A PROTEST SOCIETY EVALUATED: POPULAR PROTESTS IN CHINA, 2000-2019*

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This article reveals the trends and characteristics of popular protests in China, drawing evidence from a database the author built by collecting more than 12,000 news stories on China's mass protests from 2000 to 2019. The data present the ups and downs of China's social protests over the past two decades, showing that social protest in China has been diffused widely throughout different social groups and has covered a vast variety of issues across a wide geographical area. However, despite the trend of subsiding protests after the mid-2010s, the Chinese state has a lower capacity to channel popular protests into institutionalized forms as in the norm in democratic polities. Under Xi Jinping's rule in 2013-19, the regime has been relying on increasing surveillance and repression to squash protest activities. Police have also been more inclined to arrest protesters. This study concludes that the dynamics of social protests in China are contingent on its state-society relations and the state's capacity of channeling contentious politics into more institutionalized forms.

The experience of collective resistance in contemporary Chinese society greatly varies from that of democracies and other authoritarian countries. This study shows that social protests in China occur frequently among a wide range of social groups, in various locations, and take on a variety of claims and forms. However, despite their high frequency and momentum, most popular protests in China are disorganized, dispersed, and short-lived. Still, they are widely used as an instrument to put pressure on the government to meet the protesters' demands.

This study examines key features of popular protests in China over the past two decades, identifying the dynamic relationship between protests and repression. Over the course of the past two decades, intensifying social conflicts and widespread popular protests have occurred all over China. Diverse sectors of society are participating (e.g., students, public employees, industrial workers, farmers, etc.) in popular protests, and are employing increasingly confrontational tactics. An underlying source of these social conflicts has been the growing social grievances, frustrations, and tensions of Chinese society. China's fast-growing economy has created a powerful government and a nouveau-riche upper class, leading to a profound divide between the haves and the have-nots. Widening social inequality has become a plain fact of everyday life. At the same time, Chinese citizens have become more aware of their rights and interests. When their rights and interests are impaired, especially due to government corruption or abuse of power, complaints surge and protests intensify. As this study shows, protests soared from the early 2000s to the mid-2010s, before rapidly shrinking in the mid-2010s under Xi Jinping's rule.

* I thank Yongshun Cai, Kevin O'Brien, Yang Su, and Dingxin Zhao for their suggestions and advice in conducting this project and writing related papers. I am grateful for Hank Johnston's and the anonymous reviewers' comments and suggestions. The data collection process for this study continued for more than ten years, and I am particularly grateful to the dozens of assistants who participated during that time—many of whom were graduate students in the Master's Program of Contemporary China Studies at National Tsing Hua University. This research was supported by a series of grants from Academia Sinica and the Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan. I also thank the Harvard-Yenching Institute for providing a visiting scholarship which aided the writing of this article.

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2020 Mobilization: An International Journal 25(5):641-660
DOI 10.17813/1086-671X-25-5-641

To keep social conflict at bay and ensure stability, the government has relied on a series of *weiwen* (stability maintenance) and social governance measures, ranging from generous financial incentives to rigorous surveillance and ruthless crackdowns of protesters. Repression remains an essential measure for social and political control in China. Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the Chinese government has become more aggressive in dealing with political dissidents and those who engage in civil resistance (Franceschini and Nesossi 2018; Fu and Distelhorst 2017). In January 2019, China's Minister of Public Security stated that China's police must focus on withstanding "color revolutions" (popular uprisings), and treat the defense of China's political system as their central mission (Reuters 2019). However, the sheer use of brute force is not the routine practice when dealing with contentious daily incidents. Surprisingly, the government has sometimes tolerated or accommodated protesters in order to serve its own interests (Lee and Zhang 2013). On the one hand, protests function as a source of information for high-level authorities who tend to lack knowledge due to restrictions on the free flow of information in society. On the other, protests can help reveal the severity of an issue and its potential for more disruption if it remains unaddressed (Huang, Boranbay, and Huang 2019).

As Tilly pointed out, "The repressiveness of a government is never a simple matter of more or less. It is always selective and always consists of some combination of repression, toleration, and facilitation" (Tilly 1978: 106). Therefore, it is imperative to identify the triggers of the Chinese government's selective use of repression or toleration of social protests. In other words, what type of protesters are more likely to be repressed or tolerated by the government? What are the implications of the different configurations of protests and repression on China's institutional transformation?

Based on an analysis of more than 12,000 protests in China that occurred between 2000 and 2019, this study first reports the trends and characteristics of social unrest in China, exploring how and why protests had become frequent despite the government's efforts to maintain social order, and how protests have declined significantly since the mid-2010s. It then examines the extent of violence and forceful policing during protests, during different time periods and across rural and urban areas. The configurations of collective protests and government responses illustrate the institutional arrangements of contentious politics and social-conflict resolution in China. This study concludes that the dynamics of social protest in an authoritarian regime like China are highly associated with the state's capacity to institutionalize contentious politics, impacting the changing state-society relations in China.

WHY PROTESTS ESCALATED

Since the 1990s, China's institutional changes and market reforms have produced weak mechanisms to protect citizens' interests from being violated. While unorganized citizens became vulnerable to abusive state and nonstate actors, the state encountered difficulties in demobilizing them for a period of time because of its limited resources and ability to control them. Beginning in the 1990s, China's collective resistance first originated with the reform of the state-owned enterprise system in urban areas, which led to mass protests by laid-off workers. Rural peasants also repeatedly engaged in collective petitioning or collective resistance to protest raising taxes or the corruption of local cadres. Since 2000, private enterprises and foreign investment enterprises have developed rapidly, hiring a large number of migrant workers. However, as labor security was insufficient and labor disputes were frequent, protests by workers had heightened. At the same time, based on financial needs and urban development, local governments stepped up urban expansion and demolition projects that resulted in a growing number of mass protests. During this period, except for a few Falun Gong protests, most instances of collective resistance did not challenge the legitimacy of the Chinese communist regime. They mostly focused on economic demands, personal rights, maladministration, or executive corruption.

How can the rapid increase in collective protests in China over the past two decades be explained? This study shows that social protests had recurred in China because state authority—while constantly threatening the interests of social groups—had limited capacity to demobilize the aggrieved. The literature on collective resistance in China rarely connects Chinese experiences to the study of social movements in Western democracies. However, social movement literature in democratic countries provides useful insights into understanding collective protests in authoritarian China. Protest groups in China are usually those whose rights and interests have been harmed during institutional transformation and the market transition processes. On the one hand, emotional grievances and interest demands drive protest actions. On the other hand, the social movement literature suggests that political opportunity, resource mobilization, and framing processes are often more important factors in the formation and development of collective actions. The surge of popular protests in China has been linked to these factors (O'Brien 2008).

Political Opportunity

Collective protests and contentious action occur when political opportunities arise and when protest participants have access to resources (McAdam 1999; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1978). Political opportunities refer to those aspects of the political system that affect the possibilities for protest groups to mobilize effectively (Tarrow 1996). Among many aspects of the Chinese political system, decentralization—a certain degree of autonomy of local governments given by the central government—has been the most crucial factor driving economic development and maintaining effective rule in China. Given the formidable scale of governance in China, the central government is in charge of policymaking, and local authorities have to implement policies. However, this separation gives rise to a fundamental tension between the central government and local governments. The extent of the authority of the central government is achieved at the expense of local governance effectiveness. Therefore, the strengthening of local governance capacities implies the expansion of local authority, which often leads to an acute threat to the central authority (Zhou 2014).

Maintaining social stability has been the primary political responsibility of both the central and local governments in China. However, the central-local separation in Chinese bureaucracy has paved the way for political opportunities facilitating protest mobilization and claims making. Political opportunities arise from two starting points. One point highlights the disparities among state authorities or among authorities of different levels in the political echelon, especially the disparities of interests and priorities between the central and local levels (Bernstein and Lu 2003; O'Brien and Li 2006). The other point asserts that the central government tolerates social protests because they serve as a source of information on local agents, helping the central government identify social grievances and instances of corruption and maladministration by local cadres (Huang, Boranbay, and Huang 2019; Lorentzen 2013).

For example, the labor department in local governments prefers enhanced enforcement of labor laws, and the environmental department aims to control industrial pollution. Yet, the industrial and commercial department is concerned about corporate profits and government revenue. Different government departments have diverse goals that result in various behavioral patterns, so inconsistency among government departments provides political opportunities for protesters to exploit for the purpose of protecting or pursuing their interests. For example, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) of the Chinese central government acted as a crucial ally of the environmentalists. The environmental movements were successful in several campaigns mostly because of the support of SEPA (Sun and Zhao 2007).

Also, opportunities may arise in part from "the central-local divide," as protesters use the threat of disruption to increase the possibility of intervention from higher-level authorities (O'Brien and Li 2006; Cai 2010). For example, since the 1990s, the "rightful resistance" in rural China has hinged on peasant protesters making use of the legal system and central

government directives, thus securing support at higher levels for their efforts to check local misconduct (O'Brien and Li 2006). Labor protests, labor laws, and regulations issued by the central government (including pension contributions, overtime pay, and housing allowances) give workers leverage points to launch strikes demanding more financial reimbursement from employers and local governments (Chen 2015; Elfstrom and Kuruvilla 2014).

The Chinese government is not popularly elected and lacks procedural legitimacy. Therefore, it has to rely heavily on good performance to buttress its power. The central government is more concerned with regime legitimacy and stability, and thus it is more tolerant of citizens' nonpolitical actions if repressing such activities damages the regime's legitimacy (Cai 2008). With this belief in the central authority's willingness to accommodate people's nonpolitical claims and rightful demands, Chinese citizens commonly cite legitimate grounds for pursuing their interests (O'Brien and Li 2006). On the other hand, local governments tend to focus on local economic interests and their performance appraisals by higher levels of government. Local authorities are willing to make concessions if they realize that their own interests will be at stake, or that higher levels of government will intervene.

Another reason why local protests are tolerated by higher levels of government is due to information constraints. Higher-level authorities usually face difficulties in gathering reliable information about the policy implementation of local governments, and the underlying grievances of the masses. Social protests can provide information about whether local governments have gone against the central government's directives and bring social discontent to the surface rather than keeping it underground (Lorentzen 2013). In addition, large and disruptive protests are often reported by the media and are an important source of information for higher-level governments to identify grievances and social conflicts in grassroots society.

As mentioned above, disparities between the central and local authorities shape the political opportunity structure for social protests. The central government considers its own legitimacy and information constraints, and therefore its inclination on whether to intervene or to suppress local collective protests often depends on these considerations. Local governments must follow the directives of the central government and fulfill its various political and economic requirements. The central government's attitude to social protest is thus crucial to local governments when dealing with social resistance. The local governments become more repressive when the central government becomes less tolerant of social protests or encourages repression. The interaction between the central and local authorities thus shapes the political space for collective action.

Mobilizing Structures

In addition to political opportunities, mobilizing structures—the ties that connect individuals to groups that organize action—come in many forms and facilitate the mobilization of collective protests in China. Communist regimes understandably prohibit independent organizations to preempt political threats. In China, the party-state discourages or prohibits the formation of organizations aimed at protecting citizens' interests. For example, although trade unions may occasionally help mediate disputes between workers and their employers, they are far from assertive when defending workers' rights (Chen 2003). Trade unions and professional organizations are official organs of the party-state—they are not the mobilizing base for collective actions. While collective actions rarely challenge the legitimacy of the state, they are not legally institutionalized nor officially sanctioned, and usually not initiated or orchestrated by resourceful organizations. Popular protests are mostly spontaneous, mobilized through existing social or religious networks or institutions among the citizens such as villagers or coworkers (Pun 2007; Deng and O'Brien 2014; Luo and Andreas 2016; Lu and Tao 2017). Since the mid-2000s, when the internet and mobile phones gained popularity, social media has played a crucial role in facilitating the mobilization of collective actions.

Community associations, NGOs, and work or hometown relations have brought people together to launch collective protests. Labor strikes in China are typically initiated by un-

organized workers rather than by trade unions—whose task is to mediate, not only between workers and the government, but also between workers and employers (Chen 2010). While worker NGOs will not take the lead in confrontations with the state and usually avoid developing cross-regional networks, their contribution is to provide information or consultation on specific policy areas (e.g., labor regulations, organizing of trade unions, labor disputes), and also assist individual workers in negotiations and formulating requests in labor disputes (Elfstrom 2019; Chan 2013; Lee and Shen 2011; Friedman 2009; Friedman and Lee 2010). In addition to providing daily consultation services for workers, some NGO activists will actively provide online assistance and legal advice when they encounter cases of collective resistance or worker strikes, and encourage workers to establish trade unions. Some even offer assistance to ensure the release of detained worker leaders (Li and Duan 2013; Chen 2019).

Trade unions and worker NGOs in factories in China rarely take the lead in organizing collective resistance. The main mobilizing structures can be found in the workers' daily community and their social relations in the workplace. The development of civic organizations in Chinese society is heavily restricted by the state. Therefore, the mobilization of collective action often carries a high degree of spontaneity and relies on the living and working environments of the mobilized group. For example, during instances of collective resistance in rural China, protesting villagers often rely on the leadership of capable cadres in the village. Associations of village elders, kinship organizations, and neighborhood relations also play an essential role in mobilizing citizens for collective action (Deng and O'Brien 2014).

Many aspects of social conflicts in China also carry an emotional charge. Research found that shared understandings and emotional activities were crucial in shaping the dynamics of collective actions during riots or poorly organized social movements in the USA before the1960s (Jasper 2011). Similarly, in authoritarian China, where collective actions are not institutionalized and are not well-organized, rumors and high-running emotions have played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of social protests (Zhao 2000, 2001; Perry 2002; Yang 2009). Also, people in a poorly organized social movement are more likely to follow specific cultural scripts or even their culturally embedded emotions and instincts to pursue their demands (Zhao 2010a).

Many of China's collective protests rely on mobilization of emotions. Collective resistance arises when shared values are being violated (Perry 2002). In this sense, social movements are motivated by concern for due honor, pride, and recognition of one's basic humanity (Honneth 1995). Take China's petitioning peasants, veterans, ethnic minorities and religious groups for example. Even if they seek compensation for economic interests, what pushes them to overcome difficulties and continue to fight is not an instrumentalized, rational calculation. Their motivation is to receive fair treatment and an apology for the humiliation they were subjected to. In the age of the internet and social media, the emotional mobilization of collective action in China has spread like wildfire (Yang 2009).

WHY PROTESTS DIMINISHED

As the performance evaluation of local leaders in China is linked to their ability to maintain social stability, local governments have tried to minimize or prevent social protests by improving information collection and by creating, strengthening, and coordinating state institutions to better handle disputes (Meng U 2016; Hu 2011; Yang 2017; Chung 2012). Concessions and repression (or threat of repression) have been the primary methods employed by local governments to demobilize protests, thereby reversing the upward protest trend from the mid-2010s. The strategy of "buying stability" (*hua qian mai pingan*, literally meaning "paying cash for peace") has been the most prevalent means of pacifying aggrieved citizens involved in labor, land rights, and property disputes (Lee and Zhang 2013; Su and He 2010; Elfstrom and Kuruvilla 2014; Heurlin 2016; Yan 2016). "Buying stability" reflects the local government's eagerness to preserve stability before aggrieved protesters swarm the streets or block office

buildings of higher-level government agencies. The practice seems to have effected some positive change, and it has become a lasting mechanism (Lee and Zhang 2013; Heurlin 2016).

The essence of buying stability does not lie in the payment amount but the processes leading to it. It is through grassroots efforts of "mass work, thought work, and education work" that state power is practically realized (Lee and Zhang 2013). For protesters, their family and social relationships may put them under unbearable pressure. For example, before resorting to violent suppression, local officials may quell resistance by deploying intermediaries such as hired thugs (Chen X 2017; Ong 2018), relatives and acquaintances (Deng and O'Brien 2013; O'Brien and Deng 2015), as well as neighborhood committees and clan organizations (Deng 2017; Mattingly 2016). These methods are the most prevalent means of pacifying the aggrieved in social conflicts in China's grassroots society. Consequently, the cost for the state is believed to be "enormous and rising" (Chen 2013). However, buying stability and resorting to relational connections cannot be easily applied on a large-scale basis because of the high costs involved. Hence, many local authorities fail to fully accommodate protesters because financial resources are inadequate and all possible connections have been used up.

Apart from concessions, repression has been equally—if not more—important in creating the downward trend of collective protests in China after the mid-2010s. Under Xi's leadership, local governments have been more repressive in coping with protests against land seizures and therefore more likely to arrest protesters. The state's crackdown on certain disadvantaged groups, including peasants who lost their land, has become particularly severe. Chinese peasants are considered subordinate both socially and economically, and thus are more likely to be met with fierce repression during protests (Chen 2017). Furthermore, thanks to sophisticated digital technology, the Chinese government has established a surveillance state of immense scale (Johnston and Zhang 2020). It has enhanced information collection and internal security, elevating mass surveillance to cope with collective protest and resistance (Shahbaz 2018). Intensified surveillance has advanced the state's capacity for preventive repression. Information facilitates preventive repression because it not only reveals citizens' underlying preferences, but identifies individuals for the type and level of grievance they possess (Greitens 2019). During collective protests, local mobile networks are shut down, and social media apps blocked. A broad use of these repressive tactics may have effectively reduced the number and scale of peasant protests.

The Chinese government has also attempted to preempt collective action by strengthening the monitoring of citizens and by instituting information-collection mechanisms. From Xi Jinping's rise to power in late 2012 to the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, the most critical change in Chinese politics and society has been the authoritarian regime's accelerated oppression of civil rights and the public sphere and its realization of a digital governance of total surveillance. In response to increasing resistance and dissent, the regime has treated collective protest as a national security issue.

The central and local authorities have established nationwide surveillance and intelligence networks, tightening internet controls and codifying policies within the law (Lei 2017). Specifically, the National Security Law and the Cybersecurity Law have been introduced, and the new government agency, the State Information Office, has been established. They provide legitimacy and facilitation of the government's gathering of intelligence and monitoring of the situation on the ground across the country (Chung 2012). China's censors have reined in blogs, social media, and search engines, and effectively eradicated any "incorrectly oriented" information. Information and blog posts on provocative collective protests are blocked on social media platforms. The collusion between the state and a group of powerful internet companies, along with real-name registration, labor-intensive censorship, and the social credit system, all have contributed to the deep infiltration of the state into society. Various stability-preservation offices are tasked to screen and detect social conflicts at the grassroots level. Such activities include field investigations, information gathering and analysis, household visits, and discussions with pertinent parties (Yan 2016). The result is that the government has been able to

monitor and suppress disadvantaged protest groups, such as petitioners, ethnic minorities, and religious groups, more comprehensively and effectively than ever before.

THE DYNNAMICS OF COLLECTIVE PROTEST

Social protests challenge authoritarian rulers in part because the dynamic process of collective action may produce unpredictable outcomes. In a repressive regime, social protests signal not only societal grievances but also the limitations of the state's control. The dynamic process of collective protest in a country depends on its state-society relationship, on the basis of which the state may shape collective resistance. The extent of the state's capacity to channel protest activities into more institutionalized forms is critical to a country's state-society relationship and its national development.

In Western and East Asian democratic countries, riots and public disturbances are rare; popular protests and social movements moved from a stage of chaotic insurgencies and severe repression into a process of institutionalization and legalization, transforming the whole society into a "social movement society" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Soule and Earl 2005). However, in authoritarian China, the state has a much weaker capacity and incentive to institutionalize social conflicts. The government has been much less tolerant of contentious activities that directly challenge the central government's legitimacy (Chen and Cai, forthcoming). Protest activities in China vary widely in terms of groups, claims, size, targets, forms, as well as government responses. Some of them operate like chaotic insurgencies, while others act peacefully and follow the rules. Similar forms of protest activities occurring across China may present different dynamics depending on the local political contexts. The Chinese authoritarian state behaves differently when facing different kinds of protest activities. It can prohibit or hamper some, but facilitate other forms of social protest, and it can also be seen either as a unitary actor or an entity of multiple interests and voices, all depending on the kind of social conflicts concerned (Zhao 2010b).

With China's rapid economic development over the past four decades, many opportunities were created, but many contradictions were also spawned. The Chinese government regularly emphasizes that its national development is impossible without a stable environment. However, stability does not necessarily exclude social conflicts or collective protest. It requires that the country's ability to reduce social conflicts is continually extended and improved, thereby eliminating the possibility of large-scale, massively destructive movements.

DATA AND METHODS

Systematic data on social protests in China is lacking. This study draws on data from my collection of more than 12,000 protest news events that occurred in China from 2000 to 2019. Since 2007, my research assistants have been collecting cases of social protests from fifteen online sources, including newspaper databases—six of which are located outside of mainland China.[1] For a news event to be included in the database, four nominal criteria had to be met: it had to involve more than ten participants; it had to present either a grievance against some target or a demand made to some institution; it had to take on confrontational form; and it had to be located in the public sphere. Based on these criteria, nonconfrontational events (i.e. complaints, letter-writing campaigns, lawsuits, and press conferences) have been excluded. Petitioning (*shangfang*) events were included only if they escalated into public protests (e.g., holding demonstrations or sit-ins in front of government offices); legal and routine petitioning activities were not included in our database.[2]

It is difficult to assess whether the cases I collected are representative of the overall protest landscape in China, but to my knowledge, my database includes the largest number of publicly accessible news reports from the past decade. However, relying solely upon media reports may

introduce bias into the data (see Earl, Martin, McCarthy, and Soule 2004; Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Koopmans and Statham 1999; Ortiz, Myers, Walls, and Diaz 2005; Rucht and Neidhardt 1999). First, in regard to contemporary Chinese news reports, the fluctuation in the number of protests over the years may be caused by selective editing by the media or state censorship. Hence, the number of reported protests may not accurately reflect the actual number of protests. Second, protests by some groups (e.g., urban workers) may be more likely to gain media attention than others (e.g., peasants in remote areas). Small-scale protests are also less likely to be reported than large-scale ones. Therefore, certain kinds of protests may be underrepresented in the database. These possibilities certainly exist, but they do not necessarily invalidate the analysis in this study as I have been carefully maintaining the validity and reliability of the database.

To maintain data reliability, the data sources were kept the same and cases were drawn systematically from the same newspaper databases and news agencies. Protest news solely from the Internet or social media sources were not included to prevent introducing another layer of bias. My dataset comprises over 2,500 large-scale protests with 1,000 or more participants each. As large-scale protests are less likely to be covered up, they can be suggestive of the nature and trend of social protests in China. Another study on protest events in China drawing on data from social and news media also finds that reporting bias in the news media is substantially reduced for large events (Goebel and Steinhardt, 2019). Thus, I compared my collection of all cases with the collection of only large-scale protests, and found that the distribution of protests across different social groups over different periods displays similar patterns across the two collections. This result implies the data is not biased and its overall quality is satisfactory. However, this study is not limited to large-scale cases. As it is necessary to examine protests of different sizes, small-scale protests were also included in the analysis.

Furthermore, considering the political sensitivity of protest news in China, description bias may exist in the news events data. The news stories published in Chinese newspapers tend to present a government perspective, while some of those outside China may present the government in less favorable light. For example, while protest activists might seek to attract media attention to expose government officials' wrongdoings, news reports might frame the coverage in ways that underscore the disruption and violence of the protest. These possibilities certainly exist, but they do not necessarily invalidate the analysis because key variables included in this study were mostly objective protest characteristics, such as date, location, protest groups, the number of participants, the type of demands, the protest target and tactics, and the government's response. While data from reported protest events cannot be relied on for a description of the whole country along any single dimension, this unrepresentativeness does not necessarily affect the generalizability of findings regarding the relationships between variables (cf., Manion 1994). Existing research on contentious politics in China is mostly based on case studies or small samples.[3] This study examined the characteristics and trends of protests with a large sample. In this way, it can make a significant contribution to advance systematic research in this area.

DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL PROTESTS IN CHINA

This section first presents the development and expansion of popular protests in China. From the news events data of 12,585 cases from 2000 to 2019, it can be ascertained that collective resistance in China had rapidly increased with regard to the number of events, spatial expansion, and regional distribution. Figure 1 shows the frequency distribution of protest events from 2000 to 2019, including protests that occurred in urban and rural areas. By and large, there was a rising tendency of social protests from 2000 to 2014. During the period of 2004-2005, an initial rise in the frequency can be observed. In 2007, protest frequencies reached their first peaks, continuing their climb in 2009 only to regress around 2011-2012. The annual number and increasing rates of protests in cities were far greater than those in rural areas. Nevertheless, they

Figure 1. Yearly Number of Protest Events, 2000-2019

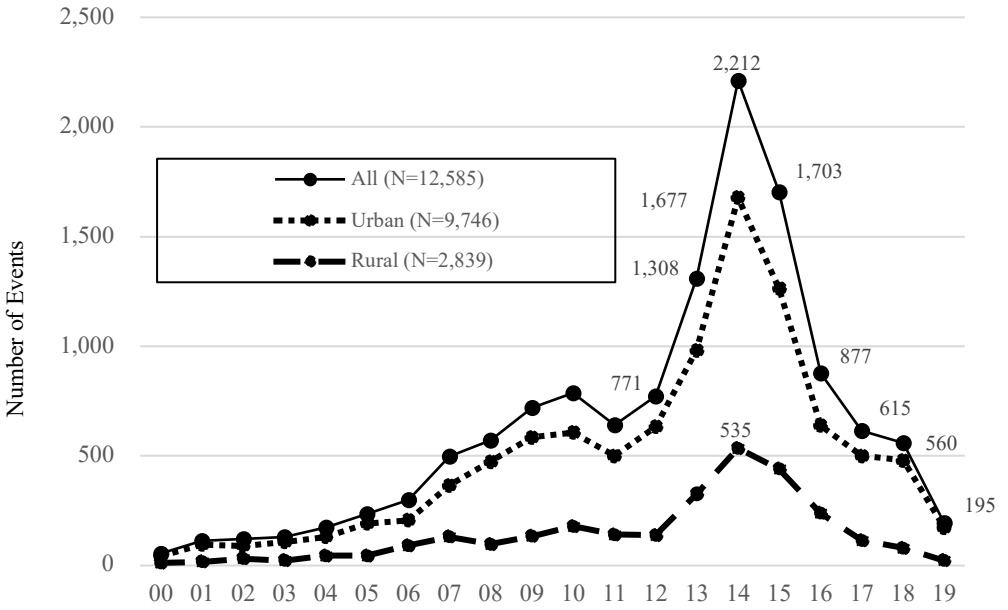
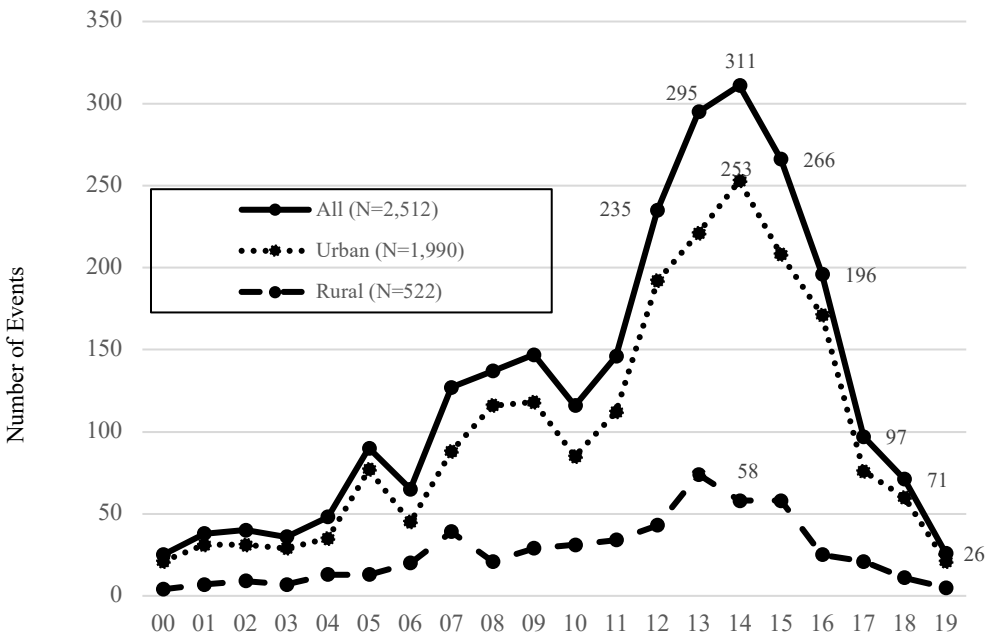


Figure 2. Large-scale Protest Events (> 1000 participants), 2000-2019



reveal similar trends, with their frequencies reaching a peak of 2,212 in 2014.[4] In 2015, however, the number began to decline to 1,703, shrinking to a twelve-year low of 195 in 2019.

Meanwhile, large-scale protests revealed a similar pattern; their numbers increased from 25 in 2000 to 90 in 2005 to 116 in 2010, before reaching 311 in 2014. They started to decline and reached 266 in 2015, falling to a twelve-year low of 26 in 2019. Both the collections of all protest incidents and of the large-scale ones showed that the number of social protests in China reached its climax in 2014, only to fall dramatically during the 2016-2019 period.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants in Social Protests in China, 2000-19

	2000-19		*2000-02*	*2003-07*	*2008-12*	*2013-15*	*2016-19*
	N	%	%	%	%	%	%
Public-sector employees	1,407	11	31	18	13	7	12
State-owned firm workers	694	6	27	13	6	3	4
Military veterans	341	3	0	2	3	2	6
Civil servants, teachers, etc.	372	3	3	3	5	2	2
Private-sector employees	2,949	23	17	24	25	25	18
Private-sector workers	2,334	19	13	18	18	20	16
FDI workers	615	5	4	6	7	5	1
Urban residents harmed	4,210	33	20	24	30	36	40
Home owners	1,121	9	1	6	7	12	9
Petitioners	1,176	9	0	5	7	12	11
Displaced residents	361	3	3	4	4	2	2
Students	214	2	5	3	2	1	1
Ad hoc groups (masses)	837	7	6	8	8	5	8
Minorities and religious groups	343	3	6	1	4	2	2
Peasants	2,839	23	21	25	20	25	20
Total	12,585	100	289	1,338	3,488	5,223	2,247

Table 1 presents the distribution of social groups in popular protests during different eras of Chinese leadership: 2000-2002 (i.e., Jiang Zemin administration); 2003-2007 (i.e., Hu Jintao's first term); 2008-2012 (i.e., Hu Jintao's second term); 2013-2015 (i.e., the first three years of Xi Jinping's rule) and 2016-2019 (i.e., the period when Xi Jinping's power consolidated). I differentiated these five periods with the aim of understanding the broader processes of social protest and social control employed by the Chinese government and its agencies under the leadership of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. Highlighting how state authorities respond to protest events can help us understand the state's incentives and illustrates the extent to which state authorities and citizens view protest as a legitimate mechanism for political participation. Especially after Xi Jinping came to power in late 2012, civic organizations, media freedom, and rights activists have all been subject to severe suppression and control by the state. The shrinking space for protest activities and suppression of collective protests have notably changed in comparison to past administrations. To highlight the impact of the Xi Jinping administration even further, I divided his tenure (2013-present) into the first three years (2013-2015) and the following four years (2016-2019).

Protest participants were divided into the following categories: (1) public-sector employees; (2) private-sector employees; (3) urban residents; (4) ad hoc groups or groups of people with mixed backgrounds; (5) minorities and religious groups; and (6) peasants. Public sector employees included civil servants, military veterans, workers at state-owned and collective firms, and those working in public institutions (schools and banks). Private sector employees included self-employed individuals, workers at private firms, and workers at foreign-direct-investment (FDI) firms. Urban residents refer to those who come from the same group with their interests or rights harmed, including homeowners, petitioners, displaced residents, and students. Ad hoc groups consisted of previously unassociated protest participants who joined protests because of issues of common concern (e.g., environmental pollution), or as participants of riots.

The data showed that some groups protested more frequently than others, and the same groups might participate in collective protests differently at different times. As presented in table 1, workers at state-owned firms frequently protested in the early 2000s, accounting for 27% of all protests during 2000-2002, reflecting a large number of labor disputes and workers' protests caused by the transformation and privatization of state-owned firms during that period (Lee 2007; Hurst 2009; Chen 2009). Workers' protests at state-owned firms significantly declined in later years, accounting for 3% of total protests in 2013-2015 and 4% in 2016-2019, respectively. In

contrast, protests staged by private sector employees accounted for a major part of the protests: their protests had become more frequent from 2008-2015 (about 25%) but declined from 2016-2019 (18%). The protest group of urban residents harmed—including homeowners, petitioners, displaced residents, and students—staged the most protests, accounting for 33% of the total number of protest events over twenty years. In particular, during the recent 2016-2019 period, their protests further increased, accounting for 40% of the total number of protest events, which were disputes with businesses or claims for their rights and interests. Peasant protests accounted for 20% to 25% of the total number of protest events over the twenty years. Rural residents protested mainly because of disputes over tax and fee collection (before the 2004 tax reform) and their loss of farmland, which has been a constant source of grievances among peasants in many localities (Chen forthcoming; Cai 2003; Guo 2001; Zweig 2000).

Protest Targets and Claims

The challenge to the state authority is measured by the target at which a protest is directed. I divided the targets of complaints into five categories: (1) high-level government, including ministries of the central government, provincial government, and municipality government (i.e., Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing); (2) low-level government, including prefecture-level, county-level, and township-level government, except village government in rural areas; (3) state-owned firms; (4) nonstate firms; and (5) village government.

As table 2 shows, 13% of the protests of the 2000-2019 period targeted the central and provincial governments, 30% were directed against governments at the prefecture-city level and lower, 13% against village governments, 14% against state-owned firms, and 30% against non-state firms. The distribution of protest targets showed significant changes between 2016-2019 and previous periods. During the 2016-2019 period, the proportion of protests directed at different levels of government increased. The proportion of protests targeting the central and provincial governments grew from 11% in 2013-15 to 18% in 2016-19, while the proportion of protests targeting local governments rose from 29% in 2013-15 to 32% in 2016-19. In contrast, protests targeting nonstate firms decreased from 36% in 2013-15 to 29% in 2016-19. During 2016-2019, protesters became more likely to appeal to the central government or provincial (municipal) governments than during previous periods, implying that their grievances could not be resolved by lower-level governments, with no alternative but to seek help from higher-level governments.

The protesters' claims were divided into five categories: (1) economic claims (i.e., monetary issues such as wages, pensions, layoff compensations, property, investments, and other economic demands); (2) administration claims (including issues with government policies and regulations, officials' malpractice and corruption, and disputes over village elections); (3) rights claims, including disputes over individual rights ranging from property rights (e.g., relocation/dislocation, forced eviction, pollution, and environmental issues, etc.) to individual rights (e.g., community safety, medical malpractice, occupational injury, job rights, gender equality, and others); (4) rural land seizures; and (5) incidental events.

Table 2. Protest Target in China, 2000-19

	2000-19		*2000-02*	*2003-07*	*2008-12*	*2013-15*	*2016-19*
	N	%	%	%	%	%	%
High-level government	1,569	13	10	10	15	11	18
Low-level government	3,440	30	30	28	30	29	32
State firms	1,612	14	38	22	15	10	12
Nonstate firms	3,465	30	12	23	25	36	29
Village government	1,566	13	10	17	15	14	9
Total	11,652	100	273	1,230	3,246	4,971	1,932

Table 3. Protest Claims in China, 2000-2019

	2000-19		*2000-02*	*2003-07*	*2008-12*	*2013-15*	*2016-19*
	N	%	%	%	%	%	%
Economic claims	5,115	41	38	39	41	42	38
Administration claims	2,394	19	30	20	19	18	18
Rights issues	2,792	22	20	22	23	19	27
Rural land seizures	1,652	13	6	13	11	16	11
Incidental events	631	5	6	5	6	4	5
Total	12,584	100	289	1,338	3,488	5,222	2,247

Table 3 presents the distribution of protest claims. During the 2000-2019 period, the most widely reported protest claims focused on economic issues (41% of all claims), followed by rights issues (22%), administration issues (19%), and issues of rural land seizures (13%). There was a significant change in the trend of protest claims over the past seven years from 2013-2015 to 2016-2019. While protest events responding to general economic discontent had been declining from 42% in 2013-2015 to 38% in 2016-2019, the protests triggered by rights issues increased from 19% in 2013-15 to 27% in 2016-19. That is, protesters in China were primarily driven by concrete interests, such as economic rights. However, people's grievances were not limited to monetary issues. Growing discontent was also caused by violations of individual rights, bad government policies, and officials' wrongdoings. In rural areas, the most important protest issue that emerged in the early 2000s and accelerated after the mid-2000s was linked to land seizures in suburban agricultural villages, where local cadres underpaid or embezzled compensations originally awarded to displaced peasants (Chen forthcoming; Heurlin, 2016).

Disruption and Repression of Social Protests

Table 4 presents the forms of collective protest in urban and rural China. Over the 2000-2019 period, violent actions accounted for 28% and 57% in urban cities and rural villages, respectively. Violent tactics were more frequently seen in rural villages than in urban areas. More than half of rural protests concluded in violence, representing 59% and 55% of all reported rural events in 2013-2015 and 2016-2019, respectively. In comparison, more than half of all urban protests (72%) adopted nonviolent means, and the overall level of violence was much lower than at rural protests, although still accounting for 28% of all events. In urban areas, nonviolent protests slightly increased from the early 2000s to the 2010s, climbing to their highest level (78%) during the period of 2016-2019.

The data reveal that repression has been commonly employed by the Chinese government in dealing with social protests, especially since 2013. As my collection includes information on whether arrests were made, I use the arrest of protesters as a proxy for repression. It merits mentioning that not all of the arrested protest participants face criminal charges, and some are released without any charges filed against them. Table 5 presents police presence and action at protest scenes, showing notable variations in the application of different police approaches between urban cities and rural villages. In urban cities, the number of no-shows (i.e., events police were not reported to have attended) in 2000-2019 is high—39% of reported protest events occurred without police presence; the other three types of police responses were standing guard (17%), dispersing protesters (15%), and making arrests (29%). In comparison, only 21% of reported protest events from 2000-2019 in rural regions occurred without police presence. However, more importantly, the percentage of instances where police resorted to arrests in rural villages was overwhelming—48% of events involved arrests. This proportion was much higher than that in urban cities, where 29% of events resulted in arrests. In rural villages, the approach of standing guard was the least frequent response (12%) to protests, whereas the least frequent (15%) police response in cities was crowd dispersal.

These descriptive statistics reveal that the use of force had been vigorously adopted in China, either to disperse crowds or to arrest protesters. These two approaches together accounted for 44%

Table 4. Protest Forms in Urban and Rural China, 2000-2019

	2000-19	*2000-02*	*2003-07*	*2008-12*	*2013-15*	*2016-19*
Urban Protests (N)	9,746	229	1,004	2,799	3,922	1,792
Nonviolent %	72	69	69	72	70	78
Violent %	28	31	31	28	30	22
Rural Protests (N)	2,839	60	334	689	1,301	455
Nonviolent %	43	37	43	48	41	45
Violent %	57	63	57	52	59	55

Table 5. Police Presence and Action at Protest Events in Urban and Rural China, 2000-2019

	2000-19	*2000-02*	*2003-07*	*2008-12*	*2013-15*	*2016-19*
Urban Protests (N)	9,746	229	1,004	2,799	3,922	1,792
Police Presence %	61	53	66	61	61	57
Arrest %	29	20	25	24	33	31
Disperse %	15	14	18	15	14	15
Stand guard %	17	19	23	22	14	11
No show %	39	47	35	38	39	43
Rural Protests (N)	2,839	60	334	689	1,301	455
Police Presence %	79	73	78	73	84	77
Arrest %	48	38	35	40	53	56
Disperse %	19	23	25	18	21	13
Stand guard %	12	12	18	15	10	8
No Show %	21	27	22	27	16	23

of events in urban areas and 67% of events in rural villages, respectively. Despite this, an important difference is that city police relied on preventive and tolerant approaches much more than their rural counterparts, where there existed a high incidence of repressive police actions.

With regard to historical trends, there have been notable changes after Xi Jinping's ascent to power, as well as between the first three years (2013-2015) and the following four years (2016-2019) of his tenure. Compared to the four years (2008-2012) preceding the Xi administration, during the first three years of his tenure (2013-2015), nonviolent protests in both urban and rural areas slightly declined from 72% to 70% in cities and from 48% to 41% in rural areas (table 4). However, in the following period of 2016-2019, nonviolent protests in both urban and rural areas increased significantly, gaining 8% (from 70% to 78%) in urban centers and 4% (41% to 45%) in rural areas. This shows that while the aggression of protesters had slightly increased in the early days of the Xi Jinping administration, violent protests were reduced and conflicts remained comparatively peaceful during the following four years of his tenure. However, over the 2000-2019 period, the proportion of police using force to arrest protesters has continued to increase, showing that the Chinese government's degree of tolerance toward collective protests is shrinking even though the percentage of peaceful protests had increased significantly.

A Typology of Repression and Violence

The dynamic relationship between protests and repression is the focus of this study. Peaceful protests and rallies are clear manifestations of institutionalized collective resistance. That is, in democratic societies with a high degree of institutionalized collective protests, peaceful protests and tolerant police often go hand-in-hand and are the mainstay of collective action. However, in China, the trend does not seem to be moving in that direction; it is more diverse.

Table 6. A Typology of Repression and Violence

	Tolerant police + Nonviolent Protesters				Tolerant police + Violent Protesters		
	Year	*Urban*	*Rural*		*Year*	*Urban*	*Rural*
Tolerant Police (No Arrests)	2000-19	5,647 (58%)	843 (30%)	Tolerant Police (No Arrests)	2000-19	1269 (13%)	627 (22%)
	2000-02	142 (62%)	16 (27%)		2000-02	41 (18%)	21 (35%)
	2003-07	556 (55%)	107 (32%)		2003-07	198 (20%)	111 (33%)
	2008-12	1,685 (60%)	255 (37%)		2008-12	435 (16%)	157 (23%)
	2013-15	2,204 (56%)	341 (26%)		2013-15	423 (11%)	264 (20%)
	2016-19	1,060 (59%)	124 (27%)		2016-19	172 (10%)	74 (16%)
	Forceful police + Nonviolent Protesters				**Forceful police + Violent Protesters**		
	Year	*Urban*	*Rural*		*Year*	*Urban*	*Rural*
Forceful Police (Arrest)	2000-19	1,385 (14%)	390 (14%)	Forceful Police (Arrests)	2000-19	1445 (15%)	979 (34%)
	2000-02	16 (7%)	6 (10%)		2000-02	30 (13%)	17 (28%)
	2003-07	138 (14%)	38 (11%)		2003-07	112 (11%)	78 (23%)
	2008-12	339 (12%)	75 (11%)		2008-12	340 (12%)	202 (29%)
	2013-15	555 (14%)	191 (15%)		2013-15	740 (19%)	505 (39%)
	2016-19	337 (19%)	80 (18%)		2016-19	223 (12%)	177 (39%)

Empirically, I used the combination of protest forms and police responses to show the dynamic relationship between protest and repression. Presumably highly institutionalized protests include nonviolent protests with tolerant police at the scene. One reason for using the combination of protest forms and police response as a measurement rather than measuring protest forms and police response separately, is that at the scene of protests in China, the disruption caused by protesters and the responses of the police are often highly correlated to one another. For example, protests that were originally nonviolent could quickly turn violent as a result of police brutality. Police responses also often vary depending on how protesters behave.

Table 6 presents a cross tabulation of police responses and violent protests. In this 2x2 framework, the raw variable is "police responses to protests" divided into two categories: no arrest and arrest. The column variable is "forms of protest" with two categories: nonviolent protests and violent protests. The observations of each cell are further divided into urban and rural areas, and across the five different time periods. The values in parentheses are total percentages. Thus, certain protest combinations can be compared as a proportion of all protests during a certain period. The four combinations were: (1) tolerant police + nonviolent protesters; (2) tolerant police + violent protesters; (3) forceful police + nonviolent protesters; and (4) forceful police + violent protesters.

The number of observations corresponding to row 1 and column 1 is the combination of tolerant police coexisting with nonviolent protesters—which is the most common scenario of collective protest in contemporary democracies, representing a highly institutionalized form of collective protest. In China, 58% of urban protests and 30% of rural protests fell into this category, indicating that collective protests in urban areas were more orderly and predictable than those in rural areas, and were less likely to result in government crackdowns. There has been no tendency for this type of "highly civilized" protest scene to increase in China. Even in urban areas, its proportion had declined from 62% in 2000-2002 to 59% in 2016-2019. In rural areas, such "civilized" protest scenes had also dropped from 37% in 2008-2012 to 27% in 2016-2019. Collective protests in contemporary China are still a long way from institutionalization and legalization, as observed in most democracies. It is worth noting that although the combination of nonviolent protesters and tolerant police accounted for the majority of protests in urban areas, its share and growth had not only not progressed, but also regressed after the 2008-2012 period, especially in rural areas.

The second protest scenario is when violent protesters encounter tolerant police. This situation was the least common in urban areas, accounting for only 13% of the total number of protests

in urban areas and 22% in rural areas. Moreover, they had continued to decrease over time. In 2003-07, 20% of protests in cities and 33% in rural areas belonged to this category; but by 2016-19, this share had shrunk to 10% in cities and only 16% in rural areas. In the past, this kind of protest scene was generally a situation where "resistance had legitimate grounds, and the government was in the wrong." Hence, the government tried to tolerate the intense behavior of the protesters. Or, when the scale of the protest was too large, e.g., in the early years, when peasants protested in rural areas and the government's police force could not respond in time, the local authorities adopted a more passive attitude. However, in recent years, as the government's stability maintenance resources and workforce have rapidly expanded, it no longer tolerates collective resistance, especially if protesters use violent means.

The third protest scenario describes a situation where nonviolent protesters were arrested by the police. This combination had been growing over the years. For example, in 2008-12, 12% of collective resistance in cities and 11% in rural areas belonged to this category; but by 2016-19, the proportion rose to 19% in cities and 18% in rural areas. The police were increasingly inclined to use force to arrest protesting crowds, even when there were no violent tactics involved.

The fourth combination, "forceful police coexisting with violent protesters," could be described as "fighting violence with violence." It was the second most common type in urban areas, accounting for 15% of urban protests, and second only to the "civilized" institutionalized form. In rural areas, this type accounted for the highest percentage of the four combinations (34% of all rural protests over the past twenty years). In the face of collective resistance, the Chinese government was much more repressive in the villages than in the cities. And the confrontations between the government and the peasants had further intensified under the Xi Jinping administration between 2013 and 2019.

Table 7 on the next page presents results from logistic regression analysis, modeling two kinds of combinations between police arrests and protest forms. Model 1 is the combination of tolerant police coexisting with nonviolent protesters, representing highly "civilized" collective protest. Model 2 is the opposite combination—forceful police coexisting with violent protesters—indicating mutual distrust and hostility between protesters and the police. In addition to variables discussed in previous sections, a dummy variable was included to examine the effects of big cities, such as Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenzhen, and provincial capital cities, on police intervention in protest activities.

First, both model 1 and model 2 show that different leaders had significant effects on the relationship between protest and repression. Other things being equal, compared to the Hu Jintao administration (2008-12), the first combination of collective resistance with tolerant police coexisting with nonviolent protesters was less likely to occur during both periods of the Xi Jinping administration; also, the combination of forceful police coexisting with violent protesters was more likely to occur. These trends are quite consistent with table 6, even when not controlling for other variables. Regardless of whether protests remained peaceful or turned violent, the trend under Xi Jinping's rule of strong repression was clear and profound. Other things being equal, collective protests utilizing nonviolent tactics and peaceful police had been significantly less common under Xi Jinping than under Hu Jintao; meanwhile, in protest scenes, instances where state violence was used to curb protestors' violence had increased significantly.

The two models in table 7 show that protest groups significantly affected the relationship between protest and repression. Simply stated, the identity of the protesters affected the interactions between protesters and the police. As can be seen from model 1, the likelihood for police tolerating nonviolent protesters who worked in the public sector, including state-firm workers, military veterans, school teachers, etc., were significantly higher than for police tolerating other nonviolent groups (except FDI workers). For example, all other things being equal, the odds for police tolerating nonviolent protesters who worked in the public sector were about $e^{1.550} = 4.71$ times (371%) higher than for police tolerating nonviolent peasant protesters.

Model 2 shows that some groups (including private-sector workers, FDI workers, ad hoc groups, urban residents, minorities, religious groups, and peasants) were more likely than public-sector employees to be situated in protests in which police force was used against protesters. For

instance, the odds for police arresting violent minority and religious group protesters were about $e^{1.806} = 6.09$ times (509%) higher than for police to arrest violent protesters employed in the public sector.

Finally, location also affects the relationship between protest and repression. Municipalities directly under the central government and provincial capitals have access to higher levels of administrative power and adequate resources. They have more room for decision making and are better equipped to deal with mass protests. Also, they can respond to mass protests more effectively and in a timely manner. All other things being equal, the odds for police tolerating nonviolent protesters in big cities are about $e^{.295} = 1.34$ times (34%) higher than for police tolerating nonviolent protesters elsewhere. Also, in large cities, forceful police and violent protesters are less likely to coexist than in other cities. All other things being equal, the odds of police arresting violent protesters were multiplied by $e^{-.297} = 0.74$ (reduced by 26%) in large cities compared with protests in other cities.

Table 7. Logistic Regression Coefficients Predicting Protest Typology, 2000-2019

Period (2008-2012)[a]	*(1) Tolerant Police + Nonviolent Protesters*		*(2) Forceful Police + Violent Protesters*	
2000-02	-.079		.051	
2003-07	-.159	*	-.121	
2013-15	-.167	***	.478	***
2016-19	-.155	*	.257	**
Protest Size (100 -1000) [a]				
Less than 100	.252	***	-.419	***
More than 1000	-.412	***	.247	***
Protest Target (Firms and others) [a]				
High-level Government	.236	**	-.493	***
Low-level Government	.171	***	-.261	***
Protest groups (Public sector employees) [a]				
Private-sector Workers	-.279	***	.528	***
FDI Workers	-.097		.411	*
Ad hoc groups	-1.182	***	1.070	***
Students	-.772	***	-.221	
Urban residents harmed	-.950	***	1.143	***
Petitioners	-.658	***	.008	
Minorities / Religious group	-1.438	***	1.806	***
Peasants	-1.550	***	1.630	***
Big cities	.295	***	-.297	***
Intercept	.723	***	-2.279	***
Chi-square	902.4	***	772.1	***
df	17		17	
N	9,820		9,820	

Notes: [a] Reference groups in parentheses; * p <.05 **p <.01 ***p <.001

CONCLUSION

This study presents trends and key features of social unrest in China, examining the dynamics of repression and protest, and the extent of the state's capacity to channel protest activities into more institutionalized forms. It shows that social protest in China has diffused widely throughout different social groups, covering a huge variety of issues across a wide geographical area. The data reveal the ups and downs of China's social protests over the past two decades.

Since the 1990s, China's institutional changes and market reforms have produced a mass society with weak mechanisms protecting citizens' interests and rights from being violated. Chinese citizens are vulnerable to abusive state and nonstate actors. Social grievances, frustrations, and tensions have been growing, and have become the causes of soaring popular protests. However, the Chinese party-state has prohibited people from establishing organizations independent from its control. A disorganized society is believed to be incapable of posing a crucial challenge to the government. Meanwhile, the central-local relations in the Chinese political system had paved the way for political opportunities facilitating mobilization and claims making in collective protests. State penetration is limited because unorganized citizens are not subjected to the government's direct control. Discrete mobilization remains possible. With social conflict persisting, the government increases repression efforts in order to contain social protests.

In China, although popular protests have not threatened social stability because they are often short-lived and isolated, the persistence of grievances keeps constant pressure on the government. The government can certainly respond to popular protests by tackling the sources of grievances. However, accommodating protesters' demands can be costly for the government. At the same time, the government's organizational control over the people is also limited. Consequently, repression has become an important measure the government has employed to contain protests, especially in recent years. However, sustaining repression also proves to be costly to the government because it requires substantial resources and may sacrifice regime legitimacy.

Since 2013, under Xi Jinping's rule, the Chinese government has been more committed to cracking down on collective protests. Compared with the previous Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, Xi's regime has shown an even greater tendency toward strongman rule and centralized decision making. The party-state has strengthened its control of civil society, and media and Internet censorship have been tightened. In addition to traditional party-state organizations, the party-state also mobilizes technology manufacturers and incorporates digital technology to advance its mass surveillance and social control (Greitens 2019, Xiao 2019). Faced with increasing challenges by political dissidents, rights defense lawyers, NGO activists, as well as various types of collective protests, the regime has responded with severe and comprehensive crackdowns. This is the main reason why mass protests have been shrinking in China since the mid-2010s.

This study suggests that the Chinese government has been capable of suppressing collective resistance in recent years under Xi Jinping. However, while the government's resources and capacity to contain social resistance have been growing tremendously, there seems to be a ceiling on the Chinese state's ability—and probably willingness—to institutionalize collective resistance in the country. Under Xi Jinping's rule, the regime has been relying on increasing surveillance and repression to squash protest activities; the police are more inclined to arrest protesters. This study concludes that the dynamics of social protest in China are contingent on its state-society relations and the state's institutionalization capacity with regard to contentious politics. This study also shows that a strong authoritarian state has important implications for people's political participation and social stability. Centralized states aggrandize themselves by destroying intermediate bodies and reducing local autonomy, which then leaves very few openings for institutionalized participation (Tarrow 1998: 78). Without intermediate associations and institutionalized collective protest, an authoritarian state is likely to face instabilities or even chaos, which can lead to its downfall. Such chaos is not necessarily the concern of governments that take all possible means to retain power. However, when a strong authoritarian state prohibits social organizations and stifles the progress of institutionalized collective action, it makes itself the major target of social grievances and actions throughout its rule.

NOTES

[1] The cases were collected from a news database, Wisers (http://wisenews.wisers.net/wisenews), three online news services published in China, and two newspapers in Hong Kong, including *Zhongguo Xinwenwang* [China News Service], *Xinjingbao* [The Beijing News], *Nanfang Ribao* [Nanfang Daily], *Nanfang Zhoumo* [Southern Weekly], *Nanfang Dushi-*

bao [Southern Metropolis Daily], *Huaxi Dushibao* [West China Metropolis Daily], *Guangzhou Ribao* [Guangzhou Daily], *Shenzhen Wanbao* [Shenzhen Evening News], *Lanzhou Chenbao* [Lanzhou Morning News], *Pingguo Ribao* [Apple Daily] and *Mingbao* [Ming Pao]. The four online news agencies based out of mainland China include the following: The Central News Agency, Radio Free Asia, *Boxun* [Boxun] and *Dajiyuan* [The Epoch Times].

[2] Reports that met these criteria were then coded for content. In collecting and coding the data, the procedures were subject to intensive reliability and validity checks.

[3] A new way of case collection is online data mining. See Zhang and Pan (2019).

[4] This tendency of persistent protests is in line with the numbers released by sanctioned sources in China. The number of publicly reported collective actions rose from 8,700 in 1993 to about 127,500 in 2008. But sanctioned sources stopped releasing the aggregated statistics after 2008 (Chung 2012).

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