
by

Abigail Friedland
Class of 2017

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2017
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 3

Note to the Reader Regarding the Use of Chinese Names in this Thesis 4

Introduction 5

The Current Moment in China’s Land System and Rights Reform Process 26

Case Study 1: The Liulitun Incinerator Project 49

Case Study 2: Redevelopment in Beijing’s Drum and Bell Tower District 74

Case Study 3: The Siege in Wukan 103

Conclusion 126

Works Cited and Consulted 140
Acknowledgements

This thesis would never have come into being without the incredible support I have received from so many people over the past year. Though expressing my thanks to each and every one of you seems an insurmountable task, I will do my best.

First and foremost, thank you to my family for your endless love and faith in my ability to finish what I begin, and for instilling in me the knowledge that I can always turn to you for help, encouragement, and inspiration. A special shout out to my parents is in order for forcing me against my will to begin studying Chinese in the 7th grade—this thesis would look quite different had I been allowed to study Spanish instead.

Thank you to my advisor, Professor Mary Alice Haddad, for taking me on as an advisee even though you already had so much on your plate for this year. Working with you on this thesis has been a tremendous honor and pleasure, and I have gained so much from our conversations that I hope to carry with me long after I leave Wesleyan.

Thank you to my professors and peers in the CSS who have taught me so much both inside and outside the classroom. From you I have learned how to think critically, how to handle immense amounts of reading, and how to embrace a work hard play hard lifestyle.

Finally, thank you to my friends, without whom I could never have gotten through these last four years, let alone this thesis. I could go through and list each of you individually and all that you mean to me but to do so would take forever and far more pages than the thesis you are about to read.

I feel truly blessed to have so many wonderful people in my life and to have had so much support as I have worked on this project—my only hope is that as time goes on I can give back to each of you what you have given to me. My heart is full.
Note to the Reader Regarding the Use of Chinese Names in this Thesis

As this thesis deals with the specific issue of citizen resistance and its impact on policy decisions in the People’s Republic of China, I often cite Chinese individuals who played a role in a resistance campaign or who have contributed to academia related to these issues. Because Chinese names are traditionally formatted in the opposite order to English language names, with a person’s family name first, before their given name, it can be confusing as to how an individual ought to be referred to. This is further complicated by the tendency of some Chinese academics to flip the order of their name in order to fit Western standards. I try my best in this work to refer to people by their family names, but there are cases where it was difficult to distinguish a family name from a given name, and so there may be places where I accidentally get mixed up. I try my best to be consistent, but I recognize that I may not have gotten it fully correct, and for that I apologize.
Introduction

In December 1978, Deng Xiaoping declared the beginning of a new era for the People’s Republic of China when he announced the adoption of a progressive policy scheme entitled Reform and Opening (改革开放). This new approach to Chinese politics consisted of loosening many of the earlier restrictions on citizens and the economy in order to promote a more natural path for growth and development in the hopes of reviving China’s society and its economy after many devastating years under Mao Zedong’s leadership. The China that exists today is the direct result of this dramatic shift in policy. Reform and Opening set in motion a rapid series of policy innovations and subsequent progressions that have allowed China to go from one of the most impoverished nations in the world to one of the richest in the span of a mere four decades.

Yet as China’s economy and society have evolved, its core political structure remains largely unchanged. In 2016, the PRC continues to be a single party, authoritarian state with a rigidly defined bureaucratic hierarchy. Additionally, despite the introduction of many new policies regulating land use and development since 1978, the fundamental issue of land ownership and land use rights remains a major source of tension.

According to a study conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, of a total number of 720 petitions filed by farmers in 2004, 73 percent contained land-
related grievances.¹ A later study by the Chinese Academy for Governance shows that the number of protests in China *doubled* in the years between 2006 and 2010, with a staggering 180,000 reported a year.² With the number of mass incidents rising sharply over the last several years, it appears that a moment of reckoning is on hand as the tensions in the relationship between the state and society near a boiling point. China’s central government is particularly sensitive to citizen unrest in regards to land issues; historically, land ownership rights have been a tipping point for revolution in Chinese society, serving, for instance, as a cornerstone of the Chinese Communist revolutionary platform in the years before the CCP came to power. As a result, the current state apparatus is keenly aware of the potential instability that questions about land ownership and land use reform could create should the situation wriggle out from under tight Party control.

In an effort to preserve one of the state’s last claims to retain a core socialist ideology, the Chinese constitution designates land as a national and public resource as opposed to a private good, with all urban land owned by the government and all rural land owned by the collectives of citizens who traditionally worked the land as peasants.³ The variation in land-related policies and their implementation between the urban and rural spheres as well as between geographic regions, along with indistinct delineations of citizen rights and local government autonomy with regards to land

---


ownership and use, has had serious consequences for both Chinese society and the country’s economy. Some of the most notable results include a stark asymmetry in the real estate and development markets between spheres, rapid growth and gains in prosperity in urban regions and little momentum in rural ones, huge financial incentives for local officials to flip land with a rural designation into urban and commercial land, resulting in widespread local official corruption and collusion with real estate development companies, and a general degradation of any semblance of rule of law. Yet despite all this, Chinese civil society continues to develop and to demand more from the political system, and as I hope to show, they are making real gains. It is in this complicated context of ideological, political, and social tension surrounding land issues in China that my research question must be examined.

The problem from which my research question has arisen is as follows: how is it that given the rigid authoritarian structure of the Chinese political system, which has been designed to leave little to no room for general citizen-led political activity and engagement in policymaking, that we see Chinese citizens successfully extracting desired policies, resources, and rights from the state? How can it be that there is effective citizen-led policy reform in this context, especially in the extremely sensitive area of Chinese policy that has to do with land ownership and use? Before I begin to address how I hope to answer this question, it is necessary to review the existing literature that has shaped the formation of my query.
Existing Theories of Chinese Policymaking

My project has been significantly shaped by the research and work of others who have theorized about the Chinese political landscape and the mechanisms that compose it through which new policies come into being. It is my hope that this work will build on the strengths of these theories while using them as a launching point for my analysis of a new addition to the Chinese policymaking process: citizen-instigated policy innovation and reform as a result of popular protest and resistance to land development projects.

Fragmented Authoritarianism

The first theoretical block that forms the foundation of my analysis is the fragmented authoritarianism heuristic. The fragmented authoritarianism theory was first introduced by Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg in their 1988 seminal work, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes*. In their book, Lieberthal and Oksenberg present a new framework for analyzing policymaking decisions in China that differs from the major two preexisting prototypes, the rationality and power models, which both contain underlying assumptions that undermine their accuracy and general usefulness. The “rationality model” used by earlier scholars leaned too heavily on Western idealistic assumptions about the rational decision making of Chinese officials, rather than considering constraints, both on leaders and on the resources available to them during the process. This false assumption is contrasted with the flaws of the opposing “power model,” which in turn

---

overemphasizes the role that factions and personal political calculations play in the construction of policies.\(^5\) In their work, Lieberthal and Oksenberg recognize the weaknesses of these two pre-existing models and based on their research on China’s energy policymaking in the early 1980s, in the years closely following the beginning of Reform and Opening, propose an additional framework that allows for more complexity and nuance: fragmented authoritarianism.

The fragmented authoritarianism model presents Chinese policy makers as actors within a complex hierarchical bureaucratic party structure in which authority and influence vary across levels and regions. As a result of the cleavages that exist within this political structure, policies are a result of gradual compromise and exchanges between actors and levels. Lieberthal and Oksenberg describe a “fragmented bureaucratic structure of authority, decision making in which consensus building is central, and a policy process that is protracted, disjointed, and incremental.”\(^6\) In conclusion, aside from debunking the myth of the Chinese political monolith, Lieberthal and Oksenberg contributed to the field a recognition of a dialogue between different strata of the state and the ways in which this fragmentation within the political structure significantly impacts policymaking. Their work was one of the earliest to make clear that despite the rigid hierarchy and bureaucracy that gives structure to the state, there is far greater decentralization and dynamism within the state than recognized previously. The introduction of the theory of fragmented authoritarianism introduced the idea for the first time to scholars that

\(^5\) Ibid., 14-15.
\(^6\) Ibid., 22.
the layered and disjointed nature of the existing political establishment is crucial to understanding the decisions and policies undertaken in modern China.

**Sebastian Heilmann and Experimentation under Hierarchy**

Lieberthal and Oksenberg were the some of the earliest scholars to recognize the crucial role that the hierarchical structure of the Chinese state plays in the policymaking process, but their work has since been greatly expanded upon. One scholar of Chinese policymaking and innovation who has helped push the field forward dramatically is Sebastian Heilmann.

Heilmann has authored several brilliant papers outlining how local state actors can utilize the existing, and often failing, institutions within the state in order to create transformative policies that address local needs. Outside of this work, Heilmann has also helped showcase the important role that policy experimentation has played throughout much of contemporary Chinese history, not merely since Deng Xiaoping reopened China to the world in 1978. In a 2008 paper titled, “From Local Experimentation to National Policy: The Origins of China’s Distinctive Policy Process,” Heilmann discusses the emphasis that leadership within the Chinese Communist Party placed on experimentation both for intellectual and pragmatic reasons long before the PRC was established in 1949. He argues that it is in the context of this lengthy history of experimentation that today’s policymaking methods must be analyzed. Heilmann is careful to distinguish his analysis of the Chinese situation from policy experimentation methods utilized in other places, as well as from the traditional sort of experimental policymaking: “Policy experimentation, as
presented in this study, means innovating through implementation first, and drafting universal laws and regulations later.” In sum, what Heilmann focuses in on is essentially a boiled down take on the fragmented authoritarianism model, with a particular focus on the central-local relationship and the role of that dynamic in creating transformative economic policy reform: “At the heart of this process, we find a pattern of central-local interaction in generating policy—‘experimentation under hierarchy’—which constitutes a notable addition to the repertoires of governance that have been tried for achieving economic transformation.” Heilmann’s identification of the possibility for innovation of higher quality policy within the Chinese political apparatus in the area of economic policy as a result of this experimental, trickle-up approach illuminates the potential for such a method to work in other policy areas as well.

**Jessica Teets and Local Governance Innovation**

As Sebastian Heilmann has been looking more closely at the impact of the central-local power dynamic on the development of economic policy in China, a contemporary of his, Jessica Teets, has also been working to understand the specific role of local government innovation in developing national environmental policy. Thus while Heilmann discusses this same relationship in the context of China’s economic policy innovation and development, Teets looks at environmental policymaking to illuminate the current trend of experimentation and innovation by

---


8 Ibid., 1.
local governments, especially showing how these attempts to solve local
environmental issues can instigate larger trends of environmental policy reform at the
national level.

Teets’ work reveals the surprising power local governance institutions can
play in changing national policy and examines the factors that contribute to the
success or failure of these initiatives. In particular, Teets examines both the
motivations and incentives for local officials to act as “policy entrepreneurs,” that is
policy innovators and shapers, as well as the causes of successful policy diffusion
along both vertical and horizontal planes of government once a local government has
innovated a solution to their seemingly unique problem. Her research reveals the
complex dynamics of policymaking in China across competing regions as local
governments fight for Party recognition and prestige, as well as the beneficial
pragmatism in addressing issues that high local government autonomy provides.
Overall, Teets’ work shows how although there is a structure that can, and sometimes
does, facilitate the diffusion of good policy created at the local level to the national
level and across localities, there remain in place political barriers that sometimes
prevent the best policies from achieving national recognition and implementation:

Policy diffusion is thus more complex and interactive than previously
theorized—not just a Darwinian process in which the best policies rise to the
national level as often presented in the economic reform literature, but rather a
political process through which socially suboptimal policies might diffuse
while more equitable or effective policies remain trapped at one level of
government or in one locality or region.9

Taken together, Teets’ and Heilmann’s work shows how much dynamism and vibrancy exists within the Chinese political system, and reveals how decentralization of autonomy at the local level has the potential to positively impact Chinese policy decisions across various policy areas.

**Andrew Mertha and Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0**

As Heilmann and Teets show the ability of local officials to impact policy making, first on a local level and then nationally, a question is raised about what other actors might potentially enter and influence the policymaking process. The potential for engagement by non-state actors in this process is of particular interest to Andrew Mertha, another China scholar, whose work is driven in part by his attempts to answer this very question. In a 2009 paper titled, “‘Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0’: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process,” Mertha argues that while the original framework suggested by Lieberthal and Oksenberg in 1988 retains its core value, over the last three decades the Chinese political system has expanded to include other layers and actors who are now playing an active role in the development of new policy. Mertha is particularly focused on the media and well-known intellectuals, low-level officials, and career activists as policy entrepreneurs within this updated context.

What is especially relevant about Mertha’s work for this thesis is not only how he shows that traditional barriers keeping new actors out of the policy process have been lowered, but also in his discussion of successful framing by policy entrepreneurs as the key to their successful resistance. The concept of framing,
whereby activists take an issue and use existing rhetoric accepted and used by the state to make their critique, is particularly interesting in the Chinese context, as the government is so sensitive to potential threats and challenges to its authority. Mertha writes of policy entrepreneurs using issue framing to amplify their intended impact and support: “Policy entrepreneurs amplify [the issue] by identifying its core components and boiling them down into a portable narrative….These narratives often depend upon deliberate references to historical antecedents, metaphors, analogies and images.”\(^\text{10}\) This strategy of issue framing in conjunction with policy advocacy is crucial to the success of popular protest campaigns in China, and will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

In his book, *China’s Water Warriors*, Mertha tests his hypothesis on framing and policy entrepreneurs by examining several case studies that deal with the development of dams in southwestern China. The dam cases he looks at are very similar in nature to one of the case studies in this thesis, the resistance to the redevelopment of Beijing’s Drum and Bell Tower district, in the way that activists utilized framing to emphasize the cultural heritage value of the land set to be developed. However, while Mertha tends to focus primarily on the role of the media, NGOs, and prominent cultural figures in disrupting the development of land for their own reasons, this thesis is meant to look more specifically at the role that groups of average citizens can play in accessing these other actors in order to engage and lead resistance campaigns themselves.

---

\(^{10}\) Andrew Mertha, “’Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0’: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process,” *The China Quarterly* 200 (December 2009): 998, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0305741009990592.
Kevin O’Brien and Rightful Resistance

I have organized the preceding theories on Chinese policymaking as I have in order to highlight the developments that have occurred in the policy process, and in scholars’ understanding of that process, over the last 40 years. It should be clear that as time has gone on since the beginning of Reform and Opening in 1978, and as the Chinese State has had to meet new challenges that have arisen as a result of rapid economic development and new expectations from Chinese society, the process through which policy is created has been gradually opening up to include more potential actors than merely the central authority or even local governments. I am hoping that my work will show that this trend is continuing, as barriers to entry drop even further than discussed by Mertha, to allow for citizen-led policy innovation and reform. To do so I hope to draw on one of the most important theories relating to successful grassroots led reform and change in China—the rightful resistance theory developed by Kevin O’Brien and Li Lianjiang.

O’Brien and Li’s theory of rightful resistance is a crucial starting point for my thesis because it begins to illuminate how ordinary Chinese citizens can successfully fight and overturn actions taken by the state that they feel threaten their interests. Success in this case is a function of citizens’ ability to achieve their policy goals without incurring great social or political ramifications. In essence, while the other theories I have presented so far deal with the windows of opportunity the existing state structure allow for parties who have already amassed a measure of guaranteed power, rightful resistance evaluates the best possible way for ordinary citizens, who
are supposed to be kept powerless and out of the way, to access that power and
opportunity, and get away with it.

Especially important to the theory of rightful resistance is the public nature of
such dissent, and the connection between acts of resistance and the process of state
building:

Rightful resistance is invariably noisy, public, and open. Rightful resisters aim
to mitigate the risks of confrontation by proclaiming their allegiance to core
values rather than by opting for disguised dissent…. [Rightful resisters] have
learned how to exploit the potent symbolic and material capital made
available by modern states. Rightful resistance is thus a product of state
building and of opportunities created by the spread of participatory ideologies
and patterns of rule rooted in notions of equality, rights, and rule of law.\textsuperscript{11}

While O’Brien and Li’s work remains one of the core texts evaluating the
potential for successful citizen protest in China, it is now somewhat antiquated.
Published in 2006, \textit{Rightful Resistance in Rural China} is now over a decade old, and
in that span of time the political and social climate in the PRC has changed
significantly. While the essence of what O’Brien and Li describe remains relevant,
there are aspects of their argument that must be expanded on so that we might better
understand the inner workings of rightful resistance today.

\textbf{You-tien Hsing, the “Urbanization of the Local State,” and “Civic Territoriality”}

You-tien Hsing is one scholar who has begun to look at the relationships
shaping the sorts of popular engagement described by O’Brien and Li. While each of
the theorists already discussed have dealt with necessary aspects of the Chinese
policymaking process, Hsing’s ideas, most clearly elucidated in his book, \textit{The Great

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, \textit{Rightful Resistance in Rural China}, Cambridge Studies in
Contentious Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.}
Urban Transformation, are of particular importance because they manage to bring together the crucial aspects of the aforementioned theorists when talking specifically about land distribution and development in contemporary China, and the ways in which components of the state and society relate to each other as a direct result of dynamics surrounding land: “land has moved to the center of local politics in post-Mao China. It now shapes the restructuring of Chinese state power and radically impacts state-society relations.”

Hsing goes on in his book to describe the desire by both the state and society to assert their authority over land as a way of claiming power and control. Aside from the tension between the state and Chinese citizenry, a fight for control is simultaneously occurring both within the state itself, tying back into the ideas discussed by earlier theorist on the fractured nature of the state and the ways in which decentralization produces competition, and within society, as different subgroups, urban residents, rural residents, and those caught in between, all try to assert their right to a physical territory alongside their fight for nonphysical territory in the realm of recognized rights and freedoms. Hsing names the building and development of the local state as a result of its efforts to assert dominance over land the “urbanization of the local state,” while he names societal actors’ efforts to circumscribe a place for themselves in this context, “civic territoriality.” These two concepts, and the ways in which they illuminate the transformation of both the state and society as a result of

---

13 Ibid., 5.
14 Ibid., 15.
15 Ibid., 6.
16 Ibid., 15.
the contention that occurs over land in China today are crucial to the development of this thesis.

A few components of these two concepts are worth examining further, as they deeply relate to the case studies and overall question to be discussed in this thesis. Aside from the emphasis Hsing gives to the role of intra-state competition over land as central to the identity of the contemporary local state in China, one of the other most penetrating ideas he introduces in the concept of the urbanization of the local state is that not only can the local state be built up in this relationship, but it can also be torn down: “The local state builds its territorial authority, and finds its political identity in urban modernity….In sum, the local state is built, and can be un-built by urban projects on physical, economic, political, and ideological fronts.”17 This recognition of the potential for the breaking down of aspects of the local state as a result of the emphasis put on land links directly to the role of rightful resistance and civic territoriality in that breaking down process. Although the goal of citizens in resisting may not be to tear down parts of the local state but merely to claim their place in China’s development process, the interaction of these two sides over the land issue can potentially have that impact.

As far a civic territoriality, Hsing gives three models for how this concept is realized in the physical environment of land development and urbanization in China. The three forms of civic territoriality Hsing describes correspond to the forms of authority and formal rights of the state and society over land in differently designated land areas: inner city civic territoriality, urban fringe civic territoriality, and rural

17 Ibid., 9.
Each form of civic territoriality responds differently to assertions of domination over land by the local state, depending on the resources and strategies available to citizens in the area. As this thesis analyzes case studies that exhibit a variety of tactics, it is necessary to keep the context provided by the notion of these three typologies of civic territoriality in mind.

**Research Design of the Project**

The question that I hope to answer in this thesis is: given the intensely rigid and authoritarian nature of the Chinese state apparatus, how is it that we see cases of successful citizen led policy innovation and reform, especially in the extremely sensitive sphere of policy that has to do with land? In the formation of an argument which I hope answers this question, and in the shaping of this project as a whole, I have studied countless books, newspaper articles, journal articles, blog posts, and transcripts of interviews conducted by others. While it is possible to find many sources on this subject in English, I have used my Chinese language skills when necessary to do searches for potential sources in Chinese on Chinese academic databases and search engines as well, and have further used Chinese to translate sources where it is needed. Due to logistical complications, I was not able to do any of my research on the ground in China, and was unable to conduct any in person interviews myself. While in most cases I would consider this a serious defect of my research project, given the incredibly sensitive nature of land rights and land use issues in China today, as well as my absolute inability to blend in and interact with

---

18 Ibid., 16.
locals in China without attracting unnecessary attention, and the use of excessive online censorship tactics used by the Chinese government, I believe that my research capabilities from America might in fact be greater than if I had done most of my research in China itself.

After focusing in on what the question leading my research would be, I began to look for case studies that would provide ample information on how average citizens in China are pushing back against the state in the area of land policy. In narrowing down the case studies considered for selection there were a few variables that were important to factor in. The first is relatively simple: quantity and quality of information available. There had to be enough information available on the case so that reasonable conclusions could be made about the sequence of events and the implications of what had happened. Since there can be considerable censorship and lack of adequate reporting on land contention incidents in China, international media sources have played a crucial role in the research process in addition to articles found in Chinese newspapers.

The second variable considered in selecting case studies was the geographic dispersion of the cases in relation to one another. For some time there was uncertainty about whether it made more sense to use cases from one particular geographic region or to have a higher degree of variation in location. On the one hand, picking cases located in one general geographic region might prevent me from feeling able to generalize about my findings beyond the experiences of that particular province or region. Since in this thesis I am hoping to discuss citizen led reform within China as a whole, the decision was made not to solely look for case studies that might only be
indicative of a certain geographic region. This decision in the case study search process ended up being slightly undermined by the case studies that turned up in my research, and I ended up selecting two separate case studies that both happened in Beijing. The selection of both these Beijing case studies was a direct result of their relative strength in fulfilling the other characteristics I was looking for despite their geographic proximity to one another.

The final variable that factored into case study selection for this thesis was the potential for significant implications in the results of the struggles over land. Contention over land is the greatest cause of social unrest in China today, and yet it is surprisingly difficult to find cases that point to a glimmer of hope for the development of a consistent norm of rule of law and basic respect for citizens’ rights. The cases selected for discussion here, though not all wholly successful or obviously significant taken individually, each point to one more step taken towards the recognition of these two still distant goals, and in combination with one another reveal that there is significant potential for reform going forwards. Finally, each of these incidents did not remain isolated, as all three cases examined here had a significant impact on influencing later protests on similar land issues across the country.

The three main case studies to be covered in this thesis vary greatly in the resources available to resistors and as a result, the tactical approach taken by each campaign to promote their resistance to the land development project at hand varies as well. At the same time, each case reveals that there are a variety of approaches citizens in China today might take in order to successfully insert themselves and
interfere successfully in the existing power dynamic that shapes the use and development of land.

**Case Study Introduction**

My first case study examines an incident of contention that occurred in the Liulitun neighborhood of Beijing between 2006 and 2011 over the building of a waste incinerator. The case is noteworthy because it helped pave the way for today’s more accepted environmental activism, a form of civic engagement that remains critically integrated with land development tensions. As environmental activism grows as a movement in China, cases such as the one I look at, where citizens are able to successfully halt planned projects and push for a stronger government regulation, are becoming more common.

The second case study shows how in 2010, citizens in Beijing worked with NGOs to mobilize quickly in order to prevent the redevelopment of the Drum Tower district. This case provides an interesting counterpoint to the first, as they both occur in Beijing but reveal stark differences in the tactical approach taken, differences that are reflected in the divergent end results of each. Similarly to environmental protectionist framing, cultural heritage claims are especially potent and widely accepted in contemporary China, a fact that Beijing citizens and NGOs took swift advantage of in this case.

My final case study deals with the well-documented struggles of Wukan village in Guangdong province in 2011, which shows the utilization of anticorruption and democratization frames by locals to fight illegal land acquisition by local cadres.
Of the three case studies, the incident in Wukan is by far the most unlikely success story, as well as the most controversial, especially given recent developments in the village.

My Theory of Chinese Policymaking

So now, to return to my research question—given the rigid authoritarian structure of the Chinese political system, which has been designed to leave little to no room for general citizen-led political activity and engagement in policymaking, how is it that we see Chinese citizens successfully extracting desired policies, resources, and rights from the State? How can it be that there is effective citizen-instigated policy reform in this context, especially in the extremely sensitive area of Chinese policy that has to do with land?

From my research I have devised an argument that I believe answers this query. I argue that it is the convergence of increased access to both technology and information for the masses, along with the existing ambiguities in Chinese land rights and use legislation, variation in implementation of land use laws and policies, and divisions within the existing political apparatus that have widened and made more visible windows of political opportunity. Once recognized, these windows of opportunity are being exploited by average Chinese citizens to successfully insert themselves into China’s land development process, and to assert their own demands into the state’s decision making equation. Given a slim window of opportunity, Chinese citizens are against great odds succeeding in making demands of the state regarding land use, ownership, and development through their strategic use of the
tools and tactics available to them. Finally, despite the contentious nature of this resistance, the ways in which Chinese citizens are resisting the state actually serve to legitimize and validate the current political regime.

I hope to show that while there is a rich and deeply entrenched history of policy experimentation by the CCP, even on land related issues, there has been a recent addition to this process whereby average citizens are beginning to play a new role, thus disrupting the earlier process which involved interaction only between the local and central government layers. Whereas earlier experimentation generally fit either a top down model, in which the central government decides to push experimentation of a specific policy in a designated locality in order to determine its value and potential for nationalization, or a bottom up model, in which local governments decide to innovate and experiment with a new policy in order to curry favor with the national government and to address a local issue, a third pattern is emerging in which average citizens are beginning to recognize land policy flaws or policy implementation failures and are pushing back in the hopes of forcing the local government, and later the central government, to address their issues. I am hoping that the case studies I have selected will illustrate this new pattern of citizen political engagement in China and its results, as well as reveal local and central government reactions to the new role these citizens are taking on.

**General Outline of the Rest of the Thesis**

The layout of the rest of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 gives greater context for understanding the current trends in the relationship between the Chinese
state and society with regards to land, and discusses the growing windows of opportunity available to citizens to engage in politics on this issue. The chapter then goes on to describe the tactics and tools available to citizens in order to push a reevaluation of the relationship between the state and society and the land reform process forwards. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 each examine one of the three cases studies and draw on them to show how it is that incidents of citizen resistance are playing out on the ground, and achieving success. Chapter 6 concludes by drawing together the most salient aspects of my argument and questioning what the future holds.
The Current Moment in China’s Land System and Rights Reform Process

This chapter is meant to go into more depth on the problems within the existing land system in China and to explain why and how citizens are suddenly actively participating and succeeding in interfering in this high risk, high stakes policy area. The chapter opens with an examination of two of the major failures of the existing land system in China: the ambiguities in the existing land laws and policies, and the implementation problems and systemic issues that plague the state bureaucracy and encourage mass local official corruption and excessive and illegal land development. This is followed by a brief survey of the more recent efforts to reform the existing legislation and system, and the forces that are pushing the central government to take on that reform effort. The chapter then shifts towards a discussion of the role being played by citizens in this process, examining the specific motivations for citizens to engage in resistance when it comes to land development and land rights reform, and why there is now a growing window of opportunity for their successful participation. The chapter concludes by laying out the potential tactics and tools citizens can use to resist and push their own agenda forwards as top down reforms continue to fail to bring about satisfactory protection of rights against local government infringement.

Legislative Fuzziness

Classical economic theory has typically placed security of property rights at the foundation of what it takes to build a more prosperous society. For example, John
Locke, a theorist whose work has profoundly impacted both political and economic fields of thought, argued for the centrality of property protection in his work, “The Second Treatise of Government,” when he wrote, “No political society can be, nor subsist, without having in itself the power to preserve the property,”¹⁹ as the central purpose for the institution of government is the protection of property rights: “whereas government has no other end but the preservation of property.”²⁰ Later work in economics has generally upheld the importance of private property rights protection to a society’s economic health:

One of the necessary conditions for trading activity to take place is that the relevant agents must be able to appropriate the gains yielded by their transactions. If the gains are appropriated by only one of the parties, then there is no incentive for other parties to engage in the exchange. Indeed, economic growth will occur only if property rights make it worthwhile to undertake socially productive activities. It is therefore clear that poorly specified property rights pose a major obstacle to economic development…²¹

Clearly, there is a lengthy tradition of theory that asserts that the more clear the laws and institutions protecting property rights are, the better it is for sustained economic development: “it has been suggested that an unambiguous definition of property rights, guaranteed most effectively by private ownership, would provide necessary security and incentive to the users for an efficient use of the land which will in turn lead to optimal production and sustained economic growth”.²² Yet China scholar

²⁰ Ibid., 51.
George C.S. Lin, who wrote these words in his 2009 book, *Developing China: Land, Politics, and Social Conditions*, takes issue with this traditional view of the cause and effect relationship between property rights definition and sustained economic development, noting China’s impressive economic growth over the last several decades despite its highly ambiguous land rights policies and flimsy respect for rule of law as evidence that something is missing from the classic schematic when it comes to China. Lin is correct in his criticism of attempts to apply conventional assumptions to the Chinese situation, for it is true that the classic theory of the relationship between defined property laws and economic development fails to explain the situation in contemporary China. In fact, in many ways the ambiguity that remains in the Chinese legislation around land ownership and land use rights has been directly responsible for more speedy economic development, as institutional barriers that could provide a check on and inhibit rapid growth do not exist or are consciously overlooked. As a result, there has been a trend of rapid economic growth due to extensive land development in China, albeit growth that often comes at the expense of the citizens who lose their land to the process without gaining from the profits their land sale provides.

In this vein, since the beginning of Deng Xiaoping’s reforms in the early 1980s, the central government has taken many steps to reintroduce private property ownership and security into Chinese society, yet much of the legislation and policy guidelines in this area remain vague in their wording. Some have argued that this ambiguity is no accident— it was an intentional decision by central party leaders to leave the wording of such policies vague so as to empower local governments to find
ways to promote speedy and efficient development of land as a means of bolstering China’s emerging economy. As Peter Ho has asserted, China’s “‘deliberate institutional ambiguity’… allows local governments to adapt and respond quickly to a variety of pressures and rapidly changing conditions.”

As mentioned previously, China’s current land system draws a distinction between land designated for urban development and land for rural agriculture. This distinction between types is one of the most precise portions of the legislation governing land in China. Article 10 in the Chinese Constitution clearly states that:

> Land in the cities is owned by the State. Land in the rural and suburban areas is owned by collectives except for those portions which belong to the State as prescribed by law; house sites and privately farmed plots of cropland and hilly land are also owned by collectives. The State may, in the public interest and in accordance with law, expropriate or requisition land for its use and make compensation for the land expropriated or requisitioned. No organization or individual may appropriate, buy, sell or otherwise engage in the transfer of land by unlawful means. The right to the use of land may be transferred according to law. All organizations and individuals using land must ensure its rational use.

The Constitution is very precise in describing all that citizens and organizations composed of citizens may not do with regards to the land. In contrast, the legal guidelines regulating the rights of government actors are quite without precision, as the public interest requirement lacks specificity and definition, a problem that reform efforts have attempted to address. Before delving fully into the difficulties of the

---


reform process, however, there is another aspect of the ambiguities regulating local
government authority that bears discussion, namely the issue of variety in
implementation and deep seated systemic issues within the Party finance structure.

**Implementation and Systemic Problems**

The ambiguity of legislation and the underdevelopment of China’s legal
system have provided local government officials with the power and autonomy to
requisition land and sell it without providing sufficient compensation or benefits.
Despite the often illegal nature of such expropriations, local officials are generally
able to do as they wish without serious consequences. As the following quote
describes:

> Vague land-use rights issued to farmers following de-collectivization have
> aggravated land grabs by officials. Fuzzy property rights provide political and
> legal justification for predatory land-grabbing, and serve as effective tools to
> silence farmers who have lost their land.\(^25\)

But how do these corrupt officials justify their actions? A trend that is
regularly cited in scholarly work about policymaking in China is that often in
contemporary China it is not the actual policies that are the source of much social
tension and contention in China, but rather the ways in which they are poorly
implemented or ignored that is the problem.\(^26\) As two central government officials
describe it, policies in China, especially ones that deal with citizens’ rights, are often
“hot in the center, warm in the provinces, lukewarm in the cities, cool in the counties,

---

\(^25\) Hualing Fu and John Gillespie, "Resolving Land Disputes in East Asia: Exploring the Limits of the
Law," in *Resolving Land Disputes in East Asia: Exploring the Limits of Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge
University Press, 2014), 19.

cold in the townships, and frozen in the villages.” While local officials claim allegiance to the Center and to the revolutionary ideal of “Serving the People” ( 人民服务), they often take advantage of the high degree of autonomy the Center allows them. This abuse of power extends beyond simple misappropriation of state funds, and often the sort of corruption that is most incendiary is the abuse of power by local officials when it comes to land requisition and development.

It might seem to the reader that there is a serious moral failure within the Chinese government apparatus if such blatant corruption and abuse of power exists. And while there may be some individuals within the political establishment who do not care for the welfare of average citizens, it is not mere greed that leads to the corrupt choices made by many local government officials. Even when local officials follow the legal guidelines for compensation of requisitioned land, the legally required compensation package amounts to far less than the profit created by conveyance fees.28

While it is certainly the case that local officials take advantage of their position within the system to maximize their monetary profits, the current Party structure and system is equally responsible for the problem, as the existing budgetary system forces local governments to amass the majority of their revenue from land sales and leases.29 One scholar describes the connection between local government

27 Ibid., 28.
29 Chen, "Legal and Institutional Analysis," 60.
revenue and land grabs neatly, citing a report put out by the China Academy of Social Science in 2010:

In 2007, land sales revenue rocketed to 1.215 trillion Yuan, comprising at least one-third of the local government revenue, 15 percent of national revenue, at a growth rate of 39.5 percent on the prior year. In 2009 alone, the revenue from land sales increased by more than 63.4 percent over the previous year.  

Such a dramatic increase in land sale revenue reveals just how serious the tying of local government coffers to land sales has become, with monetary incentives for converting as much farmland into development and commercial land as possible and for selling converted land to the highest bidder determining the majority of local government decisions. Furthermore, there is also an added pressure put on local officials to build infrastructure and increase GDP as a means of competing with other localities and cities in order to gain prestige within the Party. If a local official is successful at devising construction projects that boost local GDP he is bound to receive praise from higher ups in the Party and to be tapped for future promotions. This is at least true so long as any transgressions against official policy, law, or residents are not openly protested to a degree that diminishes the success of the building project. In this way multiple systems the Center has put in place push the interests of local officials and local residents into direct conflict with one another.

But what happens when citizens do begin to resist? How could they even begin to go about such an enormous task? Could citizens somehow use the

ambiguities in the land laws and flaws in the existing system in order to make gains themselves? It must be admitted that the odds of citizens managing to utilize the same system that has been designed to exclude their voices in order to make themselves heard are low. Yet, it seems that the gaps in policy are now being pointed out by citizens and provide the major justification for their demands to be met. Chinese citizens are seeing the discrepancies in policy implementation and are reading the existing legislation, and once identifying their window of opportunity, are taking action to push for more control and benefits with regards to land.

Reform Efforts

There have been many efforts to try and flesh out the details of how to provide greater structure within the existing land system, with two notable works of legislation standing out: the Property Law of 2007 and the 2011 Land Expropriation Regulations. The 2007 Property Law was enacted in an attempt to stabilize the economy and better secure citizens’ property rights through the clearer definition of varying forms of property rights and though more specific title security safeguards. The law goes even further, providing some detail on the issue of land expropriation and how citizens whose land has been expropriated ought to be compensated:

Land and housing owned by a collective, juristic persons and individuals can only be expropriated for public purposes or in the public interest; the expropriated land owned by collectives should be compensated to the full extent of the loss suffered subject to law. The compensation includes, among others, compensation for taking the land, a resettlement subsidy and compensation for the fixtures, crops and plants on the expropriated land as well as the premiums for social security for farmers. When the residential houses owned by individuals and institutions are expropriated, compensation

32 Chen, "Legal and Institutional Analysis," 68.
shall be provided in order to maintain the legal interest of the expropriated institution or individual. When private housing is expropriated, the accommodation of the expropriated persons should be guaranteed during the removal period.\textsuperscript{33}

Despite the step forward that the 2007 Property Law represents, it perpetuates a distinct lack of clarity as to what exactly constitutes “public purposes” and “public interest,” leaving the door wide open for local officials to do as they wish. As Lei Chen writes:

In practice, the public interest requirement is a ‘black hole’ that is open to wide and vague interpretations…Moreover, the compensation mechanism does not have to take relevant factors into account: for example, moving costs, the location of the property, the demand and supply situation, and the farmers’ employment and social security issues.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus, despite a genuine effort by the central government to provide more structure to the developing property rights system, the 2007 Property Law does not go far enough. Although its introduction appeared to signify that real progress was being made, in reality it did little to alter the status quo; citizens remained in the same weak position with relation to local government officials, although they did now have more concrete policies to point to as evidence when their rights were being infringed upon.

The 2011 Land Expropriation Regulations came about as an attempt to bridge the gaps the 2007 Property Law had failed to close. The new piece of legislation went much further than the 2007 law had and truly marks a major milestone for China’s land rights and land system reform. The 2011 Land Expropriation Regulations finally introduced a more concrete definition of what is meant by the term “public interest,” and put in place a mandatory cross-departmental review process of a project’s

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 71.
fulfillment of the public interest requirement. Legally, local governments must now receive a formal green light through this process in order to proceed with an expropriation project.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, the 2011 Land Expropriation Regulations marked an important moment in China’s land development policy as it focused on promoting the public interest and private property at the potential expense of development,\textsuperscript{36} something that earlier policies and laws had always placed above all else.

\textbf{The Push and Pull of China’s Land Reform Process}

As indicated by the process of gradual, but still lagging, reform described above, there is a cyclical relationship playing out between the state and society in modern China over the issue of land. The central government has traditionally left legislation on governmental authority in this area ambiguous in order to empower local officials to address local concerns and break out from a historically unsuccessful one-size-fits-all policy model. As a result, local officials have succeeded in pushing China’s development and economy forwards, but at the same time many have abused their power and angered the citizenry with their greed and apparent disregard for the public welfare outside of infrastructure development. The tension the current system has created, alongside worries about long term economic stability, is pushing the central government to attempt to resolve the inadequacies that exist in the land laws, by trying to introduce top-down reforms that balance a desire to find a midpoint between local government autonomy and protection of citizens’ rights.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 72.
As Chinese citizens are seeing some central efforts to more clearly delineate their rights in relation to the state in the area of land policy, they are then empowered to be more critical of incidents of perceived infringements by local government actors. Citizens are locating the fractures within the political establishment, the weak points between levels of authority and influence and within the policies themselves, and using these fissures to their advantage. The ambiguity that exists in the wording of the land laws, fuzziness that has traditionally been a tool for local officials to exploit in order to achieve development goals and financial rewards, has now become a visible defect in the system that average citizens are increasingly empowered to point out. This building citizen pressure on local governments is, in turn, putting greater pressure on the central government to address their demands and implement further reforms.

**Motivations for Engagement**

This thesis aims to show how ordinary Chinese citizens are successfully interfering and meddling in contemporary Chinese politics surrounding land and getting away with it. That is to say, in spite of significant government resistance, citizens are taking action, that is, pushing the land system and land rights reform process forwards. The impetus for average Chinese citizens to insert themselves into the political sphere, a realm they have been deliberately kept from, comes from their perception that two things are occurring. The first is the perception that the current system is failing them, as citizens see the wealth created from land development projects and see how they are excluded from the profits as local government officials
consistently and willfully ignore their interests and rights. The second is that citizens believe they can resist what they see to be infringements on their legal land use or ownership rights and emerge from a challenge of the existing status quo victorious.

The perception that a window of opportunity for success exists, though it may be slim, is a direct result of the convergence of several factors. The first is the ambiguity within China’s legal framework dealing with land and the inconsistency and variety with which laws and policies are followed across regions and between levels of government. These inconsistencies and ambiguities have traditionally helped assert local government autonomy, successfully keeping citizens from having a voice. Yet the gaps in implementation and in the actual wording of the policies despite reform efforts are now suddenly being taken advantage of by citizens to make real gains. This is possible largely because of a second factor, the influx of information now available to citizens as a result of the development of technology and new media platforms such as microblogs, video streaming channels, and wikis among others. Information on official policies and on the rights citizens are guaranteed by law is now much more available and accessible to the public than ever before, making it more possible for average Chinese citizens to discern infringements of their rights. Finally, citizens are inspired to take action by the few incidences of successful resistance reported in the official media as well as via social media networks. Examples of citizens confronting the existing, broken system of land use and winning concessions serve as an example to other communities that they, too, might succeed should they choose to resist. The rest of this chapter delves into each
of these aspects of the current moment in Chinese society, analyzing how each is
spurring citizen engagement and action on land issues.

Tools and Tactics

This section covers the tools and tactics used by citizens to successfully resist
local government infringements of their land use and ownership rights. Those
discussed here are technology and new media, domestic and foreign media, issue
framing, legal vs. illegal protests, and peaceful demonstrations vs. the use of force.

Technology and New Media

A change that has certainly given citizens a greater understanding of their
position within the development process has been the creation and dispersion of new
technologies. The rapid diffusion of new tools, namely the Internet, social media, and
smart phones, to average Chinese citizens has dramatically changed the nature of
public discourse in the country. A Pew Center report recently revealed that of Chinese
citizens aged 18-34, 94% own a smart phone, while 60% of Chinese citizens of all
ages admit to using social media.\(^\text{37}\) New technologies such as these have given
Chinese citizens greater access to information about what the official legislation is,
what protections they are supposedly guaranteed, and the ability to record and report
infringements within seconds, not only to the central government, but perhaps more

\(^{37}\) Jacob Poushter, *China Outpaces India in Internet Access, Smartphone Ownership*, March 16, 2017,  
crucially, to other members of civil society who see their own struggles reflected in stories of unfair compensation, forced demolition, and loss of land.

Two of the most successful platforms for such citizen organization and experience sharing are WeChat and Sina Weibo. WeChat, which has more than 300 million active monthly users, is an app released in 2011 that uses Wi-Fi to facilitate group texting, with the capacity to create groups with up to 500 members. Weibo, released in 2009, is commonly thought of as the Chinese equivalent of Twitter and is the largest microblogging platform used in China, with the number of subscribers in February 2011 exceeding 300 million, a number that has presumably grown in the years since. As with Twitter, users of Weibo share information via concise 140 character posts and a single thumbnail image. According to a research project conducted by Youth Daily of China, 73% of people who use microblogs believe that microblogs are a crucial source for getting information, while 56% consider information shared via microblogs to be trustworthy. This last detail is significant because of the problems related to trusting official media sources within China—as noted in the conclusion of a collection of articles on the role of new media on urban mobilization in China, “In the absence of reliable news media, the social media are

---


40 Ibid., 106.
often perceived to be more credible sources of information...Social media become especially explosive because official information is lacking or not trustworthy."\(^{41}\)

With so many of these new tools in their hands, citizens are better informed, are more able to organize, and are much more easily able to spread their experiences of transgression and resistance to others in similar positions as well as to the central government. This all combines to raise the probability for successful coordinated challenges of the local government when it transgresses against local citizens today.

**Domestic and Foreign Media**

The role played by non-social media platforms can also have a significant impact on the success of a citizen-led resistance against local government. In China especially, the censorship of media by the central government and by local governments as well as self-censorship means that often domestic media outlets do not report, or they misconstrue, citizen protest actions. In rare cases where domestic news outlets are able and willing to report on local protest events, there is a slim chance for figures higher in the government apparatus to hear of what is happening and send support for the citizens down the chain of command. Unfortunately this happens quite rarely, because the central government strongly backs the idea that it is the local government’s responsibility to deal with local tensions that arise.\(^{42}\) If the central government gets involved and mishandles the situation, the chances for a

---


protest escalating to a national level are much higher. Thus, generally the central government holds back from publicly voicing an opinion on unrest related to local protests, at least until it has become clear the local government cannot handle the situation on its own.

This decentralization of authority creates an environment where there is the potential for citizens to push at the area between levels in order to gain greater recognition for injustices occurring. The great problem that citizens face, however, is how to find a way to get enough media coverage in order to exploit those cracks between levels of authority in the government. One way that citizens have started doing this is through the use of the Internet and new media, as discussed above. Another way is through attracting international media attention.

Because of the way domestic media often fails to garner political support for citizen protests, in recent years Chinese citizens have been reaching out to foreign media for coverage of their resistance. As the number of foreign reporters in Mainland China has increased over the years, the ease of doing this has increased simultaneously. This reaching out to foreign reporters has its risks, as individuals who allow themselves to be named in a report may face consequences from local officials as a result, and even unnamed sources can be traced. Yet despite this risk, as citizens are becoming more desperate for justice when they protest, individuals are willing to take the risk, given the impact it has on the potential for the protests’ success. By using foreign media to get the resistance’s message out, Chinese citizens are able to bypass the censorship of domestic media and make certain the central authorities know the citizens’ perspectives on what is occurring. Furthermore, as the central
government does not want to lose face in the international forum for allowing gross injustices to be carried out against its citizenry, foreign media reports up the pressure for the central government to get involved, to send a message down the hierarchy to resolve the conflict swiftly, and in a manner that does not make the China look bad in the international eye.

Research has shown that the success rate for mass protests reached 76.6% when there was an intervention from government actors at higher levels of the hierarchy as opposed to 23.8% when there was no intervention.\textsuperscript{43} Since attracting substantial foreign media attention is one of the best ways to push for such an “intervention from above,”\textsuperscript{44} if reaching out to foreign media is an option, which may not be the case for all protests given location and local resources, then it is in the best interest of protesting citizens to do so.

**NGOs**

Another tactic available to some protesters is to enlist the assistance of a non-governmental organization. NGOs play an interesting role in the development of Chinese civil society as they attempt to fill the spaces being neglected by the government. According to a 2016 report by the Brookings Institution, there are around 7,000 international NGOs operating in China today and approximately 675,000 registered domestic NGOS in the country. Outside of the registered NGOS,

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 183.
there are some estimates that put the number of unregistered organizations at 3 million.45

In his work on fragmented authoritarianism, Andrew Mertha identifies NGOs as a particularly successful type of policy entrepreneur,46 arguing that they are generally quite adept at navigating China’s complex political climate in order to accomplish their goals. This success is partially owed to the overlap between the officers in these organizations and former domestic journalists and media editors.47

Aside from a connection to former career journalists, NGOs are significant because they also often serve as a link between protesters and the Chinese upper middle class and intelligentsia, a community of people who are better connected to the government. Furthermore, especially in Beijing, Shanghai, and other major cities, NGOs provide a connection to the expatriate community, which itself plays a role not dissimilar to the one played by foreign media outlets, although the influence of expats may be slightly less powerful than that of foreign media on central government action. In cases where there are NGOs willing and able to take on a role in helping citizens resist land development projects it can make for a much more speedy resolution of conflict.

46 Mertha, "Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0," 997.
47 Ibid., 997.
Issue Framing

The importance of how a protest is framed has been studied by many scholars previously, and issue framing features prominently in O’Brien and Li’s theory of rightful resistance, as well as in the research of both Andrew Mertha and Jessica Teets. The crux of the idea of issue framing is that because of the sensitive nature of contestation in the public sphere in China, especially when it comes to the problem of land use and ownership, how a resistance is framed and portrayed plays a significant role in determining whether or not it will be deemed acceptable and be allowed to make its mark. The aspects of an issue that the protesters choose to emphasize, and those they do not, is what determines the framing of the resistance. As will be discussed, there are numerous ways to frame citizen resistance with regards to land issues in China. Often there is not just one frame used at a time, but multiple frames overlapping to emphasize the message protesters want to get across. For example, one of the most common frames we see in citizen protest across China is one of loyalty to the central government and to the CCP. By emphasizing their loyalty to the Center, protesters hope to highlight that their concern is with the poor implementation of central ideology and policy by local cadres, and that their goal in pointing such failures out is to strengthen, rather than undermine, the current regime. The strategy of framing is aptly described by O’Brien and Li in their work, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*, when they write that rightful resistors succeed by “employing authorized symbols to pose inconvenient rhetorical questions…wrap[ping] their resistance in sweet reason and tender impeccably respectable demands.”48

Policy Entrepreneurship and Advocacy

Another significant tactic utilized by citizen resistance campaigns in China involves taking a step beyond simply framing an issue and opposition to imminent government actions by proposing alternative policies and ways of solving the problem at hand. The suggestion of alternative strategies towards solving a problem allows resistors to portray themselves as actively assisting the state, and in using this approach, protesters actually help build up and support the existing regime. In many ways, the proposition of alternative policy represents a culmination of several of the outcomes of the other tactics and tools available to resistors. The ability to suggest comprehensive policies capable of swaying the decisions of government officials requires that they be well researched and framed in a manner that is acceptable to those influential state agents to whom they are presented. If the proposed policy can draw on the expertise and support of NGOs, domestic and foreign media, and elites, it has an even greater chance of being accepted. Andrew Mertha’s writing on policy entrepreneurs helps illuminate this strategy of bolstering resistance to an existing policy or plan: “Policy entrepreneurs interpret events using often-existing ideas in new ways … [They] link together and assemble events in order to establish a natural and persuasive narrative, offering a fresh, alternative perspective on the issue in question.”

Cases where resistors are able to do what Mertha describes and produce a well thought out and cohesive alternative policy are much more likely to be able to influence not only short term decisions such as whether or not to continue a specific development project, but long term policy goals of the regime.

---

49 Mertha, “‘Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0,’” 998.
John Kingdon, a political scientist whose work examines policymaking processes in the American political context, captures the function of policy entrepreneurship in moving items up on a political agenda. Kingdon writes:

Agendas are set by problems or politics, and alternatives are generated in the policy stream. Policy entrepreneurs...are responsible not only for prompting important people to pay attention, but also for coupling solutions to problems and for coupling both problems and solutions to politics. While governmental agendas are set in the problems or political streams, the chances of items rising on a decision agenda—a list of items up for actual action—are enhanced if all three streams are coupled together.50

Kingdon’s words, although written about the U.S. political condition, ring true when discussing policy entrepreneurship in China as well. Although the impact of individual resistance campaigns on specific policy choices by the current regime is difficult to measure, it is certain that policy advocacy as a tactic of resistance movements contributes to the likelihood of a certain policy change rising on the Party’s action agenda.

Legal Versus Illegal Tactics

The legal framework for bringing charges against government actors in China is underdeveloped and unhelpful, and when citizens do attempt to gain recognition and justice through the official system of petitioning it often comes to naught. As one scholar describes:

In seeking to address perceived grievances, popular claimants typically begin with authorized channels of interaction, such as filing petitions, before considering illegal and disruptive acts of contention. However, in a political environment in which the rule of law is limited and often stacked in favour of powerbrokers with strong political connections, and high-ranking officials are

either unable or unwilling to respond to most of the numerous petitions they receive on a regular basis, efforts to address problems through authorized channels often fail to achieve desired outcomes. As will be demonstrated in the case studies discussed in this thesis, frustration with the failure of the legal process to provide recompense after many attempts is one of the main motivations for citizens to push beyond the legal margins for recognition of their struggle. It is generally only after citizens experience repeated disillusionment with the bureaucratic systems in place at the local level and local state’s unwillingness to provide assistance that resistors begin to strategize to use other means of making their grievances known. Although citizens will go outside the limits of legal methods for asserting grievances after repeated failures to make gains within the system at the local level, as the case studies in the next three chapters will show, even the extralegal measures taken by resistors when pushed reflect a desire to uphold and legitimate the political regime at the Center.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed how average citizens might go about entering into the political sphere and resisting local infringements of their legal land use and land ownership rights. Despite the barriers that have been set up to prevent such an engagement in this particularly sensitive policy area, over the last ten years there has been a surge of mass incidents relating to citizen discontent over the way the current land system is being managed at the local level. What is especially exciting is that not only is there suddenly a perception by citizens that they can insert themselves into the

---

political realm via resistance, but that there are even notable instances of success as a result.

Often success in this area is not what it might be elsewhere, and often the gains made immediately as a result of protest are slowly chipped away at as time goes on, but even baby steps, even short moments when the government is forced to meet citizen demands on land use and development is not a minor achievement. By using combinations of the tactics discussed above, Chinese citizens are making it clear that they are not willing to allow their rights to be overlooked, that they are prepared to do what needs to be done to gain recognition and recompense for oversteps on the part of government actors, and that, if they strategize well, they can win. Moments of successful resistance create a ripple effect, inspiring and influencing communities and individuals who see their own struggles reflected in the accounts of protest. The next three chapters delve into three separate cases where Chinese citizens fought back against land development projects and in doing so, began a process of renegotiation of the relationship between the Chinese state and society as it involves the most basic resource of land.
Case Study 1: The Liulitun Incinerator Project

The first case study in this thesis reveals not only the power of employing environmental and public health frames to resisting problematic large infrastructure building projects, but also the high degree of impact that citizens working together can have, if they use the resources around them effectively and strategize well. The case of the resistance of local residents to the building of the Liulitun (六里屯) incinerator in Beijing’s Haidian District is notable not only for the strength and effectiveness of the resistance, and the speed and manner in which citizens mobilized, but also for its earliness relative to the other cases considered in this thesis, with citizen resistance to the project beginning in 2006.

China’s Waste Problem

As one of the world’s most populated and rapidly modernizing countries, China produces tremendous amounts of waste. In 2004, China produced 190 million tons of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW), surpassing the U.S. as the world’s biggest generator of MSW.52 Given the enormous amounts of refuse it produces daily, China is being forced to seek new solutions for disposing of it. Traditionally landfills on the outskirts of cities have been used for this purpose, but today this method of disposal is less than ideal from the Chinese government’s perspective for two reasons. First, landfills fill up quickly and get in the way of urban expansion. Second, as land

resources in China are already scarce and land development has become a main source of local government revenue, utilizing large tracts of land for landfills is far from economical. One of the main alternatives to landfills that China’s central government has been pushing for the last few years are waste incinerators. Waste incinerators appeal to the Chinese government for a variety of reasons. Today, the landfills used by many cities are full or are nearing capacity, creating a situation where Chinese cities are becoming “besieged by waste,”\(^\text{53}\) while incineration allows for the efficient disposal of trash over decades, as incinerators can last for long spans of time. Additionally, the central government sees incineration as a means of creating renewable energy, by harnessing the power created by burning waste at extremely high temperatures.\(^\text{54}\) Also, building incinerators is just one example of a building project that contributes to the urbanization of the local state described by Hsing, as it allows for local officials to assert their domination over land by orchestrating a large construction project in their district, which in turn boosts local GDP. In addition to these pre-existing motivations for local officials to invest in incineration, the central government has recently created additional incentives. For example, in order to push an agenda of increased waste incineration forwards, leaders in the central government have created policies that work to encourage investment in waste incineration technology and development by firms and local governments by creating subsidies and tax rebates tied to tons of waste burned and energy created as a by-product.\(^\text{55}\)

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 360.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 360.

Some have described such policies as “heralding the onset of a ‘waste incineration golden age.’”56 Between 2002 and 2010, the percentage of Chinese MSW that was incinerated rose from 1 percent to 20 percent, and central planners hoped that by 2015 that number would rise to a staggering 35 percent.57

The “renewable energy” justification for the waste incineration boom is tainted by the reality of how the process of building such incinerators, and later the operation of these plants, occurs. It is thought by many people, including experts in waste management policy, that local Chinese government officials are especially eager to see these building projects come to fruition, as they seize the opportunity that China’s ambiguous land use laws and policies grant them to use public infrastructure development and the subsequent tax revenue acquired to fill their private bank accounts.58 The incentives to push the building of such incinerators forwards comes, therefore, more from a desire to make a profit and to gain points within the political hierarchy than from a genuine desire to reduce pollution and create renewable energy. This organization of priorities is evident in the way many waste incinerators are run once they are built. One article describes the situation:

China’s incinerators, though canonized as a ‘clean energy,’ have a dirty underside…Newer facilities are installed with air-pollution control systems, but these are costly to use and maintain. Thus, many plants operate without the required flue gas filtering equipment. Likewise, treatment of other highly toxic byproducts…tends to be either poor or nonexistent.59

The government’s dismal record in following through on environmental and safety regulations when it comes to industrial projects, combined with local government

56 Johnson, "The Health Factor," 360.
57 Ibid., 357.
58 Balkan, "The Dirty Truth."
59 Ibid.
officials’ willingness to ignore public opinion and citizens’ rights to information, all contribute to resentment and resistance of such projects.

**The Case of Luoding and Changing Resistance to Incineration**

Over the last couple of years there have been many protests against the building of waste incinerators throughout Chinese cities of varying sizes, wealth, and influence. From Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, one of China’s most famous and richest cities, to the relative backwater of Langtang township of Luoding city in Yunfu prefecture of Guangdong province, citizens across China are resisting building projects for waste incinerators. The more recent wave of protests dealing with waste incineration plants have been examples of land-related “mass incidents,” and have been noteworthy for their effectiveness despite the breakout of violence during the protests and the short period of time during which the actions lasted. In some recent cases, such as in Hangzhou and Luoding, local government officials have caved to popular demand to cancel the project within days, and have even acknowledged that popular demand was a central motivation for their acquiescence and decision to halt the project. The public acknowledgement by the local government of the potential for popular protests to dramatically impact development decisions cannot be overlooked, as it implies the recognition by the local state of the power wielded by the public and of its recognized need to negotiate with the citizenry, a reality that might seem obvious to citizens of a democratic country but certainly cannot be taken for granted in China.
An incident that occurred in a rural outskirt of Luoding city in Guangdong province in April 2015 is particularly interesting as a counterpoint to the main case study for this chapter, the resistance to the building of an incinerator in Liulitun, a suburban area of Beijing. As a relative backwater in Guangdong province, in 2015, Luoding residents employed radically different tactics from those used by citizens in Beijing between 2006 and 2011. In Luoding, on the morning of Monday, April 6, 2015, residents gathered outside the local cement factory to have a sit in and voice their shared dissatisfaction with the proposed incinerator project. Residents claim that their sit in was disrupted by the arrival of police to the scene, who then proceeded to attempt to break up the peaceful demonstration, by beating and arresting several of the protesters. These descriptions seem to be corroborated by video footage taken on smart phones and later broadcasted by Hong Kong based news organization, Radio Free Asia. The videos shows crowds of young people in front of a factory who seem disorganized, confused, and angry as police officers or hired enforcement officers dressed in black and holding batons appear to beat a young man who is lying on the ground.

Despite the video footage that seems to indicate otherwise, local government sources claim that the violence first began the following day, when a group of

---


62 "Guangdong Luoding cunmin kangyi jianzao laji fenshaochang duo ren bei zhua (Many arrested as rural residents of Luoding in Guangdong protest the building of a waste incinerator)," video file, 3:20, YouTube, posted by Radio Free Asia Chinese, April 7, 2015, accessed February 17, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KzBKav7ooE.
roughly 400 “troublemakers” began throwing glass bottles, rocks, and other debris at police vehicles, and damaging and a local police station.\textsuperscript{63} Reports on the number of participants vary across sources, with local officials claiming it was several hundred while the International Business Times claimed there were around 10,000 participants overall.\textsuperscript{64} Given such inconsistency in reporting it is difficult to gain a clear understanding of the scale of the incident. Several sources report that police cars were flipped over, while a Chinese news source, Boxun, claims that villagers armed themselves with a variety of weapons, including cleavers, beer bottles, kitchen gas canisters, and more as they marched towards the police station.\textsuperscript{65} According to English Boxun, villagers released a statement during the violence on Tuesday that read:

To defend our homes, we resolutely oppose the construction of a waste incineration plant! You’ve caused this popular anger. Police vehicles are being burned and overturned. The police headquarters was almost burned to the ground. All because of the Chinese Resources cement plant. Thousands of villagers continue to protest.\textsuperscript{66}

The Luoding protests ended late Tuesday afternoon, after government officials released two statements, one in which they announced that the waste incineration project had been canceled in order to meet the people’s demands and in order to correct any misunderstanding.\textsuperscript{67} The second statement reasserted the cancelation of

\textsuperscript{63} Wong, “China Scraps Waste-Incinerator.”


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

the project and called for the cooperation of citizens in resisting violence and in not blockading roads. After a protest lasting just a day and a half, protesters had achieved their desired results.

What does the victory in Luoding in 2015 signify? What is particularly striking about the anti-incineration protest in Luoding is the degree to which its success seems like a fluke. After all, Chinese citizens are not supposed to be able to take to the streets, flip over police cars, and somehow still manage to bring about acquiescence from the state. Yet for whatever reason, over the last few years, in Luoding and in other cities across China, when it comes to environmental protests it seems that the boundaries of what citizens can and cannot do and get away with are being expanded. The reason for this has a great deal to do with the development over the last couple of years of a strong current of environmental awareness across Chinese society as well as in the state itself.

**China’s Growing Environmental Activism**

Recent cases such as the one in Luoding are exciting because they show how much the politics and culture around environmental activism have changed over the last decade. The last few years especially have seen an increasing awareness and investment by Chinese civil society in fighting pollution and development projects that threaten public health and the environment. In 2015, former Chinese reporter

Chai Jing made a documentary film titled “Under the Dome,” that made massive waves in Chinese society, accruing over 150 million views in the first few days after it was released.\(^{69}\) In the two plus hours it takes to watch the entire movie, Chai manages to weave together an emotional personal narrative where she draws on her fears for her daughter’s future with horrifying images and facts from polluted areas across the Chinese countryside. At the end, Chai calls for action by everyday people: “It’s tens of millions of ordinary people…One day they say ‘no.’ I’m not satisfied. I don’t want to wait. I’m not going to shirk the responsibility. I’m going to stand up and do something. I’m going to do it right now. At this moment. At this place.”\(^{70}\) This rallying call led to the film being censored by the central government, ostensibly due to fears of it promoting social unrest.

“Under the Dome” has been compared to the book famous for sparking the American environmental movement, Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring,” as well as to Al Gore’s film, “An Inconvenient Truth.”\(^{71}\) After censoring the film, the central government reasserted its commitment to combatting environmental pollution in China, with Premier Li Keqiang stating, “The Chinese government is determined to tackle environmental pollution…Last year I said that the Chinese government would declare a war against environmental pollution. We are determined to carry forward our efforts until we achieve our goal.”\(^{72}\) “Under the Dome” is just one example that


\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) Ibid.

\(^{72}\) Ibid.
points to the new emphasis China’s emerging civil society, and subsequently, the Chinese government, are putting on environmental issues. In examining the main case study of this chapter, the resistance to the building of the Liulitun incinerator in Beijing, it is useful to keep in mind both the radical difference in how environmental issues were treated just ten years before Chai Jing’s movie was released and the trajectory more recent anti-incineration protests, such as the one in Luoding, have taken.

**The Plan for a Waste Incinerator in Liulitun**

The aspects of the Liulitun case that are of most relevance to this thesis occurred between 2006 and 2011, but to give a full background of the case it is necessary to give the history of the area starting from 1995. In that year, a new landfill was opened in Liulitun, an area in the northwestern outskirts of Beijing’s Haidian district, a locality that falls under Hsing’s designation of “urban fringe.” The site for the landfill was chosen by the local government out of convenience—the location of the site was contested at first by the Beijing Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB) in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report that stated clearly, “from an environmental protection viewpoint, it is unsuitable to construct a waste landfill at this location.”Eventually, presumably after coming

---

74 Ibid., 113.
under some pressure from local and municipal government officials, the EPB agreed to allow the landfill project to continue at that site, suggesting, however, that current residents within a 500 meter radius of the landfill be relocated and that there be no residential housing built within that buffer area. Unfortunately, the profits that development of urban land can provide local government coffers are very high, and as a result, the suggestions of the EPB regarding public health concerns were ignored. In the years that followed, local residents complained about the smells the landfill emitted, and voiced fears as well about groundwater contamination, and the impact such pollution might have on their community. A sudden announcement by the Haidian District government in 2006 that a brand new waste incinerator would be built adjacent to the landfill thus pushed the nearby residents to channel their frustration and complaints into concrete actions of resistance.

**Citizen Resistance**

The beginning of the citizen resistance campaign at Liulitun had its roots in the housing developments bordering the selected site for the plant, and in the early Internet connection available to residents within these developments. The real estate developers for these residential complexes had set up an online billboard (BB) for homeowners to express concerns and share information with each other easily. In November of 2006, a resident in the complex posted on the online billboard page that

---

75 Ibid., 113.
the local government had just announced its plans to build the Liulitun incinerator.\textsuperscript{78} This led to a flurry of discussion and the initial organization of local residents against the project.\textsuperscript{79}

The Haidian District government had approved the plan for the project internally in 2005, announced it to the public in 2006, and planned for construction on the incinerator to begin in the early spring of 2007, with the goal of finishing the project in time for the 2008 summer Olympics, which were to take place in Beijing. Following the initial post on the online billboard page, local residents quickly organized themselves to resist the building of the incinerator. They did this first through a variety of legal methods, from petitioning, writing letters and emails to local officials, and making phone calls. Calls to stop the project were enhanced by the utilization of a public health frame, and one paper notes “health concerns were used to dramatize grievances and convey a sense of urgency against an impending threat. Campaigners closely associated incineration with dioxins and cancer.”\textsuperscript{80} This is demonstrated in the slogans printed on gigantic banners that residents hung in their housing complexes for all to see. The slogans proclaimed such messages as “In the name of the elderly, mothers, and children, please do not build the incinerator plant here!,”\textsuperscript{81} and “We don’t want to breathe toxic air!”\textsuperscript{82} Residents, many of them retirees, also organized themselves into groups to better educate themselves on the policies,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{78} Lang and Xu, "Anti-Incinerator Campaigns," 836.
  \item \textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 836.
  \item \textsuperscript{80} Johnson, "The Health Factor," 363.
  \item \textsuperscript{81} Lang and Xu, "Anti-Incinerator Campaigns," 836.
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Johnson, "The Health Factor," 363.
\end{itemize}
regulations, and laws surrounding waste incineration and disposal, and to better acquaint themselves with the history of the landfill site selection.\(^{83}\)

Based on their research, the campaigners were able to focus their energies on strategically framing their grievances into a cohesive message that utilized the language of the government and public responsibility rhetoric in order to push back against the project. An important aspect of this early framing was the conscientious choice by the campaign to shift to an ideologically based, rather than Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) approach, since resisters recognized the greater potential ideological, boundary-spanning claims, could have of succeeding in the Chinese political context.\(^{84}\) In order to further enhance the validity of their grievances, resisters committed massive time and energy to investigating all aspects of existing waste disposal policy and incineration generally, as well as the details of the proposed plan. Research done by local residents organized into “study groups” uncovered recommendations by two other national government departments, the National Development and Reform Commission (NRDC) and the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) that incinerators not generally be built within large or medium sized cities, either upwind of or in densely populated areas, or in areas where environmental standards might be violated by the construction of such a plant.\(^{85}\)

Armed with this statement from two other governmental agencies, residents in the Liulitun area were able to exploit the ways in which the efforts by the local

\(^{84}\) Johnson, "The Health Factor," 365.
Haidian District and Municipal government officials came into conflict with other official recommendations in order to make their case. This deliberate pointing out of the differences in written opinions of various government agencies is an explicit example of the critical component of Lieberthal and Oksenberg’s theory of fragmented authoritarianism in practice. Yet while Liberthal and Oksenberg noted the impact that the fragmented political structure played in the state’s policymaking, here that same fragmentation created a window of opportunity for average Chinese citizens to more safely critique the actions of the local government in the hopes of resisting further land development.

The Liulitun area, residents claimed, fit each of the three designations the NRDC and SEPA listed against building incinerators. Not only is Liulitun situated within Beijing, which is one of China’s largest cities, but by 2006 over 250,000 people resided within a 5 km radius of the selected site.\(^{86}\) Furthermore, the years of landfill operation and the close proximity of the selected site, within 1 kilometer, to the main water channel supply for Beijing’s drinking water\(^{87}\) made it possible for campaigners to argue that the area was environmentally sensitive. Continuing to investigate, local residents found a shortened version of the landfill’s earlier EIA for that project, and discovered many obvious flaws in the document that suggested the assessment had been rushed and not done properly. These errors included incorrect details on wind direction measurements, as well as false claims about the plant’s technological ability to measure dioxin output in real time.\(^{88}\)

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 114.
\(^{87}\) Ibid., 114.
\(^{88}\) Johnson, "The Health Factor," 362.
In February 2007, activists applied for an administrative review of the EPB’s original decision to approve the EIA on the landfill in 1995, demanding as well that the current project to build the incinerator be suspended while SEPA conducted a new EIA that would include public consultation. After having received no response from SEPA, which in itself constituted a failure to meet the Administrative Review Law in China, a law that requires government offices to respond to citizens within 90 days, Liulitun residents decided to take their protest a step further. On June 5, 2007, World Environment Day, Beijing’s SEPA headquarters was surrounded by over 1,000 citizens wearing matching t-shirts demanding a government response to their petition. As an unregistered mass protest, this action was illegal, and marks the first legal transgression committed by the campaign. Yet despite its illegality, the demonstration did not cross the line into violence but remained peaceful. This mass direct action resulted in the assignment of then-SEPA Vice-Minister, Pan Yue, to the case. Two days following the direct action outside SEPA headquarters, Pan issued a public statement, saying: “We hope that all levels of government will provide a platform to enable the public to enjoy sufficient right to know, right to supervise, and right to participate in large-scale environmental affairs.” On June 12, the administrative review decision was released. The review was critical of local officials for ignoring the EPB’s advice in 1995 and for allowing the development of the land within such a close distance of the landfill. However, the review failed to incriminate

---

90 Ibid., 114.
the actions of the EPB and upheld the original EIA.\textsuperscript{93} Despite this, SEPA suggested that the waste incinerator project be suspended temporarily until further investigation of the potential environmental and public health impact could be made.\textsuperscript{94}

Construction on the project was halted temporarily, despite apparent continued support for it within the local district and municipal governments. The resistors continued to write and petition, retaining their strategic emphasis on framing by being careful to apply enough pressure so that their cause would not be forgotten, but mindful of not applying too much pressure or causing social unrest so close to the 2008 Olympics.\textsuperscript{95} The residents were unpleasantly surprised, therefore, when in early 2009 it was announced by the Beijing Municipal government that the Liulitun incinerator was among a list of top priority construction projects for the year.\textsuperscript{96} Local residents responded immediately with a petition carrying 10,000 signatures that expressed frustration at the Haidian District government for ignoring SEPA’s recommendations on soliciting public opinion on the project, as well as their continued concerns over the potential health and environmental risks of the proposed plant.\textsuperscript{97} Then, on March 31, 2009, campaigners sent out a report titled, ‘Opinion Letter for Opposing the Construction of a Waste Incinerator in Liulitun’ to multiple Beijing and national government bureaus. The report was an expanded version of the earlier petition, and included various suggestions and alternative solutions as to how the government might resolve its urban waste disposal problems. The report also

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 115.
listed a number of influential intellectuals and public figures who willing to publicly voice their opposition to the incinerator, such as Qu Geping, the former head of the national environmental protection agency, as well as a sitting member of the China People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).  

Overall, the tone of the report was aimed to convey a clear message that despite their hardened opposition to the waste incinerator, local residents maintained a genuine desire to retain their newfound role as policy entrepreneurs, and to help the local government find a better solution than the one they were currently presenting to the public. Finally, in January 2011, local officials announced that plans for an incinerator in Liulitun had been abandoned for good.

Analysis

This next section aims to examine how resistors to the project of the incinerator at Liulitun managed to succeed in interfering in and eventually altering the land development decisions being made by local state actors. In this case, the tactics used by the campaign included almost all of those discussed in the preceding chapter: technology and new media, domestic media, connections to NGOs and public figures, strategic issue framing and average citizens as policy entrepreneurs, and both illegal and legal forms of resistance.

---

98 Ibid., 115.
99 Ibid., 116.
Role of Technology and New Media

The initial mobilization of resistance to the Liulitun incinerator was a direct result of local residents having access to new technologies and social platforms for discussion. The online billboard for residents of the Liulitun area housing complexes was the first space in which resistors were able to come together to share opinions and collective grievances, and was the forum where active resistance was first organized. One in depth study of the use of the Online Homeowners Forum of Zhonghaifenglian (OHFZ), the online billboard of the first residence complex that began to resist, illuminates just how influential access to this forum was to the eventual success of the campaign. The study looks at how initial discussion on OHFZ led to the emergence of the campaign’s leaders, the creation of action groups, and allowed for initial communication and cooperation between not only members of the Zhonghaifenglian housing complex, but with residents of the neighboring Baiwang Jasmine housing complex as well.\(^\text{100}\) Despite the political constraints faced by resistors, the Internet and the forums it provided for interaction allowed for the campaign to speedily develop a cohesive message and a unified strategic approach to overcoming the obstacles it faced.\(^\text{101}\) In the context of the newly developing residential communities on Beijing’s urban fringe, where traditional communal bonds are missing, the Internet allows for the creation of new social bonds and facilitates community building, which in turn facilitates the potential for unified collective


\(^{101}\) Ibid., 58.
action: “In a community without any formal grassroots organization, residents are strangers to each other and have difficulties building trust, let alone acting together. The forum therefore helped individuals find likeminded others and establish online and offline connections.”

In addition to helping local residents overcome collective action challenges, the use of the Internet and social media allowed for the campaign to transcend political constraints on public dissent in more formal channels by functioning as a quasi-public space for deliberation and debate. This was largely possible because the Internet allows for effective communication and mobilization amongst activists in a flexible manner that is felt to be less threatening to the regime because of its virtual nature, and as a result is more likely to be tolerated. Yet despite the crucial role the Internet and new media played in the success of the anti-incineration campaign at Liulitun, it was only one way that citizens organized in order to circumvent political and social restraints they faced.

**Role of Domestic Media**

Due to the location of this case study and the resulting proximity to many domestic media outlets, there was significant media coverage of the issue within local papers as the years of anti-incineration resistance went by. Furthermore, the nonviolent and predominantly legal tactics employed by resistors at Liulitun made it a less sensitive issue for domestic media to cover. Yet while domestic media coverage

---

102 Ibid., 59.  
103 Ibid., 61.  
104 Ibid., 53.
certainly aided the campaign in attracting greater attention of public figures and experts and eventually in achieving success,\textsuperscript{105} in this particular case study the role played by domestic media outlets was much less significant than that played by the Internet or social media or by some of the other tactics used.

**Role of NGOs and Public Figures**

In 2007, towards the beginning of the resistance campaign to the Liulitun incinerator, residents reached out to an environmental NGO called Friend’s of Nature (FON) for assistance. At that time FON declined its public support due to the sensitivity of the issue. In 2009, however, once Liulitun residents had made the shift from a NIMBY frame to one based more on general environmental concerns about waste disposal policy, FON cooperated with the campaign to develop waste sorting systems and reduction projects in a few housing complexes. When asked about FON’s official perspective on the Liulitun situation, a spokesperson for the group presented it in a list of five points. Of these five, two are especially revealing. They are, “FON hopes that Liulitun people will change their attitude and their starting point by recognizing that the waste issue is a Beijing problem, not just a Liulitun problem,” and “FON is concerned about environmental protection: the issue is not just about housing prices.”\textsuperscript{106} The addition of FON to the support of the campaign helped give the resistance greater pull, not only with more members of Beijing’s upper middle class and expat communities, but with domestic media as well. Also, public condemnation of the incinerator project by public figures such as those in power

\textsuperscript{105} Lang and Xu, "Anti-Incinerator Campaigns," 837.
\textsuperscript{106} Johnson, "The Health Factor," 370.
positions within the CPPCC added to the pressure felt by local officials still intent on pushing the project.

**Role of Strategic Issue Framing**

The case of the Liulitun incinerator illustrates the gains average citizens can make in the face of motivated local governments in delaying and finally halting a major infrastructure project, not a small feat in authoritarian China. Local Beijing residents accomplished all this through applying pressure on the weak points in the fragmented political structure where different government departments and bureaus overlapped and offered a less than cohesive policy stance. Armed with information that revealed the original disagreement in opinion between SEPA, EPB, and the Haidian District government, and with endurance and determination to make their opinions known, campaign activists utilized accepted channels and a well thought out strategy to frame their struggle for a seat at the table where urban infrastructure development happens as a rational step towards protecting the local environment, public health, and social harmony. By enlisting the opinions and assistance of influential public figures, ordinary citizens were able to draw more attention to their cause as well as to put greater political pressure on local officials who continued to push for the project.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the resistance to the Liulitun incinerator was the deliberate shift in strategy resisters employed, changing their protest frame from a Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) type campaign to one that expressed concern over waste incineration and waste disposal policy generally. This was an intentional
shift, as NIMBY protests are generally reviled by the Chinese government as selfish, because, in the eyes of the regime, they demonstrate no commitment to greater ideals but rather a desire by protesters to preserve a personal way of life rather than to help shoulder a portion of the burden required for China’s further development:

Campaigners acknowledged that they were vulnerable to accusations of being purely motivated by selfish and irrational NIMBY sentiment. As a result, they attempted to portray themselves as ‘rational’ (lixing 理性) actors. This meant basing their opposition…on facts rather than emotion, and discussing incineration as a regional, national, and even international issue rather than an exclusively local one.\textsuperscript{107}

This intentional shift in frames was made more potent by the enlistment by the campaign of another strategy, policy entrepreneurship.

\textbf{Policy Entrepreneurship and Advocacy}

Resistors in Liulitun utilized boundary-spanning, ideological claims to explain their opposition to the building of the incinerator, but this approach would have been much less effective had they not put forth their own interpretation of the issue and suggested an alternative means of solving the problem. They did this through becoming experts in the field of waste policy, and through their research into the waste disposal industry and relevant government policies, began to argue not against incineration generally, but rather against “unsafe” incineration, that is incineration without proper sorting prior and incineration at plants that fail to actually meet regulations and environmental standards.\textsuperscript{108} Simultaneously, campaigners sought to push for greater public consultation in the site selection process. This shift in frames,

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 365. 
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 366.
backed up by research and exploitation of the gaps between governmental agencies and levels, gave the arguments made by opponents of the Liulitun incinerator legitimacy and potency.

**Influence on Later Resistance**

In later controversies over similar waste incineration projects in other districts of Beijing, some of the same campaigners who had worked on the Liulitun incinerator resistance became resources for helping educate other citizens on waste disposal policies and potential paths to success halting of the projects. The tactics employed by the resistance in Liulitun, such as active self-study to become experts on the issue, followed by advocacy of alternative policies, strategic framing, mindfulness of the immediate political climate, and use of new media and the Internet, were deeply influential in several later incidents of resistance against waste incinerator projects in both Beijing and other large Chinese cities. As a result of the Liulitun resistance campaign, both citizens and officials have adjusted their approaches to incineration projects. This dual learning process is described by Thomas Johnson when he writes,

> Since the Liulitun anti-incineration campaign began in 2006, Beijing residents and officials have undergone a learning process. Anti-incineration campaigners have learnt from each other and in some cases have become lay experts. Officials have learnt lessons and have begun to modify their incineration strategy.

The legacy of the Liulitun resistance has motivated some Chinese officials to take action to create greater opportunities for citizen participation and consultation in

---

waste incineration project decisions, and to provide greater transparency on the functioning of incinerators that are already running.\textsuperscript{112} At the same time, however, other officials have used the instance of the successful resistance in Liulitun to strategize new ways of circumventing similar protests.\textsuperscript{113} An article written about the recent protests of incinerators in Hangzhou among other sites, draws a connection between the degree of controversy of a project and the local government’s handling of the situation: “The more controversial a project is, the less likely that rules about public consultation will be obeyed, and the more likely that nastier tactics, including hired thugs, will be relied upon to silence critics.”\textsuperscript{114} In comparing the more recent resistance in Luoding to the earlier campaign in Liulitun, it becomes clear that controversy is just one small factor among many that help determine the tactics employed by both the resistance and the local government. Geographic location, socio-economic conditions, and technology all play a role in how both protests, although wildly different, managed to succeed.

**Conclusion**

There are many aspects of the Liulitun case that helped it to succeed that might not have been possible under other circumstances. The location of Beijing, especially in the years leading up to and following the 2008 summer games, played a significant role in keeping the local government from pushing the project forwards.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 122-3.  
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 123.  
too aggressively. Deliberate efforts to keep social unrest to a minimum nationwide, especially in the capital city, ensured that local officials were much more cautious about how they proceeded in addressing local grievances during the campaign’s earlier phase. Furthermore, Haidian District is unique in its high population of Chinese intelligentsia, as the district is home many universities, including Peking University and Tsinghua University, as well as to Zhongguancun, a hub for technology often referred to as China’s version of Silicon Valley. Additionally, the high density of the population in the affected area, and the residents’ proximity to the central government, made it much more possible to exert direct pressure between levels of the political structure, and to ensure their petitions and letters were being received. In the vast majority of places in the country, it is much harder for citizens to take the time and energy to protest, let alone to ensure their arguments are being communicated effectively to people in power who might be able to influence the local government’s decision. Yet it should be noted that even with all of the information available to them, with the strong, fact-based arguments residents presented, and with massive public support, still it took over four years for residents to officially attain their victory. In less well off cities and regions in China, local governments may not back down so easily, even when resistors employ the less contentious environmental protection frame to their argument, especially if the proposed factory or plant has the potential to boost GDP and local government revenue, as well as the local economy in the long term.

In the case of Liulitun, resistance by average citizens not only led to the cancellation of the project at its original site, but also to real change, no matter how small, in the relationship between the local government and the citizenry, as the political process was officially adapted to include more regular implementation of preexisting mandates set up by the central government’s legislation that require formal consultations with the public before approval for such projects is granted.\textsuperscript{116}

Although the resistance by residents in the Liulitun area was a success, and prevented an incinerator from being built there, the campaign did not prevent the building of a replacement plant in a more rural area outside the city, thus transferring the harm caused by a poorly run incinerator onto a less well connected or influential group of citizens.\textsuperscript{117}

The problem of waste disposal continues to be faced by cities of varying sizes across China. As waste incineration is promoted more heavily, various attempts at resisting these projects reflect the rising ability of ordinary Chinese citizens to influence policy and decisions relating to the use of land. While the Liulitun case reveals the newfound ability of the urban middle class to influence policy decisions around land, the protests in more rural areas and smaller cities such as Luoding show that this change is trickling down, including not only the urban middle class but expanding to incorporate even rural citizens. The next case study, however, deals not with civic territoriality in either an urban fringe or rural region, but with resistance to land development in Beijing’s inner city.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 843.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 843.
Case Study 2: Redevelopment in Beijing’s Drum and Bell Tower District

A visit to Beijing’s old Drum Bell Tower District, specifically to the Bell and Drum towers themselves, is ranked number 37 of 1,599 things to do in Beijing by Trip Advisor.118 Located in the old part of the capital, on the north-south axis just north of the Forbidden City, the towers and the area surrounding them have held a central position in Beijing’s history as a metropolis for centuries. Built in 1272 AD, in the second year of the Yuan dynasty, the Bell and Drum towers traditionally functioned to help Beijing residents tell time, with corresponding strikes between the bell in the Bell Tower and the drums in the opposing Drum Tower marking the hours of the day in the busy city.119

One of the few traditional areas remaining intact within the old city, the Gulou (鼓楼), or Bell Tower, neighborhood is a treat for foreign visitors and Chinese tourists alike and provides a glimpse into Beijing’s storied past. A visitor to the Gulou area today might wander along the hutongs (胡同), narrow alleyways, in the shadow of the two towers, eating street food snacks for hours, reveling in the sense of history walking through the area provides. For many visitors to Beijing, the experience of

exploring the area is a highlight of the trip. Yet just a few years ago there was a plan in place to bulldoze the entire area in the name of redevelopment and progress.

Upon news of the development project, there was a rapid mobilization by a combination of local residents, expats, historians, preservationists, and a local NGO to form a resistance campaign against the proposed plan. In an unusual turn of events, in this one case amidst a series of similar cases, the resistance campaign was successful in influencing the local government to cancel the project. How did this resistance campaign achieve its goal of halting the redevelopment project, especially given the uncertainty of the project specifics, the lack of unity within the community, and the limitations created by political constraints? This is the question this chapter hopes to answer.

Demolition and Development

The tumultuous first few decades after the founding of the People’s Republic of China resulted in the theft and destruction of many of the country’s traditional cultural treasures. This was especially true during the Cultural Revolution, a period of extreme chaos that lasted a decade from 1966 until Mao’s death in 1976. During this time, the active destruction of historical and cultural sites was encouraged and carried out under a banner of revolution and transition towards a “New China.” In an eerie and disconcerting repetition of history, over the last few decades China has once again been robbed of much of its traditional architecture and cultural sites through the actions of state agents and Chinese citizens in the name of progress and modernization. Though the ideology reinforcing the motivations to bulldoze and
destroy classic sites is different from that during the Cultural Revolution, in many ways the end result is all too similar. Often this destruction is followed by a half hearted attempt to recreate the traditional site using new materials, an effort that is rarely well done and often comes off feeling fake, forced, and tactlessly marketed towards tourists.

As the Chinese government attempts to find a balance between solving issues of economic growth, socio-economic inequality, social harmony, modernization, and the many other challenges it faces, cultural preservation has often been put on a back burner. Yet this neglect is at odds with the official mantra of the state, which makes bold statements about its commitment to Chinese heritage. The central government often claims to prioritize preservation alongside growth, and local governments make a show of following suit until it becomes clear that such protection is getting in the way of profitable local development. Furthermore, the politics surrounding cultural preservation are confused by the disjointed organization of the state apparatus in which many disconnected parts of government have partial jurisdiction. This fragmentation is evident in the existence of an Administration of Cultural Heritage, which is itself subsumed under the larger Ministry of Culture, an altogether different government agency than the one responsible for urban planning, the Ministry of Construction. Since each of these departments function through separate hierarchies at each level of government, lateral coordination between the multiple agencies responsible for cultural preservation and urban planning is seriously

121 Ibid., 135-9.
inhibited. This problem is further compounded because most development is now planned and carried out at a local level without much consultation in the central government hierarchy.\textsuperscript{122} This tension in priorities and in responsibilities between agencies and levels within the state is well reflected in the controversial plan that was laid out for Beijing’s Bell and Drum Tower district in 2010.

**History of the Hutong**

Before delving into the details of that case study, it is necessary to provide some historical context on the typical Beijing *hutong* neighborhood and how these areas have changed since the establishment of the PRC. The origin of the word *hutong* comes from the beginning of the Yuan dynasty, coinciding with the building of the original Beijing Drum and Bell towers. At beginning of the Yuan dynasty, founded by Kublai Khan in 1271 AD, the city currently known by the name Beijing (北京), which means Northern Capital, was called Dadu (大都), or Grand Capital. The word *hutong* comes from the Mongolian word *hottog*, which means “water well,” referring to the location of such wells in these alleyways.\textsuperscript{123} *Hutongs*, which are narrow alleys that traditionally run from east to west between larger main roads in the city, occasionally housed small businesses but traditionally were almost entirely residential, with the classical *siheyuan* (四合院) style home forming the main architectural unit on which the neighborhood was based. Spanning across

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 139.

centuries and through three dynasties, these *hutong* and *siheyuan* formed the backbone of life in the ancient capital, filling the city and serving as the foundation of everyday life for the common people. One important aspect of the traditional *hutong* neighborhood was the communal bathhouse. In the traditional *siheyuan* there was no private bathroom, and no running water. As a result, the neighborhood bathhouses became a center for social interaction, as well as a means of maintaining personal hygiene. The significance of the bathhouse to life in the neighborhood will be returned to at a later point.

According to an ancient Chinese phrase, the number of *hutong* in Beijing once outnumbered the hairs on a goat’s back.\(^{124}\) Though this might have been true at one point, sadly it is no longer the case. These examples of classic Chinese architecture, the *siheyuan* and the *hutong* contained within them, have now become endangered, with fewer surviving Beijing’s development frenzy each year. Yet the justification for the modern destruction of the *hutong* neighborhoods did not suddenly appear overnight, as historical and social movements over the 20\(^{th}\) century led to their decline.

**Decline of the Hutong Neighborhood Model**

While the *siheyuan* and *hutong* traditionally existed as high quality family housing, the years following the Chinese civil war and the subsequent revolution took a serious toll on the infrastructure of these areas as they did on Chinese society itself. Classically, the *siheyuan* structure was tended to and looked after with regular

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 147.
renovation and repairs done every thirty years,\textsuperscript{125} preserving it for future generations. But the chaos of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century prevented homeowners and later, state officials, from keeping up this tradition.\textsuperscript{126} A housing crisis following an earthquake in 1976 brought many refugees to Beijing, and in order to deal with the influx of people in need of housing the government promoted the filling in of the traditional \textit{siheyuan} courtyard and house, putting up walls within the larger original structure to create several small homes. As a result of a combination of neglect and the housing crisis, by the end of the 1970s the \textit{hutong} neighborhoods were infamous for their overcrowding as well as their unsanitary nature, as the inner city remained without running water and proper plumbing. At this time, however, the neighborhood bathhouses were still in operation, though they would soon be on their way out.

This poor reputation led to many officials adopting the attitude that the only way to bring about positive change in Beijing’s urban landscape would require wholesale demolition and a total rebuilding of these neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{127} When, in the 1990s, the local government finally had the resources and means to carry out this plan, it wasted no time. One conservative estimate argues that between 1990 and 2002 over 40 percent of Beijing’s Old City met a wrecking ball.\textsuperscript{128} A 2010 CNN article reveals how much that destruction continued in the interim, claiming that approximately 80 percent of Beijing’s \textit{hutongs} had been destroyed at the time of

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 203
\textsuperscript{127} Campanella, \textit{The Concrete Dragon}, 149.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 150.
The speed with which ancient neighborhoods were destroyed is owed to a convergence of factors involving land issues touched on in earlier chapters, most crucially the introduction of a real estate market in 1988, the separation of land use and land ownership rights, and the subsequent 1994 tax reforms that linked local government revenue with land leases and sale fees. This all led to a sharp rise in the value of land in central Beijing, as in the 1990s alone the price of housing in the inner city rose to approximately twenty times the annual income of the average local resident. All this worked together to incentivize the destruction of the old in order to make way for the new:

With the decentralization of fiscal authority, lower tiers of government have gained increasing autonomy over economic development within their jurisdictions. Meanwhile, the central government has ceased allocating resources for urban development. Local governments thus face tremendous pressure to finance their own budgets. Consequently, once land sales demonstrated considerable revenue generation potential, local governments have had substantial incentives to promote the real-estate industry.

While government officials initially intended to demolish neighborhoods in order to rebuild them and upgrade the housing for current residents, as the value of the land increased these plans were discarded for others that were more profitable. Even well-meant programs that aimed to upgrade housing for residents in situ, such as the Old and Dilapidated Housing Renewal program (ODHR) ended up being among those that helped push residents who had lived in Beijing’s inner city for

---

131 Ibid., 150-151.
generations out into the suburbs.\textsuperscript{132} As Thomas J. Campanella writes in his book, \textit{The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What it Means for the World}:

The municipal government soon abrogated its responsibility to provide affordable new housing for residents in the Old City, and chose instead to fatten its coffers with lucrative land-lease fees and taxes on parcels released to developers. In the process, Beijing ridded itself of both ‘old and dilapidated housing’ and the poor people inconveniently living in it.\textsuperscript{133}

\textbf{Failed Attempts at Preservation}

As this was occurring there were a few attempts to preserve areas of long-lasting historical, cultural, and architectural significance, but they were a colossal failure. This is reflected in the tremendous letdown of the 1990 Conservation Plan for 25 Historic District Areas in Beijing’s Old City, a plan that was initially hailed by many as a milestone in China’s movement for cultural preservation. The proposal was novel in that it emphasized not only the preservation of individual sites of historic significance, but also of the neighborhoods surrounding them, a dramatic break from the traditional “potted plant” approach to cultural preservation that had become the norm.\textsuperscript{134} Despite this, the plan itself was essentially a botched effort to save the fabric of Beijing’s historic urban environment, as it protected only five percent of Beijing’s remaining \textit{hutong} neighborhoods. Furthermore, it actually facilitated the speedier destruction of any neighborhood not explicitly protected by it. Finally, since the preservation plan did not expressly protect the older architecture as the valuable asset of these neighborhoods,\textsuperscript{135} government officials felt justified in demolishing the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 153.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Campanella, \textit{The Concrete Dragon}, 149-50.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Abramson, "The Aesthetics," 140.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Campanella, \textit{The Concrete Dragon}, 152.
\end{itemize}
buildings in protected neighborhoods and filling the area with new housing that poorly replicated the classical building they sought to replace. After this process, the neighborhoods became unlivable for earlier residents who could usually no longer afford to live there.

One neighborhood that was protected by the 1990 plan was Nanchizi (南池子), an area located just outside the moat of the Forbidden City that had once been part of the palace complex itself, opening to the public only after the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911. The local government decided that the aspect of the Nanchizi neighborhood worth preserving was not the structure of the neighborhood itself, but rather its location in proximity to the Forbidden City. As such, plans were announced in 1993 to turn the half of the neighborhood on the west side of Nanchizi street into a park, to resemble an “emerald necklace bedecking the Imperial Palace.”\(^{136}\) Aside for the plans for the park on the west side of the neighborhood, the local government planned to turn the east side, which was larger, into a newer luxury neighborhood for China’s nouveau riche. After years of planning and development schemes discussed in official circles, in May 2002, Nanchizi’s nearly 1,000 families were told they had a month to vacate their homes. An elderly man who had lived in the neighborhood since 1947 stated that, “this is all a real estate scam…they say our house is too old and falling apart, but they won’t let us fix it up ourselves because they want the land.”\(^ {137}\) This resident’s complaint reflects the experience of so many Beijingers who have been forced or coerced to leave their homes and communities under the auspices

\(^{136}\) Ibid., 153.
\(^{137}\) Ibid., 155.
of improved quality of life when in reality the reason is profit for the local government and for development firms. Despite the supposed protection the 1990 Conservation Plan should have afforded Nanchizi, by the end of 2002 the historic neighborhood had fallen prey to the redevelopment frenzy. The destruction of this gem of historic old Beijing was just one more loss to the city’s cultural heritage, and represents the lack of enforcement of the 1990 Conservation Plan.

In 2005, the hopes of preservationists and historians were once again raised by the passing of a new Beijing City Master Plan that laid out a significant area of the old city as a demolition free protected area.138 The 2005 plan was the result of a decade of negotiations between well-connected preservationists and government officials,139 and one of the many areas that was designated as safe from redevelopment was the historic Drum and Bell Tower district.

The Plan for Beijing’s Drum and Bell Tower District

It is in the context of Beijing’s history of demolition, development, and failed preservation initiatives that the case study for this chapter, the successful lobbying campaign for the preservation of the Gulou neighborhood surrounding the Drum and Bell towers, must be analyzed. Also protected by the 1990 and 2005 plans, Gulou is one of the last remaining classical hutong neighborhoods in Beijing. As a result of neglect by state officials, by 2010 the quality of life for residents in the neighborhood

139 Ibid.
was incredibly poor relative to other parts of the city, with many of the homes still lacking basic heating, air conditioning, or plumbing, as they had remained wholly neglected since the 1970s. While the lack of indoor plumbing was an inconvenience for the residents 40 years earlier, that was the norm for urban life in China during that period, and there were still communal bathhouses where one could go to attend to one’s needs. By 2010, however, the neighborhood bathhouses were no longer in existence, and indoor plumbing had become a basic amenity for urban residents and was found almost everywhere else. However, despite the development of the city around the neighborhood, “for many [Gulou] residents, a visit to the bathroom means bundling up and strolling down to the nearest public toilet.”\textsuperscript{140} The situation was no longer acceptable, especially given the substantial increase in quality of infrastructure in other parts of the city.

The terrible quality of life that Gulou residents were experiencing, combined with the high value of land in this area, led to the Dongcheng government announcing plans in January 2010 to spend $73 million dollars to redevelop the area around the Drum and Bell towers into “Beijing Time Cultural City.”\textsuperscript{141} Another likely reason for the proposed project has to do with horizontal competition in the state apparatus, between Beijing’s inner city districts. This motivation for the plan is highlighted in the words of He Shuzhong, a leader of the resistance campaign, when he said:

\begin{quote}
If I were the mayor of Dong Cheng District, I would be very frustrated too. Just look at my… colleague…running Chao Yang District. They’re producing such high GDP and they’re boasting such high tax revenues. I would be
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{140} Moxley to CNN newsgroup, “Gulou: The Heart of Old Beijing Still Beats.”

frustrated too if I were the mayor of Dong Cheng District. Look at Chao Yang. We have a common boss. And the boss has the same expectations from me, the mayor of Dong Cheng, and the mayor of Chao Yang, and they want the same things from us. My boss is going to say ‘look at Chao Yang, they produce such high GDP. They’re returning so much tax revenue, what are you doing?’ And then I probably would be done for, just after that. So I would need to find a way out of that… [Aside from] Chao Yang District, as the mayor of Dong Cheng District you would compare yourself to other inner-city districts; the Xi Cheng, the Xuan Wu. Xi Cheng has got a financial street and Xuan Wu has got a media boulevard. As mayor of Dong Cheng I would have to think of something to do in my district. Let’s do something different. Let’s do something.142

The plan for “Time Cultural City” involved building luxury homes for the wealthy, a museum on ‘timekeeping,’ and an underground mall.143 The plans for the project were not widely dispersed, with few to no details given to the public and to residents of the timeline of the development project, and few knowing what steps the local government was intending to take to make certain it happened.144 Yet it was assumed by the community that such a project would, as most urban redevelopment projects, require the relocation of many of the local residents. Newspaper articles from a variety of sources reveal the lack of transparency in the planning process for the project. One article, which appeared in the New York Times in July 2010, asserted that, “Officials have yet to publicly reveal the plans, and requests for information from the local government and the designated developer, the Beijing Oriental Culture Assets Operation Corporation, have gone unanswered.”145 It appears that the plan for the redevelopment was initially floated at a town hall style meeting

143 Jacobs, "Bulldozers Meet Historic."
145 Jacobs, "Bulldozers Meet Historic."
the year before, but since that time any public debate or discussion on the project had been strictly constrained.146

**Resistance Amidst Division**

After the official announcement of the project in January 2010, a local NGO, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Preservation Center (CHP), organized a meeting for March 27 to allow Gulou residents and other members of the Beijing community to come together to express concerns and opinions on the redevelopment.147 However, the day before the meeting was scheduled to take place, the police forced CHP to cancel it.148 In a bold public statement, CHP declared that the cancelation had taken place “because [the meeting] was going to cover two basic but important issues: the rights of local residents and protecting [the neighborhood’s] cultural heritage.”149

Despite CHP’s apparent confidence, the meeting, had it been allowed to occur, might not have been able to provide the united support for resisting the project that the organization was likely hoping for. The plans for the redevelopment project, vague as they were, had become extremely divisive amongst both Gulou residents and Beijing society generally. Preservationists and expats were horrified by the notion of yet another historic Beijing neighborhood being turned into a commercialized shell

---


149 Kuo, "Wrecking Ball."
of its former self, as illustrated in a quote from Robin Foo, a Brunei-born Chinese architect: “When they’re done, the place is going to look like Universal Studios.”\textsuperscript{150} But for some local Gulou residents, the redevelopment project and the thought of moving away from the historic neighborhood seemed quite appealing given the horrendous living conditions they endured on a daily basis as a result of living in such dilapidated homes. Still, other residents were less willing to leave the neighborhood they had spent their lives in, especially since they feared relocation to the outskirts of the city.

There were many Gulou residents who were aligned with CHP in their desire to stay in their homes and see their quality of life raised in situ. These residents had a variety of reasons for not wanting to leave. One middle aged Gulou resident, Zhou Changlin, had superstitious reasons for not wanting to move. Zhou told a reporter that the only way he could be convinced to leave would be if he were allowed to relocate to a single-story home as opposed to a new high rise apartment building: “I need to feel the earth beneath my feet….I’ve heard that old people who move to high-rise buildings usually die within two or three years.”\textsuperscript{151} Others, such as Liu Jinming, a martial arts master, refused to move because of the value of living in a place rich in community and history: “It’s a treasure to live in a place where you know the people and where your family has lived for generations…Who wants to live in a place where you can live next door to someone and not talk to them for years?”\textsuperscript{152} Yet another resident, Liu Hongqian, told a reporter, “I definitely won’t move if they want us out

\textsuperscript{150} Jacobs, "Bulldozers Meet Historic."
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
as far as the Sixth Ring Road. If you live that far, you have to buy a car, how much gas do you have to use everyday? We make so little money.”\textsuperscript{153} As the quotes by these three different individuals reveal, there are a variety of reasons why Gulou residents might want to stay in place, even despite their poor quality of life. Even so, many other Gulou residents felt differently, and hoped that the project might be an opportunity to raise their quality of life.\textsuperscript{154} Regardless of their willingness or unwillingness to leave the area, residents were united in their determination to receive adequate compensation should they be forced to relocate\textsuperscript{155}, although how much money that would take was never made clear.

Meanwhile historians, preservationists, and more connected members of Beijing society sought to cancel the plans to redevelop the area, while also attempting to push for an alternative plan that would simultaneously preserve the neighborhood and its culture while upgrading the current residents’ quality of life. Most of the actions taken to cancel the proposed plan were channeled through the NGO that had tried to host the community meeting that was cancelled by the police. This NGO, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center (CHP), is locally based in Beijing, and was started by a lawyer, He Shuzhong, the same He who alluded to the Dongcheng district government’s competitive motivations for pushing the project. Legally registered with the government in 2003, CHP’s website describes itself as:

\begin{quote}
A registered Chinese NGO that works at the grass roots level to assist local communities to preserve tangible and intangible local culture… Large portions of China’s rich cultural heritage are at risk due to low awareness and
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[153] "In Beijing," \textit{NBC World Blog}.
\item[154] Kuo, "Wrecking Ball."
\item[155] Jacobs, "Bulldozers Meet Historic."
\end{footnotes}
poor enforcement of heritage protection laws, as well as short-sighted policies that sacrifice cultural rights and values to short-term economic gain. Chinese government laws and policies in the field of cultural heritage protection are generally well-conceived, but are not well understood and are often poorly implemented. CHP has been established to address and tackle these issues.156

Aside from the grassroots level work it does, CHP’s website elaborates on its constituency and major partners in creating meaningful change: “Key constituencies with which CHP works include children, university students, artists and architects, lawyers, tourism industry representatives, journalists, community leaders, and government bureaucrats and leaders.”157 With existing connections to these politically influential groups, CHP was well positioned to take on a leadership role in the resistance campaign to protect the historic neighborhood.

After the initial community meeting was cancelled, CHP wasted little time mobilizing support for the resistance campaign from press, both foreign as well as domestic. Two days after the community meeting was supposed to be held, on March 29, 2010, CHP hosted an event with the Foreign Correspondents Club of China. At the event, He Shuzhong fielded questions on various aspects of the rumored development plans and on CHP’s resistance campaign. After first reaching out to the media to get more coverage of the proposed plan as well as the resistance, CHP turned to research and policy advocacy as a means to sway the government’s decision. In early May, CHP published a letter on its website in both Chinese and English, titled “A Better Future for Gulou—CHP’s Views on the Planned Redevelopment.” The letter goes into depth discussing why it makes sense that the

157 Ibid.
government should want to improve the area—and proposes an alternative plan to do so:

Since the government is willing to spend such large amounts to improve the Drum and Bell Tower neighborhood, and has stressed the protection of the cultural heritage of the old parts of Beijing, we therefore suggest the government cancel the Time Cultural City project and instead invest the budgeted funds in a ‘Caring for the Drum and Bell Tower’ rejuvenation project. Such a project could become a prominent model for cultural heritage protection. It would improve local living standards and civic participation, as well as become an exciting precedent for the Party and government in enjoying the gratitude of local residents.\footnote{158}

Despite the earnest efforts of CHP and its allies to improve the quality of life for Gulou residents in situ, the class differences within this dynamic and the unlikelihood of CHP’s proposed alternative succeeding sparked much bitterness amongst residents who saw the redevelopment project as a potential way for them to receive compensation and a way out of the slum that the once pleasant neighborhood had become. The frustration of some local residents with preservationists is especially apparent in the comments section of articles about the proposed Gulou redevelopment on the Beijing Cultural Heritage Preservation Center’s website:

“[CHP], don’t bring this kind of trouble! You all live in big houses, but what about the everyday people!? Go bother the government about it since you can! But don’t go pulling the media over to your side. Can I offer a bit of advice to those standing speaking without sore and bent backs? Put on our shoes and think it over, empathize with the local residents that have lived for decades in these conditions that you can’t even imagine! If you come on 27 March to listen to the thoughts of local residents and come up with ways to improve living conditions, then we welcome you! But if you come with the same half baked commercial ideas, to protect the interests of businesses and your own so-called ‘cultural appreciation’ horseshit, then you better not step into Zhangwang Hutong or we’ll beat you all down!”\footnote{159}

The frustration of these residents at the interference of preservationists and wealthier Beijing citizens in the redevelopment project is justified to a certain extent, especially given their relative deprivation and the lack of power CHP seemed to have to make significant changes to their quality of life in the way the government could. Yet Gulou residents might very well have been mistaken in thinking the government would be more able, or willing, to improve their quality of life as much as they hoped. Key to this potential miscalculation are the two issues of compensation and relocation.

The emphasis placed on compensation in development cases such as this is reflected in the words of 72-year-old resident of Gulou, Zhou Meihua, who said to a reporter, “Tear the whole place down…If we get enough compensation we’ll happily move out.” The importance of compensation in this context cannot be overstated. However, given the financial incentives of the local government officials, it is very rare for compensation offers to match the actual value of the land being negotiated over. Urban residents who face a predicament like the one faced by Gulou residents are often given three options. The options are: “buy a unit in the new development at a discounted price (if it is indeed housing being built, and not an office or shopping mall); accept a lump-sum payment and be gone (the optimal solution from the developer’s standpoint), or accept new housing provided by the developer elsewhere in the city.” Given the often central location of the new development, older residents can rarely afford to move into a new home on site, even with the subsidy,

---

160 Jacobs, "Bulldozers Meet Historic."
162 Campanella, The Concrete Dragon, 167.
and given the importance placed on owning a home in Chinese society, most people choose resettlement housing over the lump-sum offer.\footnote{Ibid., 169.} Since the real estate developers seek to minimize cost, the location of resettlement complexes tend to be on the cheapest available land, meaning that residents who have traditionally spent their lives in the inner city center move to the outskirts of the city, to the urban fringe.\footnote{Ibid., 169.} This move encompasses a significant tradeoff. As Campanella writes,

In their new homes far from the city center, residents typically have the space and modern conveniences their hutong homes lacked—a modern kitchen, private bath, heat and air conditioning, telephone, and sometimes even internet service. But such perks come at a steep price. Displaced residents are now often distant from their workplaces, in locales poorly served by public transportation, far from schools or hospitals, and lacking the wide range of shopping, dining, and cultural opportunities that were once at their fingertips. In many instances relocated residents must commute as long as two hours to get to workplaces that were once a short walk or bicycle ride from home. Worse, people are removed from the long-standing family networks and social contacts that rooted them to their old homeplace. Though the practice of relocating whole neighborhoods to the same new housing estates eases this to some degree, the old neighborhood’s deep social structure rarely survives transplanting.\footnote{Ibid., 169.}

Yet Gulou residents were never given the option of making a permanent choice involving relocation, as campaigners against the redevelopment managed to organize swiftly and efficiently enough to force the local government to cancel the plans before compensation packages became a tangible negotiation point.

On September 6, 2010, shortly before construction on “Time Cultural City” was set to begin, plans for the project were suddenly and mysteriously shelved by the

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 169.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 169.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 169.
local government. Although there was no clear reason for the cancellation given to the public, rumors surfaced that the decision was due to the expected cost of the project, as well as to the recent merger between Dongcheng and Chongwen district governments. Aside from these logistical challenges, the project was under considerable pressure as a result of the ideological challenges brought forth by the resistance campaign. It would be naïve to diminish the importance of the role played by CHP and the resistance in the cancellation of the plan, as the campaign applied immense pressure to the local government at a time when the local government was weakest, that is, while it was facing a merger. The announcement of the shelving of the plan was celebrated by preservationists and resistors, and marked a moment of successful interference of the public in the matters of state. Given the profit that could have been made from such a development project in the middle of the city, it is fair to assume that a substantial part estimate of the high cost of going through with the project took into account the likely difficulty of settling compensation packages with residents, alongside a media battle orchestrated by CHP and its partners in the resistance campaign.

The administrative merger was completed on August 26, 2010, only just over a week before the plans for Time Cultural City were shelved. At the same time, however, it would be reasonable for a newly merged district office to desire to make a

---


167 Ibid.

positive first impression, and for individuals within the new district office to need some time to negotiate where they stand in the new hierarchy, thus making an ambitious redevelopment project difficult to continue. The unpopularity of such a project under the controversial circumstances that CHP and the resistance campaign were doing their best to highlight in the media would have made continuation of the project even more difficult. The official spokesperson for the new Dongcheng district government told reporters, “The plan has been put on halt….It’s unclear what is to follow at this point.”\footnote{169} A few months later it was announced that the greater plans for “Time Cultural City” have been definitively cancelled, but that a small timekeeping museum would still be erected, a project that would not require additional demolition of residences or relocation of any Gulou residents.\footnote{170} He Shuzhong, the founder of CHP, told a reporter from the Global Times that he was encouraged by the government’s decision to alter the plans for the area: “I see the changing of policy as a sign of government progress…It shows that the government has a better understanding of the value of old community culture and it accepts the voices from the public and non-government organizations.”\footnote{171} For the time being, things in Gulou returned to normal.

\footnote{169} Ibid.
\footnote{171} Ibid.
Analysis

The resistance to the proposed plan in this case study was in many ways defined and directed by the uncertainty of the people involved. Since there was never an official notice declaring the finalized parameters of the project, and since community members’ requests for more information were denied or ignored, the resistance had to be based on more conceptual arguments against the project than the approaches used by citizens in other cases. In many ways, the lack of a defined plan that had been revealed to the public was a boon to the resistance, since the project’s ambiguities allowed the campaign to frame its case as based squarely on ideological foundations and a sincere desire to preserve heritage, as opposed to a localized anti-development campaign.

This case study stands out for the ways in which it breaks from the others in this thesis and from patterns of successful resistance more generally. While both of the other cases in this thesis took significant amounts of time by resistors to achieve success, in this case the matter seemed to be resolved fairly quickly and quietly, before many residents even fully established a cohesive message of demands. For this reason, this case study is a useful counterpoint for understanding how different resources are available to different communities and how strategies might have varying consequences with regards to the resolution of contentious land development projects. Of all three cases in this thesis, this one can be viewed as the “ideal,” in that the campaign was able to swiftly and efficiently carry out its resistance and achieve its goals without needing to go outside the bounds of the law. This success is owed to the resources available to the resistors, and the tactics that such resources made
available to it. Of the tactics employed by the resistance in this case, of particular importance were the role of NGOS and public figures, domestic and foreign media, strategic issue framing, and policy advocacy.

NGOs and Public Figures

Concerned Gulou residents and other concerned Beijing community members were represented in the resistance struggle primarily by the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center (CHP), an NGO led by its founder, He Shuzhong. As a more established organization with connections to both the expatriate and international communities, as well as to multiple agencies within the Beijing government, CHP was able to utilize its connections, guanxi, to channel the concerns of Beijing’s elites and expats, as well as those of Gulou residents who wanted to remain in their homes but see actual improvements to their quality of life. When reflecting on the ability of CHP to achieve its goals, He Shuzhong noted that,

If you’re familiar with matters in China, and in Beijing particular, you would find that a lot of nearly impossible things are in fact possible even though they may look difficult. It all has to do with your timing, it has to do with your approach, your methodology, you need to touch the right pressure points and then you can make things possible.172

By exerting pressure at the right “pressure points,” at the opportune moment, CHP was able to navigate the complications of Beijing’s intensely fragmented authority structure, and to push back where and when gaps in consistency opened up.

Although in this case many outspoken Gulou residents were those who desired compensation and relocation, there were many others who did not wish to

172 Shuzhong, "Transcript of FCCC," interview, Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center.
leave their homes. For these citizens, CHP was able to represent, and amplify, their voice, by utilizing its connections and power to make certain the campaign’s message was heard and understood.

**Role of Internet and New Media**

Compared with the other two cases examined in this thesis, the role played by the Internet and new media use seems to be less significant in determining the resistance campaign’s eventual successful outcome. In this particular case study, the use of the Internet and social media was a stepping-stone that allowed for information on the development project and efforts to resist to spread throughout the Beijing and Gulou communities and be discussed to a degree that would have been difficult were the Internet not available. Still, the role played by these two particular tools in impacting the local government’s decision to cancel the development project was quite minor, especially when compared to the role played by domestic and foreign media coverage.

**Role of Foreign and Domestic Media**

One of the strategies actively pursued by CHP was involving the press so as to get word of the resistance out into the public sphere. CHP focused particularly on enlisting the help of the foreign press located in Beijing, as is indicated in the organization’s holding of a Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China press event on the Gulou redevelopment.\(^{173}\) At the event, He Shuzhong, the founder of CHP, fielded

\(^{173}\) Ibid.
questions from the foreign press on various aspects of the rumored development plans and on CHP’s resistance campaign. When He was asked what the resistance’s first step towards stopping the development project would be, the first thing he said was, “Well, first of all there’s pressure. Pressure from the general public, from the media. When it comes to what media, the minor officials are more worried about domestic media and the big officials are worried about international media.”

He’s acknowledgement that different tiers of government respond differently to varying types of media coverage indicates his intention to use media coverage to not only raise awareness and support of the campaign, but also to apply pressure to various layers within the fragmented authority structure of the government in Beijing in order to elicit negotiation over the project. This strategic manipulation of various forms of media as an ally was crucial to the campaign’s ability to speedily gain traction.

**Strategic Issue Framing**

As the driving force behind the resistance campaign, CHP is the main actor to evaluate in an effort to understand the use of strategic framing in this case study. The CHP website gives an overview of the entire campaign alongside short articles written to advocate its position on preservation generally, as well as in the particular case of Gulou. As in the other cases in this thesis, the loyalty frame featured prominently in all articles written on CHP’s attempts to halt redevelopment. Rather than framing the campaign as anti-development, resistors chose to frame it as anti-demolition, pro-preservation, and pro-improvement in quality of life for average people.
Beijingers. Towards this end, CHP regularly asserted its loyalty to the government, and its genuine desire to be an ally in helping shape good development policy going forwards: “We support the government in making significant investments in the protection and cultivation of cultural heritage areas such as Gulou, and also making great strides in improving the quality of life of local residents.”¹⁷⁵

Policy Entrepreneurship and Advocacy

Another key strategy utilized by the resistance campaign was policy advocacy as opposed to mere opposition to the development project. As in the case of anti-incinerator resistance in Liulitun, the campaign published a letter establishing its position on the project, and in addition to pointing out the flaws in the government’s plan, advocated for alternative ways to achieve positive outcomes in the area. The letter, which was published in both Chinese and English on CHP’s website, is titled “A Better Future for Gulou—CHP’s Views on the Planned Redevelopment,” and goes into depth discussing why it makes sense that the government should want to improve the area—and proposes an alternative plan to do so:

Since the government is willing to spend such large amounts to improve the Drum and Bell Tower neighborhood, and has stressed the protection of the cultural heritage of the old parts of Beijing, we therefore suggest the government cancel the Time Cultural City project and instead invest the budgeted funds in a ‘Caring for the Drum and Bell Tower’ rejuvenation project. Such a project could become a prominent model for cultural heritage protection. It would improve local living standards and civic participation, as well as become an exciting precedent for the Party and government in enjoying the gratitude of local residents.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Letter by Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center, "A Better Future."
¹⁷⁶ Ibid.
By presenting themselves as rational policy advocates, who had both the Gulou residents’ and the governments’ best interests at heart, CHP and the community of resistors it represented were able to better navigate the political barriers that exist for nongovernment actors in shaping land development issues in an urban context.

Conclusion

This case study shows how a combination of Beijing residents from different backgrounds—historians, cultural preservationists, and Gulou residents—mobilized quickly with an NGO to halt a planned development project by the local district government. By utilizing a variety of tools and tactics, these campaigners were able to draw attention to the value of maintaining the existing structure of the Gulou neighborhood surrounding the Drum and Bell towers while advocating greater government support for improving housing conditions for residents in the area. As a result of the central location of the area, and the attention the conflict received in Beijing media sources and expat communities, average Beijing residents successfully interfered with a government plan to redevelop the entire area without needing to take the risks associated with illegal protest measures.

This case must be considered a great achievement in advancing the interests of Chinese citizens in conflicts over land development and use, as it shows that it is possible to work fully within the existing system to create meaningful change. Yet while citizens successfully interfered in the local government’s decision-making process in this instance, their success was possible largely because of the wealth of resources available to them as a result of the location and type of campaign, that is, a
campaign led by a registered NGO to preserve Beijing’s cultural heritage. As such, the “ideal” resolution presented here is not yet available to the majority of Chinese citizens who deal with exclusion from land development decisions. Furthermore, although this victory was heralded as a milestone for citizen mobilization and resistance at the time, the years since then have shown that the local government is as determined as ever to make as much of a profit off the area as possible.

In 2013, demolition resumed in the Gulou neighborhood, this time as part of a government effort to expand and revitalize the Qing dynasty square located between the towers in the name of cultural preservation. The new project, smaller than the abandoned “Time Cultural City” plan, required the relocation of approximately 136 families living in the area who were told to vacate their homes by the end of February. While some complied, others hung back, unsatisfied with the initial compensation package the government offered them as it equaled only half of the market value of the land their homes sat on.\(^*\) Local businesses have also been seriously impacted by the new project, with many cafes and bars that had drawn people to the area being forced to relocate.\(^*\) Thus, just a few years after the success of the resistance campaign, the local government found a way to utilize the potency of the cultural heritage frame to its own advantage, and to reassert its right to determine how to develop the area.

\(^*\) Ibid.
Despite the 2013 development project in the neighborhood, the achievement of the resistance campaign in 2010 remains. Due to the ever-changing nature of the Chinese urban landscape, even a small interference by civil society in the land development decision-making process marks a significant step forwards. This way of viewing different types of success is noted in the words of He Shuzhong:

Maybe you’re able to completely stop this project…but if you’re not able to completely stop it you might be able to reduce the impact, reduce the damage caused by it. That’s a kind of success as well. Or even, there may not be any changes to the project on the surface, but in the process you might be able to apply pressure on certain people and have an impact on them so that they will do things differently next time. That’s a kind of success as well.¹⁷⁹

Until the systemic issues that provide motivation for local government officials to focus their energies on land development are altered, there are going to be continued efforts by the local government to assert its dominance over land in the inner city. Yet any example of citizen and civil society interference, which forces a reconsideration by the government of the importance of public opinion, marks a success in advancing the voice of citizens in China’s urbanization process.

¹⁷⁹ Shuzhong, "Transcript of FCCC," interview, Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Center.
Case Study 3: The Siege in Wukan

The next case study delves into the tensions within the existing land system and how injustices occur in a rural Chinese setting as a result. In stark contradiction to the two other cases which both take place in Beijing, it might seem that villagers in rural China lack the resources to implement a sustained resistance effort against the local state. And yet, despite the odds for success being heavily stacked against them, rural citizens in a tiny village in the south-eastern part of the country managed not only to take a stand against the injustices carried out against them by local officials, but also managed to draw international attention to the deep flaws within the existing land system in China.

In September 2011, the small village of Wukan, in China’s Guangdong province, suddenly captured international attention. Wukan is located in Guangdong’s southeastern coastal region, not too far from Hong Kong, and is home to 13,000 people. As a rural village, the land in the Wukan area is technically owned by the collective of farmers and villagers who live there, yet control over the land actually rests in the hands of the local cadres, as opposed to being directly controlled by average citizens whom the cadres supposedly represent. This is the result of the structure of the land policy and land rights system in rural areas in China, and, as in most other parts of the country, the absence of a clear definition of collective

---


103
ownership has created a “de facto ‘plight of rights’ among farmers.”

Wukan is therefore just another in a multitude of villages in China in which ordinary farmers have little to no actual control over the land they technically own by law. The commonplace nature of the Wukan land situation makes the resistance that occurred there in 2011 all the more relevant for discussions on land policy issues and the development of Chinese civil society. Though the situation in Wukan is so similar to the experience of villagers across China, the nature of the mobilization of Wukan villagers and the impact their protest has had on Chinese society makes Wukan unique. This chapter aims to look critically at what happened in Wukan in 2011, how citizens mobilized, how the protest both succeeded and failed, and how it inspired and impacted Chinese citizens across the country.

The Land Issue in Wukan

Today, Wukan’s economy is based on the fishing industry in the local bay and on agriculture, mostly of rice, peanuts, and sweet potatoes. Despite its position within one of China’s wealthiest areas, the Pearl River Delta, Wukan itself lags far behind the rest of the region. Industrialization in the village began in 1992 with the establishment of the Wukan Harbor Industrial Development Corporation, a joint venture between a Hong Kong businessman, and the village party secretary at the time, Xue Chang. Despite its official mandate of handling industrial development in the area, the prime focuses of the corporation were land transactions and real estate.

---

183 Ibid., S128.
184 Ibid., S128.
development, as evidenced by the fact that in the years between 1993 and 2012 it sold 2,112 acres of the village’s land, for a total profit exceeding 700 million RMB ($101.6 million USD). All this was done without the input of the legal owners of the land, the average people of Wukan. According to an interview with a villager in 2012, “Have a look around, the land in Wukan is a big mess. All the land has been grabbed by those powerful and rich officers and speculative developers. As a result, the grassroots farmers in this village are totally landless.”

Under Xue Chang’s leadership, the administrative village cadres made a huge profit on land sales without ever consulting or informing the Wukan villagers, thus totally depriving the villagers of their rights over the collective land that their very livelihoods are based upon. At the same time that the cadres and the real estate developers were making a huge profit, the average people in Wukan received scarcely any compensation. According to one report, over the entire period between 1993 and 2011, Wukan villagers received only two compensation payments, one for 50 RMB ($7.26 USD) and another for 500 RMB ($72.64 USD). Although the villagers understood they were being taken advantage of, there seemed to be little they could do about it. On one instance, in April 2009, a flyer was circulated throughout the village by an anonymous source, self-named “Patriot No. 1,” with a QQ id number (China’s equivalent of Facebook). The flyer was titled: “A Letter to the Dear

---

185 Ibid., S129.
187 He and Xue, "Identity Building," S129.
Villagers of Wukan: We are not the Slaves of a Dead Village.” The flyer asserted that since 1993, the villagers had been swindled as corrupt practices had led to the sale of land without the villagers themselves receiving any profits. Aside from laying out the situation the villagers now found themselves in, Patriot No. 1 called for action, for the villagers to demand answers to their grievances: “Might we ask is this the kind of government that ordinary people can trust and depend on? Will the real Party please pay us a bit more attention!” Although village committee leaders scrambled to have all the flyers removed immediately, many villagers had already added the anonymous Patriot No. 1 on QQ. For many of Wukan’s villagers, the flyer constituted a turning point—they were able to see that their individual frustrations with the village’s governance and land system was actually a shared, widespread grievance that might be solved through collective action. Once many villagers added Patriot No. 1 on QQ, he created a group called the ‘Wukan Hot-blooded Youth Group.’ As time went on, the number of members of this online group grew to nearly 1,000.

Between 2009 and 2011, as the land issue in Wukan became more severe, there were at least nine instances where groups of villagers appealed via petitions to authorities in higher levels of the provincial government or the city government, citing the land issues they faced and the deprivation of their rights by the corrupt local cadres. Yet each of these appeals made no difference, and no replies were ever

---

189 Ibid., 19.
191 Ibid., 31.
192 Ibid., 31.
193 Ibid., 31.
194 Ibid., 31.
sent. When their numerous efforts to achieve justice and recognition of their struggle through the approved channels failed, Wukan villagers turned to the Internet, to online discussion groups such as the ‘Wukan Hot-Blooded Youth Group,’ as a place to reflect, vent, and plan methods of resistance. Additionally, the use of online platforms allowed for the dissemination of information to villagers with ties to Wukan who were not immediately present: “Through the internet, this grief and indignation [over illegal land requisition] was gradually spread to people from Wukan who were struggling to make a living away from the village.” These Wukan villagers living away from home were then able to compare the situation in Wukan to the situation in other villages. The comparison often left them frustrated. As one man originally from Wukan living in another village wrote of that village’s experience in the online forum: “Their land was collectively let out, there was collective income, and they shared the profits. We’ve never had that in Wukan…Why is it that other people have it like that, but we don’t?”

A source of particular bitterness for the villagers was the obvious manipulation of local elections by the presiding cadres, which prevented any chance of change in village leadership. This corruption was personified most obviously by Xue Chang, the man who helped set up the Wukan Harbor Industrial Development Corporation, who had somehow managed to remain in the elected position of village party secretary for 40 years. One post in the ‘Wukan Hot-blooded Youth Group’

---

196 Lie, "Rethinking Rural Resistance," 19.
198 Ibid., 32.
raged, “The cadres from the two village committees who have been in office for forty years in a row seek personal gain from public resources, illegally seize land….then gobble up vast sums of money.” By 2011, the Wukan villagers were coming to the realization that their livelihoods were at risk since there was no more land to farm. They were also growing ever more aggravated by the obvious corruption of the cadres who were supposed to represent the village’s best interests. Finally, in September 2011, the frustration of the villagers that had been building for years, bubbling under the surface, burst through. The ‘Wukan Hot-blooded Youth Group’ left the virtual space of the Internet chat room and became a concrete resistance movement.

Citizen Resistance

The Wukan protests that mark the beginning of this chapter’s case study began on September 21, 2011, when approximately 4,000 Wukan villagers congregated outside of the Wukan village committee building to call for Xue Chang to release to the public the village’s financial documents and the documents pertaining to land sale transactions that had occurred over the years. This demonstration was a call for transparency, and for the actual implementation of the right of Wukan’s average people to know what was being done with their assets. It was also a clear call to end the 40-year reign of Xue Chang over the village. Villagers carried flags and gongs, shouting slogans such as “overthrow corrupt officials,” and

---

201 Lie, "Rethinking Rural Resistance," 19.
“return our farmland.” From the village committee building, the villagers marched to construction sites on disputed land, but when no one from the construction company was willing to talk to them they continued to the Lufeng Municipal government office. There, the protesters were assured by local government officials that the land contracts over the most recently disputed land were not yet complete, a fact questioned by the villagers who had seen surveyors working on the area.

After listening to the government officials, the protest returned to the Wukan village committee building to confront Xue Chang, but he was not there. At this point, a mob sacked the village committee office, while some villagers blocked roads and destroyed property in frustration. The next day, September 22, 2011, saw the arrival of riot police in the village, who were dispatched by the Shanwei municipal government in the name of maintaining order. The introduction of over 200 police led to the first violent confrontation with villagers. Armed with bricks and steel pipes, Wukan residents overturned nine police vehicles, causing a riot that left dozens injured on both sides.

Up until this point, the leadership of the resistance had remained ambiguous, with chat room discussions facilitating most of the protest organization and logistics. It was only after the violent clashes on September 21 and 22 that villagers put forth a leader for their resistance movement. The person that emerged as the representative for the villagers was 67 year-old Lin Zuluan, who was a CCP member and had served

---

202 Ibid., 19.
203 Ibid., 20.
204 Ibid., 20.
205 Ibid., 20.
as a village cadre at a much earlier point in his career.\textsuperscript{206} Lin had not personally been involved in the violent riots of the previous days, but was sympathetic to the grievances of the villagers who had acted to express their frustration at their lack of agency in the governance system.\textsuperscript{207} With Lin Zuluan representing their cause, the Wukan villagers decided to try to use more diplomatic means of making their demands. The first appeal they made was for new local cadre elections, since they felt indignant at the obvious corruption that had kept Xue Chang and his cronies in power for so long.\textsuperscript{208} This demand was not as revolutionary as foreign media later made it seem, as the villagers were entitled, by the existing Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees passed in 1998 and revised in 2010, to contest unlawful elections through filing complaints.\textsuperscript{209} Yet, as in many places within China, laws passed in Beijing do not always get implemented in other areas. As villagers investigated and looked for evidence to prove the corrupt nature of the Wukan election process, on September 29, the resistance elected a temporary board of 117 representatives to govern the village. Of these 117 representatives, 13 were elected to take on the negotiation process with local authorities in order to use diplomatic means to find a resolution that would meet the villagers’ demands.\textsuperscript{210}

After a month and a half of investigation, on November 14, the newly established board of representatives presented a report to the Lufeng City National

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 20-1.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 20-1.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 21.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Lie, "Rethinking Rural Resistance," 21.
\end{itemize}
People’s Congress Standing Committee that listed the tracts of land that had been destroyed and developed without the proper laws and policies being followed.\textsuperscript{211} In response, the Lufeng government publicly organized a working group to investigate the villagers’ claims, while also quietly sending agents to pressure Wukan villagers to sign a petition attesting that the incidents in September had already been resolved.\textsuperscript{212} This subterfuge angered the villagers, who responded by orchestrating another march.

On November 21, two months after the first protest, 4,000 Wukan residents marched once again to the Lufeng municipal government building to present officials with a petition. While Lufeng officials assured the marchers that they would respond accordingly, just a few weeks later, in early December, the Shanwei municipal government proclaimed that the temporary board of representatives the villagers had elected was an illegal organization.\textsuperscript{213} Then, on December 9, plainclothes policemen arrested four of the movement’s more prominent protesters without warrants.\textsuperscript{214} This act by local authorities marks the beginning of a new phase of the resistance campaign.

\textbf{Escalation and the Siege}

One of the men who had been arrested without a warrant, Xue Jinbo, died of suspicious causes in police custody two days after being taken into custody. He was 42 years old. The news of Xue Jinbo’s death acted as a catalyst for a more aggressive resistance on the part of Wukan’s villagers. Though Xue Jinbo’s official cause of death was stated to be heart failure, it is widely believed to be murder.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 22.
death was reported by the government coroner to be sudden cardiac arrest, when his family was allowed to view the body briefly they identified what appeared to be signs of torture. According to Xue Jinbo’s daughter, “There were cuts and bruises on the corners of his mouth and on his forehead, and both nostrils were full of blood…His chest was grazed and his thumbs looked like they had been broken backwards. Both his knees were black.” At her father’s funeral, his daughter told reporters that her father’s death would not be allowed to pass without meaning: “We know his wish was to get his land back and punish corrupt officials…He sacrificed himself—and now we’ll make a sacrifice to fight for his cause.”

Xue Jinbo’s daughter’s words proved not to be empty; as the Wukan villagers heard of Xue Jinbo’s death in police custody, they were galvanized to take more aggressive action. Thousands of villagers rioted and occupied the village committee headquarters and fought back the local police’s attempt to regain control, causing all the remaining Communist Party officials in the area to flee. The resistance then successfully repelled an effort by riot police to enter the village and set up barricades on every road into Wukan using tree trunks. Over the next ten days Wukan was

---

216 Ibid.
essentially under siege. Authorities and police were barred from entering the village, and in turn they set up barricades that some reports claimed were limiting food supplies from getting through to the village.\textsuperscript{220} Reporters who managed to smuggle themselves into the village, however, were welcomed by villagers; a de facto press center was set up in an empty home and there was great enthusiasm and willingness on the part of protesters to share their opinions in order to spread news of the village’s situation.\textsuperscript{221}

Any degree of trust Wukan’s villagers had previously held in local authorities’ commitment to helping them had at this point evaporated. This is evident in the words of a villager who told one reporter: “We are not sleeping. A hundred men are keeping watch. We do not know what the government’s next move will be, but we know we cannot trust them ever again.”\textsuperscript{222} Yet the distrust of the local government was also balanced by a fierce belief that the central government would come to Wukan’s rescue. At a rally on December 17, for example, thousands of villagers chanted “We love the communist party,” while a banner displayed prominently in the crowd pleaded that the central government not abandon the village.\textsuperscript{223}

After over a week of siege, on December 21, 2011, Lin Zuluan met with two provincial level government officials, Zhu Mingguo and Zheng Yanxiong, and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{221} Moore, "Inside Wukan."}
through negotiations they were able to come to an agreement to end the protest and reopen access to the village in return for meeting some of the villagers’ demands.\textsuperscript{224} The entrance of provincial level officials into negotiations indicate that the Wukan incident had gained enough traction in the press and online that actors in upper levels within the Chinese political hierarchy were eager to see the situation resolved quickly and in a manner that might increase their political capital while diminishing its negative impact. It seems that the successful negotiation paid off politically for the two provincial officials, who were praised the following day in the official CCP newspaper, \textit{The People’s Daily}, for “creat[ing] the basic conditions for stability and harmony” in the village.\textsuperscript{225} As part of the deal, the system of self-governance the villagers had set up for themselves in the board of representatives was recognized as legitimate, the riot police withdrew from the area, and the remaining protesters in custody were released.\textsuperscript{226} Xue Chang and the head of the village administrative committee, Chun Shunyi, were both detained and held for interrogation by the provincial CCP’s interparty disciplinary officials.\textsuperscript{227} And so, four months after it began, the Wukan protest ended.

\textbf{Analysis}

There are several aspects of the Wukan resistance in 2011 that are worth examining more closely. These are the role played by technology, new media and

\textsuperscript{224} Wong, "Demonstrators Who Took Over Chinese Village Halt Protest."
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{226} Lie, "Rethinking Rural Resistance," 22.
\textsuperscript{227} Wong, "Demonstrators Who Took Over Chinese Village Halt Protest."
\textsuperscript{227} Lie, "Rethinking Rural Resistance," 22.
foreign media, and the crucial issues of framing that came up with the introduction of these new tools of communication for the protesters.

**Influence of Technology and New Media**

The role of technology and new media in the ability of the Wukan villagers to organize and mobilize their resistance cannot be overlooked. The creation of an online chat room, ‘The Wukan Hot-Blooded Youth Group,’ allowed for villagers to share a virtual space for discussing the injustices they had experienced and to plan their method of pushing back against the corrupt local authorities. Furthermore, this online forum allowed for Wukan villagers living away from Wukan to engage in the resistance movement as well, helping the resistance gain insight from experiences elsewhere. Smart phones that could easily record video and document events in real time, which could then be easily uploaded to a variety of online platforms helped spread awareness of what was happening within the village to others, as well as to reporters who then were able to broadcast the evidence of what was occurring inside the village to a greater audience. Thus, technology and new media allowed for the initial mobilization and organization of the resistance in Wukan, and helped provide ammunition to aid the villagers in making their grievances heard via foreign media. Because of these new tools and the strategic ways in which Wukan villagers used them, their voice was heard across the world, despite the best efforts of local officials to cut the village off completely. Without access to the Internet or to these new technologies, the resistance in Wukan would have looked radically different, if it would have happened at all.
The Role of Foreign Media

Foreign media played a significant role in the relatively successful resolution of the siege in Wukan. In fact, the way in which Wukan’s villagers actively sought to get their message across through foreign media as a means of getting the attention of central government leaders is maybe the key to answering the question why the Wukan incident in 2011 ended as peacefully as it did. The number of foreign reporters in the village, and the near constant coverage of the resistance put greater pressure on local government officials as they considered how to handle shutting down a protest that was so present in the public eye. Furthermore, this strategy of actively trying to entice foreign reporters to broadcast their message made the Wukan villagers somewhat of a novelty. As Hess writes, “[Wukan] may represent a watershed in terms of the tactics applied by popular claimants. Unlike most of China’s 180,000-plus mass incidents each year, the organizers at Wukan made a concerted effort to voice their local claims not only to sympathetic high-ranking officials within China but also to a global audience.”228 Key to the strategy of the Wukan villagers in reaching out to foreign media was the distinct sense that domestic media sources could not be trusted to report accurately on events. The frustration of the villagers with the way their earlier efforts at resistance had been reported on in the domestic media led them to search for an alternative means of getting their grievances heard. For example, after the clash between Wukan villagers and the police on September 22, 2011, the mainland media coverage was felt by the resistance to be very misleading: “In the reports of the mainland media, we’ve become a bunch of

violent thugs, the police were injured, and we suffered no casualties whatsoever.”

By drawing in foreign media coverage, Wukan villagers toed the line between accepted and unacceptable measures of protest. While utilizing international press is not illegal, it also marked an intentional effort by the villagers to go over the heads of local media and local officials as a means of applying pressure on actors within the political system. This tactics was highly successful as, “by broadcasting their message internationally and drawing attention to their plight, protest leaders were able to put pressure on the provincial and, most likely, national leadership, prompting an intervention from above.”

**Strategic Issue Framing**

As in the other cases considered in this thesis, the way that citizens in Wukan framed their resistance made a significant impact on the overall success of the protesters in achieving a sufficient government response to their demands. Furthermore, the way in which the resistance was framed was intentionally and strategically considered—the Wukan protesters were keenly aware of the way in which they wanted to frame their resistance. There are two main issues that emerge in the strategic framing of the Wukan Incident that bear greater discussion. These are the loyalty to the center framing approach and the lands rights versus democracy framing dilemma.

Of great importance to the Wukan villagers, as with resistors in the Liulitun and Gulou cases, was that it be clearly understood that their quarrel was with the local

---

government and the corrupt village cadres, not with the central government or the ruling political regime more generally. The professed devotion of the Wukan villagers to the existing political regime was expressed by to foreign reporters over and over again. The perception of an intense degree of fragmentation between the levels of the state, and the attitude of the villagers that the empowerment of local officials that results from this divide is harmful, is evident in the words of the mother of one of the men detained with Xue Jinbo. In an interview with a reporter she expressed he fear of local authorities quite bluntly, as she said, “Please tell the government in Beijing to help us before they kill us all.”

Aside from individual villagers framing the collective struggle as being one against the problem of local corruption rather than with the CCP regime, this same frame was pushed explicitly to reporters who were working out of the de facto pressroom created during the siege. In an article that was part of a New York Times series on the Wukan protests called “Wukan Journal,” reporter Edward Wong describes the interior of the press center, noting that on a wall in the main room there was a sign expressly requesting that the reporters did not call the protest in Wukan an “uprising,” and stating clearly, “We are not a revolt…We support the Communist Party. We love our country.”

The emphasis of the resistance on local governance issues, rather than on the national Party-state system or democracy is a framing tactic characteristic of both citizen resistance movements and the central government in China. Both local activists and central government authorities use the locality frame to avoid uncomfortable political confrontations. For Chinese citizens, in emphasizing the

231 Ibid., 192.
232 Wong, "Canny Villagers Grasp Keys to Loosen China’s Muzzle."
specific, local nature of their discontent, they hope to draw support from the central government whom, they assume and assert, should appreciate their desire to improve the overall quality of governance in the nation. Rather than a protest that questions the legitimacy of the central government, as portrayed by the Western media, the Wukan protesters actively reinforced the legitimacy of CCP authority through their repeated articulations of their faith that the Center would do what was right. This exemption of responsibility by the central government is also upheld through the decentralized political decision making structure in the modern political apparatus, as the central government, in emphasizing the locality frame when it comes to governance issues, can distance itself from unpopular local state actors and from the responsibility of having to openly proclaim either support or disdain for the choices local cadres make.

While the loyalty to the Center, loyalty to the CCP, frame has been observed in each case study in this thesis, this particular case study is distinct due to the role played by foreign media in the distortion of the land rights and anti-corruption frames into a statement about a grassroots democracy movement taking on the Chinese government. A unique aspect of the Wukan case is that actors other than the resistors themselves framed the protest issues in a manner that aided the success of the resistance. The role played by foreign media in the relatively successful resolution of the Wukan protest is difficult to quantify, yet it is certain that international press coverage of the incident had a deep influence on the signals the central government sent down to local officials to clean up the mess.²³³ With the world’s attention on

Wukan as a result of foreign media coverage of events there, the central government was keenly aware of trying to avoid anything that would bring memories of tanks and Tiananmen into Westerners’ interpretation of events. In fact, it is probably directly due to the amount of foreign media attention on the siege at Wukan that provincial and city officials resisted the urge to bombard the town with riot police and use brute force to shut the resistance movement down, as they had attempted to do during the earlier protests in September. Although foreign media attention certainly assisted the villagers in avoiding a crackdown and a potential loss to local officials, the way the foreign media portrayed events was distinctly at odds with the focus of the issue for the villagers themselves.

As field research conducted by Anne Lie reveals, the key difference between the way the Wukan villagers framed their struggle and the way foreign media, especially Hong Kong and American media, framed it, has to do with the centrality of the issue of democracy in spurring the resistance. For the Wukan villagers who rose up in 2011, the demand for the introduction of the free and fair elections they were entitled to by Chinese law and their determination to get rid of corrupt local cadres were both simply a means towards the ends of regaining their rightful control over the village land resources. Land, not democracy, was the central issue for the Wukan villagers, and the main motivation for their struggle. Foreign media, however, portrayed the protests in Wukan primarily not as a fight over this basic resource, but as a fight for democracy and anti-corruption within the greater CCP and Chinese state at large. In her masters thesis, Anne Lie recounts:

In many ways there seems to have emerged two narratives from the Wukan incident, one as seen through the eyes of foreign journalists, and one from the
perspective of the Wukan villagers….Foreign media coverage of the incident has been largely focused on issues such as democracy and grassroots political movement…It was common for the foreign media to attach labels ‘rife with political connotations,’ such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, and self-governance. The Wukan residents I talked to used quite different terms to describe their key concerns. They used terms such as ‘corrupt official,’ ‘land grab,’ and ‘share profit’ to describe what they considered the core of the Wukan Incident.234

This gap in framing is also noted by a Chinese intellectual quoted in a Wall Street Journal article that came out several years after the conclusion of the 2011 Wukan protest, “Wukan’s true problem is the capitalization of land, but media hyped it up as democracy’…‘Villagers are not interested in democracy if there is no economic interest.”235 Westerners tend to fetishize the notion of democracy in authoritarian China, and by casting the events that occurred in Wukan in 2011 through a democracy frame, news sources were able to guarantee that more Americans would hear of the issue and more newspaper articles on Wukan would be read. At the same time, however, this was a serious break from the frame the villagers themselves aimed to use, that of their legal right to the land, and after that, anticorruption and free and fair village elections.

Success?

Following the deal that was negotiated on December 21, 2011, things in Wukan calmed down. The barricades were taken down, roads were reopened, the reporters left, and the village seemed to return to normal, albeit a “new normal.” In March

234 Lie, “Rethinking Rural Resistance,” 54-5.
2012, there was an election held for a new village committee, and many of the leaders from the Wukan protest were elected to fill the positions of the cadres that the villagers had forcibly removed from office. At first glance, it would seem that the Wukan siege had led to a remarkable achievement for citizens in authoritarian China. Yet the gigantic success the world and the Wukan villagers themselves believed had occurred never fully materialized. Though fairer village elections were implemented and the cadres who had colluded with developers at the villagers’ expense were punished, the central issue, the misappropriation of the village’s land, was never resolved. By March 2014, three years after the supposed resolution to the conflict, the new village committee still had not been able to get back the land that had been taken. Furthermore, as the new round of elections approached, one of the main leaders of the 2011 protests admitted to a journalist that he “regretted” ever becoming involved. To make matters even worse, in early March 2014, one of the corrupt cadres whom the protest had ousted in 2011 was appointed by the township level government to a county-level position; in effect receiving a promotion despite his involvement.

The most recent news from Wukan only adds to the sense that the earlier success people envisioned for the village is far from being realized. In the summer of 2016, nearly five years since the beginning of the initial protests in Wukan, Lin Zuluan, now in the elected position of Wukan village Party Secretary, was arrested by Lufeng city authorities. The charges against Lin included claims of corruption, abuse of

236 Ibid.
237 Lie, “Rethinking Rural Resistance,” 22.
238 “Wukan: New Election, Same Old Story.”
239 Ibid.
power, accepting bribes. Most Wukan villagers believe that the charges against Lin are false, and are merely an excuse to retaliate against him for his recently renewed efforts to make another push for the long awaited fair compensation and return of the land that sparked the initial protests five years ago. In the three months between Lin’s initial detention and his sentencing, Wukan villagers once again took to the streets daily to demand his release and for all charges against him to be dropped. Lufeng city officials allowed these demonstrations to continue, but despite public outrage, protesters were unsuccessful in getting the charges against Lin dropped.

After three months of detention, in September 2016, Lin made a televised confession to the charges against him and was sentenced to three years in jail. His many supporters fervently believe that the confession was forced. According to an article published in the Los Angeles Times, one of Lin’s former attorneys told the Associated Press that Lin’s confession was most likely motivated by a desire to protect his family from harm.

Following Lin’s sentencing, Lufeng city officials sent out a letter notifying villagers that they should cease all demonstrations and allow for the return of order to the area. When villagers refused to comply, the Lufeng city authorities responded with a midnight raid, tear gas, and rubber bullets. According to Lufeng authorities, 13

---


242 Ibid.


244 Associated Press, "Chinese Police Arrest 13 in Crackdown."
people involved in inciting protests were arrested. Foreign media reporters who were in the village were detained by the police and then escorted to the Hong Kong border; some were also made to sign agreements not to return to Wukan. Chinese citizens posted or shared information online about the Wukan situation were dealt with swiftly as well. One woman from a city 350 km away from Wukan was jailed for 13 days without trial for sharing an article about Wukan on WeChat, one of China’s most popular social media networks.

**Conclusion**

Despite the more recent developments in Wukan, and the failure of the resistance movement to successfully ensure the return of stolen land back to the villagers, the protests in 2011 and even those in 2016 are not absolute failures. The Wukan villagers were able to overthrow their corrupt leadership, highlight the village’s governance problems, and draw international attention to the problem of land mismanagement in rural China. Furthermore, through their strategic use of the resources available to them, these rural villagers pointed out the failures in the existing system, and somehow come out the other end relatively unscathed. The boldness and courage of the Wukan villagers in asserting their rights and their grievances showed Chinese people across the country, and people across the world,

---

247 Ibid.
that there is something deeply wrong within the existing governance and land distribution systems in China, and that Chinese citizens are no longer willing to simply accept reassurances of economic growth as reasonable alternatives to their rights being protected. The impact of the incidents in Wukan, both in 2011 and in 2016, have inspired people across China to take action to resist illegal land development projects and corruption.
Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to address the research question: given the rigid authoritarian structure of the Chinese political system, which has been designed to leave little to no room for general citizen-led political activity and engagement in policymaking, how is it that we see Chinese citizens successfully extracting desired policies, resources, and rights from the state? How can it be that there is effective citizen-instigated policy reform in this context, especially in the extremely sensitive area of policy that has to do with land? The argument developed from my research to answer this question has two components. First, the windows of opportunity for citizen engagement in China are growing and becoming more apparent to the masses as a result of increased access to technology and the spreading of information on existing ambiguities and variation of Chinese land legislation and divisions within the existing political structure. Second, in response to the recognition that opportunity for resistance exists, average Chinese citizens are strategically using the tools and tactics available to them to successfully insert themselves into China’s land development process, and to assert their own demands into the state’s decision-making equation. Given a slim window of opportunity, Chinese citizens are against great odds succeeding in making demands of the state regarding land use, ownership, and development through their strategic exploitation of gaps in the existing political structure. This chapter seeks to evaluate the conclusions that can be drawn from the evaluating the case studies alongside one another, and given the evidence gathered,
the implications for Chinese civil society and its relationship to the state, as well as those for the continuing land system reform process.

**Case Study Review**

Each of the three case studies presented in this thesis show how Chinese citizens in varying locales—urban fringe, inner city, and rural—with access to different resources, still somehow managed, through picking and choosing strategies that fit their situation, to take advantage of the slim window of opportunity presented to them by the cleavages in the authoritarian structure of the Chinese state and to insert themselves into the decision making process when it came to land development.

In the Liulitun section of Beijing, an area defined by its lack of deep social organization as a newly developing residential neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, local residents utilized the Internet, social media, strategic framing, petitioning, and when necessary, mass demonstrations, to make their voices heard. Their successful campaign against the building of a waste incinerator shows the emerging political power of China’s urban middle class, and the impact that strategic framing can play in the success of a resistance campaign under an authoritarian, albeit fractured, regime. While their resistance took years to succeed, the campaigners against the incinerator at Liulitun managed to work mostly within the existing system in order to achieve their goals. Furthermore, as an earlier case, beginning in 2006, of environmental based land development resistance, the campaign inspired citizens across the country to protest unsafe and polluting infrastructure projects, while
changing the local government’s calculations for what it could build without public consent.

Likewise, in Beijing’s historic Drum and Bell Tower District, a locally based NGO managed to amplify and project the voices of those residents who were reluctant to move, especially without proper compensation, and who feared for their livelihoods once transplanted from the inner city to Beijing’s outskirts. As an NGO, CHP was able to provide enough support for the anti-demolition campaign by bringing in the expat community, experts, prominent Beijing community members, and foreign and domestic media into the mix. The context of inner city territoriality greatly shaped the resistance campaign, rendering it quite different from the urban fringe civic territoriality experienced in Liulitun. The divide in the Gulou and the greater Beijing community over how to approach the development project would likely have led to any organized resistance crumbling, were it not for the structure and direction provided by CHP. With the leadership provided by CHP, the anti-demolition resistance campaign was able to push back against the state at a moment when authority was most fractured, at a time of administrative merging, and succeed. The case reveals the power wielded by recognized citizen organizations in the still contentious area of inner city land development.

Finally, in China’s southeastern Guangdong province, farmers from the tiny village of Wukan not only disrupted business as usual by overthrowing their own corrupt local government, but brought international attention to the plight of rural Chinese citizens across the nation as a result of China’s land system’s defects. The Wukan villagers’ resistance campaign against the corruption of village cadres who
stole village land for a profit without the input or participation of the villagers reveals that the power to resist is not restricted to more urban areas and wealthier citizens, but is powerfully present in the countryside as well.

Each of these three case studies plays a role in telling just one part of the greater story of what it means to resist as a citizen in contemporary China. Since Deng Xiaoping initiated China’s Reform and Opening in 1978, the country has gone through a rapid transition both in its economy and society. Yet despite significant changes that have been made to China’s governance structure to allow for local government autonomy, the political condition remains one of rigid authoritarianism under a one Party system. The decentralization that has helped push China’s economic development forward and that has allowed local issues to be solved locally has a cutting back edge, namely that rampant corruption is empowered and incentivized by the existing decentralized authority structure as well as in the legal tying of local government revenue to land sales and leases. Furthermore, the CCP’s emphasis on construction and physical development of land as the ideal means of pushing China’s development process forwards enables and encourages local officials to overlook citizens’ rights and interests in the name of “national progress.” At the same time that the number of cleavages across both vertical and horizontal planes of the state apparatus has risen, empowering local officials, citizens, too, are increasingly empowered to take advantage of these gaps in order to make their grievances with the local government heard.

So long as the Chinese state continues to prioritize economic and infrastructure development over development of citizen rights, civil society, and rule
of law, Chinese citizens are going to continue to resist actions by local officials that they feel violate their rights and expectations. Incidents of resistance such as those three discussed in this thesis are just one part of an ongoing negotiation between China’s state and society. As far as incidents of resistance in an authoritarian context go, the three cases discussed here are relatively successful, despite the fact that their individual victories are often only partial or short lived. Successful resistance by average citizens builds momentum for civil society development across the country, and elbows out greater space for all Chinese citizens to think more critically about which promises being made by the state are, and are not, being kept. As such, it is useful to reflect on how citizens strategically utilized tools and tactics available to ensure that their grievances were not only heard, but acknowledged, by the state.

**Strategies, Tactics, and Change**

In all three cases discussed in this thesis, it was shown that the strategic choice and implementation of tools and tactics was crucial to the ability of the resistance campaign to succeed. It was not the mere availability of resources available to these resistance campaigns that led to their success, but the ways in which the campaigns used available tools and tactics in unison that allowed them to make an impact. For example, while the Internet and social media allowed for residents in Liulitun to gather information, educate themselves, and overcome collective action problems, it was the choice to employ the collected information to make policy suggestions, to frame their resistance as ideological and boundary-spanning, rather than a NIMBY type protest, and to show up en masse in front of SEPA that forced the government to
address the citizens’ concerns. Similarly, in the case of the preservation of the Drum and Bell Tower district, it was the policy advocacy of CHP, the engagement of the foreign press, Beijing intelligentsia, and expat communities, and the fortunate timing of the administrative merger that worked in combination to push the local government to reconsider the project. Finally, in Wukan, where there were far fewer resources available to make claims via accepted channels and succeed, villagers, frustrated by repeated failure to achieve redress through the official grievance lodging system, took to the streets, brought in the foreign press, and proclaimed the failures and corruption of their local government on the world stage. In each of these cases, working within the existing system allowed the resistance campaigns to arm themselves with ammunition to point out the validity of their claims. However, it was the bringing in of allies who had more influence and power, strategic timing and framing, and knowing when and how to push the boundaries of the system just enough that allowed for success.

Although new technologies and resources encourage and empower citizens to speak out, at the same time they also open up the possibilities for government surveillance and censorship. With increasing public discussion of topics of political nature occurring online, the degree of monitoring conducted by the government has also risen. On the one hand, this surveillance means that activists and resisters are made more vulnerable to repression by the state for their online activities. On the other, the monitoring of public discussion of issues can be used by the state not only as a means of repression and censorship, but as a way to measure public opinion and support or lack of support for political initiatives. Given the unreliability of domestic
media to accurately portray public opinion, the Internet can allow for the Center to be better in touch with how the citizenry views its leadership. In this way, the same tool that enables mobilization and public discussion for the citizenry could be utilized as a means of proactive consultation by the state.

With regards to the tactic of strategic issue framing employed in each case, the Center has something to gain by recognizing the genuine support for the Party voiced by resistors across the board, despite their grievances with local officials. In case after case, resistors emphasized their loyalty to the Center and their strong belief that the central leadership would come to their aid, if only it knew of the injustices being committed against them. If the central government can better enlist Chinese citizens as their allies in forcing local officials to fall in line, then perhaps a greater degree of trust can be built between the citizenry and the state apparatus as a whole. For the time being, there continues to be an active effort by resistors to proclaim their loyalty to the center. The more often the central government does not come to the aid of such protests, the faster average citizens might lose their underlying faith in the current regime.

**Implications for China’s Reform Process**

This thesis has focused on incidents of land contention, but the patterns observed in this area of conflict persist throughout the dynamic between the Chinese state and society. Up until now, the CCP has favored an approach of gradual and experimental political reform as a means of balancing out the rapid economic changes sending shock waves through Chinese society. This deliberate effort to limit the speed
at which change occurs indicates an acknowledgment by the Center of the potential for too speedy reform to lead to political instability. The connection between development, reform, and political stability is brilliantly elucidated by Samuel Huntington in his 1968 seminal book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. In that work Huntington argues that, “Not only does social and economic modernization produce political instability, but the degree of instability is related to the rate of modernization.”\(^{248}\) According to this theory, the rapid change occurring in Chinese society, and the lagging reforms within the political institutions in comparison, should indicate an imminent political overhaul of some sort, and increasing instability. But while there are growing numbers and incidents of citizen protest in China, this increase does not seem to reflect a desire by resisters to overthrow the existing system, but rather, to stabilize and build it up even further. What we seem to be observing in China is that while Chinese citizens are more empowered than ever to speak up and resist the authoritarian regime, rather than protest the system and the Party as a means of breaking the authoritarian state apart, they are seeking to build the state up, and to bring legitimacy to CCP rule in incidents where local officials are failing to live up to expectations.

The increasing number of mass incidents in China, and so many related to land issues, is a signal of the deep seated problems that exist within the land system and about the increasing unwillingness of Chinese civil society to sit back as the land problems continue. The result is a push-and-pull relationship between the Chinese state and society over land, complicated by the complexity of motivations and gaps.

within the state apparatus across both vertical and horizontal planes. As citizens continue to resist infringements by local officials, the stakes for the central government to respond to citizen demands for justice will rise. The case studies in this thesis show that citizens go about contesting local government decisions over land via official and legitimate routes first. Only once these efforts to work within the system are unsuccessful do resistors begin to strategically play up the tensions created by gaps in the state apparatus. By enlisting the help of influential actors, such as NGOs, foreign media, and public figures, and through advocating alternative policies and framing their loyalty to the Center, resistors make it clear that they see their goals as aligned with the Party and with the country’s best interest.

This thesis contributes to the literature on responsive, contentious, and resilient authoritarianism by examining the way that different groups of Chinese citizens are approaching resistance to the state. In particular, this thesis shows the ways that the methods employed by resistors to challenge the local government are validating and legitimizing of the Center and the political apparatus as a whole. Thus, while they are resisting the autonomy of the local government, Chinese citizens are simultaneously reinforcing and upholding the authority and resilience of the Chinese Party-state.

The question of how an authoritarian regime can remain in power even as economic and social conditions develop has been studied by many scholars and yet demands greater attention. One scholar who has contributed to this field of research is Xi Chen. Xi Chen explores the concept of authoritarian resilience and responsiveness in his work, *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China*. In this book,
Chen conducts an in depth analysis of the existing *xinfang*, or petitioning, system and how the system is an example of an earlier effort by the regime to create a “consultative apparatus…designed to facilitate ‘managed participation,’ which means that both the forms and effects of participation are under tight control by the Party-state.”\textsuperscript{249} As Xi Chen discusses, however, the ability of the state to effectively manage and control public participation has diminished as time has gone on. Thus, although the *xinfang* system was created so that “Ordinary people can signal their preferences to the state but are not supposed to exert pressure on it,”\textsuperscript{250} the system is no longer able to function as it was originally intended. Furthermore, citizens are aware of the desire of the state to be in favor with the people, and as the *xinfang* system is one of the only legal means of expressing discontent, are finding ways voice their frustration with local officials via the mechanisms present in this existing, Party-sponsored, system.\textsuperscript{251}

Similarly, Christopher Heurlin uses the term responsive authoritarianism to discuss the increase in the CCP’s willingness to address popular grievances over the last two decades.\textsuperscript{252} Heurlin defines responsive authoritarianism as referring to:

> A regime that proactively monitors citizen opposition to state policies and selectively responds with policy changes when it gauges opposition to be particularly widespread. Responsiveness, moreover, is intended to strengthen the state and avoid the development of a revolutionary opposition rather than being a sign of state weakness.”\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid., 3.
The notion that the authoritarian state recognizes it has something to gain from addressing popular grievance claims works in conjunction with that the case studies in this thesis seem to indicate—that the Center is upheld and legitimized even as resistors point out the failures of local government, and that citizens believe they are assisting in building up the state through this approach to contention. Furthermore, the fact that there are any incidents of success when Chinese citizens confront any part of the state apparatus reveals that the resistance occurring is not perceived as being wholly damaging to the regime. Even though citizen resistance movements related to land contention are succeeding in varying locales via different strategy routes across China, the protests remain localized, and therefore, although incidents of successful resistance inspire resistance in others, there is no unified momentum of citizens to push for policy change on a national level. In many ways, this localization of resistance movements is what allows there to be incidents of success—as localized protests addressing local grievances, they are not a threat to the central regime, and as such, are allowed to succeed. Despite what some Western intellectuals might read into reports of increased protest in China, the increasing numbers of citizen resistance cases occurring in the PRC today are not indicative of a grassroots democracy movement or a political revolution aimed at overturning the authoritarian system. As Xi Chen writes:

Although the institutions for political representation are conspicuously inadequate in China, the existence of pervasive and routinized popular contention serves as an indicator of the remarkably elastic character of the Chinese system...One observes a unique political order in China: Beneath the surface of noise and anxiety, the whole political system remains stable.\textsuperscript{254}

\textsuperscript{254} Chen, \textit{Social Protest}, 5.
Despite the non-revolutionary character of citizen resistance in contemporary China, citizen demands from the state are not to be taken lightly. As barriers to public participation in the political sphere remain in place, China’s citizenry is becoming restless as countless abuses occur on the local level. Anger about abuses of power and widespread corruption in the sale and development of land is one of the areas in which this building tension is most visible. As this thesis shows, average Chinese citizens in various locales are refusing to quietly acquiesce to infringements of their rights in relation to land, and they becoming more creative at finding innovative ways to get around barriers to engagement in order to hold local officials accountable. However, if the Center cannot find a way to keep local government officials in line, and if the expectations of the Center by citizens continue to rise without satisfaction, the political stability the CCP has managed to maintain these last 40 years might begin to unravel.

**Concluding Remarks**

When discussing citizen resistance under an authoritarian regime, it might be assumed that the resistance being discussed undermines political stability. Yet the story told by these case studies and the research in China is at odds with this assumption. Each case study reveals that in the localized grievances being contested by citizens, there is not an assertion that because of these issues the system as a whole is broken. Chinese citizens, even those who take to the streets to protest, seem to retain an exceptional faith in the Center and in the central government’s leadership. This faith has been able to persist despite the countless violations of citizen rights and
protections on the local level. This thesis shows that instead of using these instances of infringement to point out the failures of the regime as a means towards bringing it all crashing down, Chinese resistors are displaying a genuine desire to improve conditions on the local level, and in doing so, are legitimizing the regime at the top. For the most part, activists who are engaging in land-based contention seek to improve and build up the state, as opposed to undermine it. Through the sequence of tactics chosen to resist, and the urge to begin within the legal limits provided by the system while only going outside them when there appears to be no other way forwards, citizen-led resistance is actively supporting and validating the leadership of the CCP. This state-building aspect of contemporary Chinese resistance is evident in the policy alternatives and institutional improvements suggested by the campaigns in Liulitun and Gulou, as well as in the loyalty to the Center frame that so deeply defines the Wukan resistance. Thus, despite the myriad of issues surrounding land development and land rights and use reform, it would be incorrect to assume imminent reforms will lead to a sharp decline in Party control and authority. At this point, the trend seems to indicate that if the Center can find a way to reign in the abuses occurring on the local level, the public will continue to wholeheartedly stand behind the regime.

This active attempt by protesting citizens to build up the state apparatus even as they exploit its existing fractures makes the case in China worth further research. Until now the means of resisting the state has involved citizens allying themselves with the Center, and in doing so, absolving the top leadership of much of the responsibility for abuses carried out by local officials. Because the manner in which
citizens are resisting the local government involves legitimizing the Center and calling for further state building, in the form of the development of further institutions and policies under the current regime, this form of resistance must have a limit. At some point, the Center is either going to have to address the concerns of resistors more fully, or the approach taken by citizens in resisting the state will become impossible to sustain.
Works Cited and Consulted


Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/33ae0866-3098-11e5-91ac-a5e17d9b4cfe.


