transition* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1993): 159-180.

[48] Ties to criminal organizations can also facilitate mobilization by protesters or religious believers. See Jae Ho Chung, Hongyi Lai and Ming Xia, "Mounting Challenges to Governance in China: Surveying Collective Protestors, Religious Sects, and Criminal Organizations," *China Journal* 56 (July 2006): 1-32.

[49] See also Marc J. Blecher, "Hegemony and Workers' Politics in China," *China Quarterly* 170 (2002): 283-303.

[50] At the Berkeley conference, Sidney Tarrow suggested a more elegant, extended version of this metaphor. "The lesson of the [American] civil rights movement is that the symbols of revolt are not drawn like musty costumes from a cultural closet and arrayed before the public. Nor are new meanings unrolled out of whole cloth. . . . Frames are woven from a blend of inherited and invented fibers into collective action frames in confrontation with opponents and elites." See also Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 118; Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes, *Frames of Protest* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 9.

[51] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

[52] Wiktorowicz, "Introduction," 18. See also O'Brien and Li, *Rightful Resistance*.

[53] Research on homeowner's activism is starting to fill this gap. See Shi and Cai, "Disaggregating the State"; You-tien Hsing, "Urban Protests and Mobilization in Inner-City Beijing" (paper presented at the Conference on "Reclaiming Chinese Society," University of California, Berkeley, October 2006); Benjamin Read, "Assessing Variation

in Civil Society Organizations: China's Homeowner Associations in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Political Studies* 41:9 (September 2008); Yongshun Cai, "China's Moderate Middle Class: The Case of Homeowners' Resistance," *Asian Survey* 45:5 (September/October 2005): 777-799; Luigi Tomba, "Residential Space and Collective Interest Formation in Beijing's Housing Disputes," *China Quarterly* 184 (December 2005): 934-951.

[54] For explanation and use of these terms, see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 7-9; Kevin J. O'Brien, "Neither Transgressive Nor Contained: Boundary-Spanning Contention in China," *Mobilization* 8:3 (2003): 51-64; Johnston, "'Let's Get Small.'"

[55] Zhiping Li, "Zai Gongzhong Weiquan Shijian Zhong Shou Jianshi de Gongzhong Canyu yu Huanjing Yingxiang Pingjia Zhidu: Yi Shenzhen Xibu Tongdao Cejiexian Gongcheng Shijian Weili (Upholding the Public Rights of Public Participation and Environmental Impact Assessment: The Example of the Shenzhen Western Corridor Project), unpublished manuscript.

[56] For activism by lawyers and pressures they face to make a living, see Ethan Michelson, "The Practice of Law as an Obstacle to Justice: Chinese Lawyers at Work," *Law & Society Review* 40:1 (2006): 1-38, and David Kelly, "Citizen Movements and China's Public Intellectuals in the Hu-Wen Era," *Pacific Affairs* 79:2 (2006): 83-204.

[57] Eva Pils, "Asking the Tiger for His Skin: Rights Activism in China," unpublished manuscript, and "Rule by Law," *New York Times*, February 25, 2007.

[58] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*.

[59] For a description of one such program, see Becky Shelley, "Political Globalisation and the Politics of International Non-governmental Organisations: The Case of Village Democracy in China," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 35:2 (2005): 225-238.

[60] A partial list of American organizations funding programs focused on building civil society or the rule of law includes: the Ford Foundation, the International Republican Institute, the Carter Center, the National Democratic Institute, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Open Society Institute, the Asia Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund. There are also European, Australian, Canadian and Japanese organizations (and government affiliates) administering programs. See Anthony Spires, "Influences from Abroad: The Impact of Global Civil Society on Chinese Civil Society" (paper delivered at the International Contemporary China Studies Conference, University of Hong Kong, January 2007).

[61] Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal, "The NGO Paradox: Democratic Goals and Non-Democratic Outcomes in Kazakhstan," *Europe-Asia Studies.* 51:7 (1999): 1267-1284; Laura A. Henry, The Greening of Grassroots Democracy? The Russian Environmental Movement, Foreign Aid and Democratization, *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2001).

[62] Between 2002 and 2005, U.S. private foundations issued over US $280 million in China-targeted grants. Spires, "Influences from Abroad," 11.

[63] Monique Deveaux, "Comments," *Current Anthropology* 46:3 (2005): 402-403. But also see Millie Thayer, "Negotiating the Global: Northeast Brazilian Women's Movements and the Transnational Feminist Public," (Ph.D. diss., University of California,

Berkeley, 2004); Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[64] James Ferguson, "Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa," *American Anthropologist* 107:3 (2005): 380.

[65] Murray Scot Tanner, "Rethinking Law Enforcement and Society: Changing Police Analyses of Social Unrest," in Diamant, Lubman and O'Brien eds., *Engaging the Law in China*: 193-212.

[66] Tanner, "China Rethinks Unrest," 144.

[67] Jonathan Hassid. "An Uncertain Business: Controlling the Chinese Media," *Asian Survey* (forthcoming).

[68] See Jennifer Earl, "Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression," *Sociological Theory* 21:1 (2003): 44-68; also special issue of *Mobilization* 11:2 (2006) devoted to repression and the social control of protest.

[69] Patricia M. Thornton, "Insinuation, Insult, and Invective: The Threshold of Power and Protest in Modern China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44:3 (July 2002): 597-619.

[70] Hurst and O'Brien, "China's Contentious Pensioners."