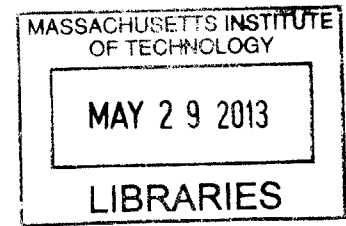


The Hidden Activism: Media Practices and the Media Opportunity Structure
in Chinese Politics of Resistance

By

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B.A. Journalism, Tsinghua University, 2010



SUBMITTED TO THE PROGRAM IN COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES/WRITING
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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Science in
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Abstract

My thesis discusses the hidden and non-adversarial nature of resistance in authoritarian countries through the perspectives of media practices and media opportunity structure. To understand the art of resistance in authoritarian countries, one has to look beyond the striking physical confrontational aspect of resistance. I approach the topic of hidden resistance by examining the social and cultural implications of media artifacts appropriated by movement participants and their strategic interactions with different stakeholders within the media ecosystem. Using media practices and the media opportunity structure as analytical lenses, I conduct case studies on three movements. The first case, Wukan Protest in 2011, which was a local protest against land expropriation, illustrates the essence of non-adversarial resistance in a confrontational incident. Wukan protesters' media practices helped them take advantage of the opportunity structure. The second case examines how New Workers Art Group (NWAG), a nonprofit organization in Beijing, actively produces alternative discourses as resistance to hegemonic urban values. Migrant workers collective identities are constructed through their self-produced media artifacts. The third case looks at how New Rural Reconstruction (NRR) movement leverages mainstream discourses and conducted a series of experiments aiming to change economic, social, and cultural relationships in rural China. The diversity of cases is to obtain more complex view on real-life contention and avoid oversimplifying the thick meaning of "hidden transcript" across different movements. The thesis concludes that the success of hidden resistance cannot be solely defined by mainstream media visibility. Looking beyond confrontations portrayed in media reporting, this thesis argues that participants' practices of alternative media forms assist them in mobilization and organization, and resisters' strategic interactions with different players in media system create opportunities for them to continuously implement incremental social change on the ground.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

“Do not think the world is what it is.

Do not think the poor can be forgotten.

Do not think we are fooled by your trick.

Let all hypocrisy and unfairness get out of the way.”

-- From the song, *Life in Cities*, by Xu Duo, a member at New Workers Art Group

“Acknowledgements: China Central Party’s Cultural Ministry, Propaganda Department, Beijing Cultural Bureau...”

-- Written in the back cover of the album having the song *Life in Cities*

On January 3rd, 2013, *Southern Weekly* newspaper published its annual New Year special editorial entitled "Chasing Dreams." Readers found several factual mistakes and posted them online, which aroused much discussion, as these low level mistakes are not usual for such a high quality newspaper in China. It turned out that this published version of the editorial had gone through several rounds of modifications between Guangdong provincial propaganda department officials and Southern Weekly editors. In quick succession, several Southern Weekly journalists and editors posted details of editing processes through their Weibo accounts and went on strike to protest against censorship. The person in charge of the paper’s official Weibo accounts was pressured to hand in passwords and issued a false statement saying the chief editor was responsible for this incident as he did not follow the publication workflow.

Every move of this incident was closely followed by millions of Chinese Internet users, and many supporters of *Southern Weekly* gathered in front of the newspaper’s building to protest

against the propaganda department's distortion of fact. This conflict was no longer just between journalists and censorship officials. It became an incident at the national scale, and even international media stepped in. Then the pressure was shifted onto other side of this conflict, the Guangdong government: they had a meeting with newspaper editors and both of them made a compromise. Guangdong propaganda department promised less intervention to the newspaper's editorial practices, and the staff agreed to stop their strike and to make sure the next issue of the newspaper would be published on schedule.

By looking at the outcome, their resistance has created a window for them to seize the opportunity of asking for a more open editorial policy. What would happen if they stuck to their press freedom idealism and turned down the peacemaking offer by the government? The choice they made was rooted in the art of resistance in authoritarian China. Most of their staff was not severely impacted and this newspaper gained more freedom in practice. Many of the earlier studies on activism in China only tell a partial story on the conflictual relationship between resisters and the regime. This study delivers a more comprehensive look at the strategic choices made by the resisters, the compromise they reach with the authorities, and their tactics enabling the emergence of political opportunity.

What is "resistance" in China? Some would list numerous cases of collective action, street protests, sit-ins, and self-immolations. While sometimes they exemplify physical confrontations that create striking scenes to promote resisters' causes, in authoritarian countries resistance can be complex. The relationship between the state and resisters is not always confrontational, and sometimes it can be cooperative. This thesis discusses the hidden and non-adversarial nature of resistance in authoritarian countries through the perspective of media

practices and strategies. The art of resistance in repressive regimes has been theorized as hidden¹ and rightful.² As theorized in James Scott's hidden transcript thesis, the relationships between the state and resisters are far more complicated than explicit, visible, public confrontations between the two. To understand the art of resistance in authoritarian countries, one has to look beyond the striking physical confrontational aspect of the resistance. Often, the true nature of resistance on the ground is disguised.

In this thesis, we unpack the disguised nature of resistance by exploring different types of resistance forms in three case studies. The first case, Wukan Protest in 2011, which was a local protest against land expropriation, illustrates how resisters avoided exaggerations of conflict in media reporting in a confrontational incident. The second case, New Workers Art Group (NWAG), a nonprofit organization, actively produces alternative discourses as resistance to hegemonic urban values. The third case, New Rural Reconstruction (NRR) movement, leveraged mainstream media and conducted a series of experiments aiming to change economic, social, and cultural relationships in rural China.

In terms of the scale of physical presence and radical tone, the Wukan case is more confrontational to the state than the two other cases; however, in terms of social change, the forms of resistance in the other two cases are worth deeper examination. This study does not intend to make sweeping claims that non-confrontational movements are more likely to bring more influential social change. The inclusion of the three forms of resistance is to establish a relatively wide range of practices so that our scope is not limited to protests that make newspaper

¹ Scott, James C. *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale university press, 1990.

² O'Brien, Kevin J, and Lianjiang Li. 2006. *Rightful resistance in rural China*. Cambridge University Press,

² O'Brien, Kevin J, and Lianjiang Li. 2006. *Rightful resistance in rural China*. Cambridge University Press, February 13.

headlines. Thus we can see clearly how those "hidden transcripts" strategies occurred across these different forms of resistance.

The theoretical framework I set up to examine the hidden transcript in authoritarian regimes (the discourses and cultural symbols embedded in media for the repressed) follows the lens of Raka Ray's fields of power. Ray's theory has the merits of contextualizing the outcomes and the forms of movements by issues of interests, the dynamics of regional politics, and cultural norms in history. Instead of framing Chinese resistance as a binary concept, which sets up the state as the opposite of the movement actors, social movements operate within fields of power, a dynamic space where the interactions between the state and the social movement agents are less predictable and more diverse, both supportive and adversarial.

Media Perspective

I approach the topic of hidden resistance from the perspective of media, and aim to bridge the gap within the current literature on media and social movements, and thus I propose two analytical lenses to examine the cases:

- 1) media practices of movement participants and social history surrounding these practices;
- 2) media opportunity structure and resisters' strategic interaction with stakeholders in the Chinese political environment.

It should be noted that these two lenses are not mutually exclusive categories. We can examine mediated social movements in China through these lenses at the same time by asking corresponding questions such as:

- 1) What cultural messages are embedded in media that resisters use and produce?
- 2) How do resisters use this media to construct their collective identities as resistance?

3) How do the resisters use this media to strategically create opportunities in negotiation with the authority?

I will answer these questions respectively in the following three case studies, but for now these questions illustrate the analytical tools with which we look at the role of media in Chinese social movements.

Situating within the tradition of media studies that focus on media social history instead of media texts, my interpretive lens of media forms aims to unpack social and cultural history associated with media artifacts. Media artifacts are not separated from their social conditions and their cultural environment. Realizing this fact may shed light on many questions such as why people use media in this mode rather than another, and how media properties are shaped across time. For example, when we examine a poster with characters "Give Back Our Land" on it, we should not stop at the realization that this protest might involve a land dispute. We need to also think about the formats of the characters, the materiality of the poster, and most importantly these media properties associated with the entire history of posters as representation of public writing. Thus the message is not only the characters per se but also the media forms themselves. Our scope is not limited to a specific media platform, but we ask how "old media" such as posters and theatres are transformed and remediated to "new media" outlets such as microblogging platforms and other social media communities.

Some social movement scholars have recently argued for a focus on movement media practices. Sasha Costanza-Chock defines media practices as "tools, skills, and norms that social movement participants use to create, circulate, curate, and amplify movement media across platforms."³ This definition leads us to explore the relationship between media forms and

³ Costanza-Chock, Sasha. 2012. Mic check! Media cultures and the Occupy Movement. *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3-4: 375-385.

movement identities and outcomes. Media practices do not only serve the publicity purposes of movements, but also, media practices by resisters exemplify and construct their identities. The social processes of their framing and discourses formation through media also define the growth of the movements. In this sense, media practices are not just strategies in response to external challenges, but in fact internalize resistance itself. For example, some social movement organizations call for migrant workers to write diaries. The media production practice by the participants, writing diaries, is worth examining because this self-exploratory process not only mobilizes them to participate but also strengthens their collective identities.

The concept of media opportunity structure is originated from political opportunity structure in social movement literature. Often it describes that social movements gain visibility in mass media platforms and thus they create opportunities to negotiate with state agencies; however, social media environment has complicated this discussion because a large amount of information flows between different media platforms. Additionally, some scholars have challenged the idea that the “media opportunity structure” is stable or fixed external object. Rather, it is in constant transformation, shaped by the changing political economy of communication, media and communications policy, the rise of participatory culture, increased digital media literacies and so on.⁴ Framing theorists elaborate further on the power contestation between stakeholders behind narratives on media.⁵ Within the power-laden media space, the contestation of different frames and discourses embedded in various media forms make an impact on the outcomes of the movements. Through case studies of local resistance and progressive groups, we look at the frames created by movement organizers in the media they

⁴ Costanza-Chock, Sasha. "Se ve, se siente: Transmedia mobilization in the Los Angeles immigrant rights movement." *doctoral dissertation. University of Southern California, Los Angeles* (2011).

⁵ Benford, Robert D. 1997. An Insider's Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective*. *Sociological Inquiry* 67, no. 4: 409-430.

produce and examine how the frames change as the actors interact with state agencies and media practitioners. We also examine how resisters leverage mainstream media, build constituency, and cooperatively produce alternative discourses.

Summary of Methods

Methods used in this thesis include frame analysis, content analysis, historical analysis of media, semi-structured interviews, survey method and textual analysis. Data are gathered from several sources. This thesis requires us to systematically examine media artifacts produced and appropriated by social movements participants as well as media reports on them. These media artifacts can be posters, flyers, webpages, micro-blog posts and so on. Some of these media artifacts were observed in the field, and photos of objects and notes were taken at the same time. Some historical media artifacts were examined in archive settings, especially posters from the 1950s and 1960s; photos and notes were taken. These photos, clipped webpages, micro-blog posts, videos, and many other types of records are organized and presented on this site:

<http://hiddenactivism.wordpress.com>. Another source of primary data is face to face and Skype interviews with participants and organizers. Interviews are organized around five questions.

They were drafted before interviews but as interviews proceeded our conversation expanded.

The third type of data came from NGO2.0 Project's annual survey on Chinese NGOs' digital and social media literacy.⁶ This data provide a general picture of civil society organizations'

involvement with media, especially their proficiency in social media. These data sources are examined through different methods determined by the nature of the data. For example, frame

analysis is adopted to see the frames embedded in media artifacts, and content analysis is used to

⁶ A project by New Media Action Lab, MIT. Description of this project and the surveys can be found at http://www.ngo20.org/?page_id=295&lang=en

examine emerging themes within interview data and other texts. This mixed methodological approach fits with the research scope as well as various data types.

Summary of Cases

I select cases to cover a wide range of resistance types in terms of their scale of the movement and the diversity of media coverage. Thus we can obtain a more complex view on real-life contention and avoid oversimplifying the thick meaning of "hidden transcript" across different movements.

In terms of the scale of movement, Wukan protest participants are local villagers; NWAG primarily mobilizes migrant workers in Beijing but they also collaborate with other workers rights organizations; NRR is a national movement because they involve participants from villages all over China who eventually go back to their hometown to start rural reconstruction experiments. All three cases have rich online and offline materials about their activities: Wukan Protest has entered the international media ecology; NWAG has ample self-curated web content; NRR's cause has been amplified in mainstream mass media within China.

Wukan is the easiest to be identified as resistance because of its episodic street protests. Wukan protesters succeeded in overthrowing the village leaders of the communist party and elected protesters as new village leaders. Its gain was the political concession offered by the provincial party leaders. Although they won a village election to transform their protesters identities into village officials, it is still unknown if this resistance model can be replicated by other villages in China.

New Workers Art Group establishes alternative discourses as resistance to the mainstream discourses circulated in urban China. As a result of urbanization and modernization, migrant workers have been portrayed as marginalized groups. The social deprivation of their

lives (lack of social security, no medical insurance, no permanent residency rights in cities, no education resources for their children, etc) has created a self-perception of desperation and despair. The discourses generated by the new workers' media practices have produced a completely different frame of self-representation: they are active, constructive, and often calling for action to change current inequalities.

New Rural Reconstruction Movement resists modernization while actively reconfiguring rural production, social relations, and cultures within rural communities. Their media practices are examined at both micro and macro levels: at the macro-level, its success is examined through their mainstream media campaign on Agriculture, Peasants, Village (三农) policy; at the micro-level, the individual cooperatives (合作社) at each village rely on cultural troupes (文艺队) for mobilization and self organization.

Selecting such a wide range of resistance types has one advantage: we can demonstrate the hidden tactics of the suppressed in authoritarian countries and contribute to the literature that has been primarily focused on confrontational movements. Yet I also realize limitations of the findings in the study: including more cases with similarities in movement purposes and scales will be more helpful in teasing out factors other than non-adversarial media strategies. What should also be emphasized is that this research does not intend to make universal claims by stating non-adversarial media strategies are more effective than confrontational movements. Through the following case studies, this paper contextualizes the media strategies by taking culture, history and locality into the framework. The social movement political environment is a highly fluid space where resisters' action is not structural but dynamic.

Chapter 2 Resistance in Authoritarian Regimes

Non-adversarial strategies by activists are not a new theoretical discovery, as can be shown from studies of resistance under authoritarian regimes, but previous scholars rarely focus on their media practices. Non-adversarial resistance is paid less attention mainly because of its implicit nature, but James C. Scott responded to the theory of hegemonic domination by illustrating efforts of peasants and slaves who disguised their resistance. In his words, distinctive from the public transcript, the hidden transcript is the subversive reaction against elites domination.⁷

For more explicit resistance in authoritarian countries, O'Brien and Li pointed out in rural China, the "rightful resistance" channels the rhetoric of the party in power and sympathies of the allies within the political system.⁸ Within this similar framework, Yongshun Cai identified how Chinese citizens make use of their social networks to influence people in power to achieve their goals of resistance.⁹ When protesters position as legitimate, they adopt symbols and practices that resonate with institutional revolutionary and cultural ideologies.¹⁰ Although many of them discuss how activists disguise the dissent nature, they rarely systematically examine how their non-adversarial strategies are mediated in the media ecosystem. If activists create striking episodes to channel public opinion, their images or messages are inherently mediated.

Following this topic of hidden transcript, scholars have developed "boundary pushing" framework: the repressed resist the powerful by constantly pushing an invisible boundary that

⁷ Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale university press.

⁸ O'Brien, Kevin J, and Lianjiang Li. 2006. *Rightful resistance in rural China*. Cambridge University Press, February 13.

⁹ Cai, Yongshun. 2010. *Collective resistance in China: Why popular protests succeed or fail*. Stanford University Press, February 17.

¹⁰ Perry, Elizabeth J, and Mark Selden. 2003. *Chinese society: Change, conflict and resistance*. Routledge.

lays out what the state tolerates. Since the state's repressive behavior is unpredictable, boundary pushing may fail, but "a small success is likely to encourage others to venture further, and the process can escalate rapidly."¹¹

However, movement practitioners and state agencies are not always in opposition to each other. In addition, dynamics within the state, such as regional discrepancies and central-local agencies, make predictions of state behavior difficult. Instead of thinking resisters who constantly push boundaries that the state agencies draw, a framework of "fields of protest" was proposed by Raka Ray to contextualize the unpredictable relationship between the resisters and governments.¹² This framework theorizes that the movements are embedded in socially constructed political fields where forces are configured and transformed. Rather than focusing on the boundaries of the field, they specify the patterns and concentration of the forces, and the culturally acceptable and legitimate forms of resistance. In comparison with the "boundary pushing" thesis, this concept captures more nuanced variations of resistance in different cultural, institutional and social settings.

Examining through the lens of "fields" rather than "boundary," we find many studies on nonprofit organizations and their interactions with other stakeholders such as media and governments become relevant in the context of Chinese politics of resistance. Kang proposes concrete frameworks for understanding how NGOs and local government work together.¹³ A synergy model explains the interactions between NGOs and mainstream media, and how they cooperatively work together to influence social policies in China. For example, Zeng's work carefully lays out the NGOs' media strategies in their interactions with professional media

¹¹ Stern, Rachel E, and Kevin J O'Brien. 2012. Politics at the Boundary Mixed Signals and the Chinese State. *Modern China* 38, no. 2: 174-198.

¹² Ray, Raka. 1999. *Fields of protest: Women's movement in India*. Vol. 8. U of Minnesota Press.

¹³ Kang, Xiaoguang. 2010. *NGO and Government Collaboration Strategies*. Social Science Works Press. (康晓光. 2010. *NGO 与政府合作策略*. 社会科学文献出版社.)

practitioners;¹⁴ however his scope is very limited if we look for NGOs' media strategies in the digital space. The synergy framework is still useful in the sense of public agenda setting process: in the public opinion space the agencies propose their frames and contest with each other. This thesis expands this scope into the digital space and includes the state agencies into the discussion. I adopt a media ecology perspective to study NGOs' appropriation of the media artifacts, and answer why they adopt such media strategies by incorporating the state-society relationship. The role of the state agencies in this paper is no longer an entity the NGOs only confront with, but rather as mentioned before diverse agencies which can be both supportive and adversarial.

Networked Society

Many scholars have identified the new trend brought by the use of ICTs in transnational activism, but for a large country like China, the complicated inner levels of media and contradictory interests of different levels of governments might represent many similar characteristics in the transnational media ecology. Castells rightly framed the role of media in changing contemporary contention, and media making skills and persuasion through information flow are fundamental to community media strategies.¹⁵ The various levels of communication channels together with traditional personal or public contacts have created a network of influence, where frames can be disseminated and information can flow within and across the networks.

Keck and Sikkink discussed Boomerang Effect that blocked issues within a state can be addressed by transnational networks and generate pressure from another state to the first state.¹⁶

Their analysis is useful to map out the complexity of the contention between the different levels

¹⁴ Zeng, Fanxu. 2012. *Power of Expression: When Chinese NGOs Meet Media*. Shanghai Sanlian Press. (曾繁旭. 2012. 表达的力量: 当中国公益组织遇上媒体. 上海三联书店.)

¹⁵ Castells, Manuel. "The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Vol 1. The Rise of the Network Society." *Malden, MA: Blackwell* (2000).

¹⁶ Keck, Margaret E, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, January.

of stakeholders. I think their analysis should not be limited to the transnational networks alone, because it is also applicable to an authoritarian country like China in terms of its multi-leveled media system. That is, we can identify a network consisting of individuals, communities, local government and media, central government and national media, and virtually supported online networks. Local collective actions draw attention from larger media, which create pressure from the above, while the local authority is only accountable to higher authority, the local community might be able to successfully practice the Boomerang Pattern. A well-organized movement might have control over the practices of scaling up or down when drawing media attention. Political scientist Schattschneider theorized that stakeholders in politics play with the scope of conflicts, where like in a game, the way to break the balance is to invite the spectators into the game of contention.¹⁷ This point sheds light on the media strategies adopted by the local social movement actors in their contentions. If understanding politics as strategies of communication within the networks, the goal of grassroots communities does not have to be completely adversarial to the domination of the authority, but rather a more complex process of negotiation.

Framing and Hegemonic Powers in Media

Studies on framing have been growing among social movement theorists since the 1970s (Goffman 1974; Gitlin 1980; Gamson 1992; Snow & Benford 1992; Ferree et al. 2002). The framing literature, alongside resource mobilization theory and political opportunities, became the central perspective in understanding social movements, and frames have been regarded as an independent variable in explaining the outcomes of the actions. The consequences of framing processes have direct influence on other movements as well. Framing theory has already been

¹⁷ Schattschneider, Elmer. E. 1960. *The Semi-Sovereign People*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

used by theorists of Chinese contentious politics to claim that framing as allies with the elites can open up new spaces and opportunities for actors to receive support from within the system.

One of the main critiques to the framing theories is their static tendency. Many studies treat frames as static things rather than a dynamic process in which actors, stakeholders and even social structures constrain, contest and transform.¹⁸ Ferree and other authors theorized their framework as a dynamic space where churches, activists, parties and individuals contest their voices in media.¹⁹ Although they indeed laid out the changes of frames in a period of three decades, their conclusions are mostly based on the accumulation of the static frames in different times. The analysis of the micro-process of the formation, contestation and transformation of frames in an in depth case study might be useful to illustrate the relationships between different frames.

Even though Chinese media is controlled by the state to a certain extent, the media should not be viewed as a monolithic entity. The liberalization potential of the media in China is mostly discussed through the lens of political economy. The central question asked by the field of political economic analysis of media is how political control and economic reform change the media landscape. Two schools of thought have long debated about the relationship between market development and democratization. Chin Chuan Lee embraces the liberal view that market change is the key to the opening of the media,²⁰ while Zhao Yuezhi in another camp argues forcefully that commercialization has transformed the relationship between the media and the state, but instead of leading to democratization it produces both political and market hegemonic

¹⁸ Benford, Robert D. 1997. An Insider's Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective. *Sociological Inquiry* 67, no. 4: 409-430.

¹⁹ Ferree, Myra Marx, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht. 2002. *Shaping abortion discourse: Democracy and the public sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge University Press, September 19.

²⁰ Lee, Chin-Chuan. 2000. Chinese Communication. *Power, money, and media: Communication patterns and bureaucratic control in cultural China*: 3-44.

control. She criticized the liberal's static view on the role of state, and emphasized that the state has created media symbols to further hegemony.²¹ Their discussions are mostly based on their examinations of the transformation of Chinese media; however, their views are illuminating in understanding the theory of hegemony in another political context rather than western societies. Gramsci's version of hegemony focuses on the power of the ruling class in creating and reproducing ideologies through cultural symbols as well as mass media. What Lee and Zhao have identified are the powers both from the authoritarian regime and capitalist economy in domestic media. Because of their times of research, digital media was not as prevalent as today, they did not cover the transnational network and the rising new space in the arena of the Internet. To what extent these powers reproduce in the two spaces and the fact that the grassroots creative use of new technology can counter the processes are the two aspects this thesis can address.

Media and Identity in Movement

Within social movement literature, an alternative perspective on identities shifting away from resource mobilization theory and political process emerged as explanation for the growth and outcomes of social movements.²² Building collective identities has been thought as goals of some social movements and the outcome of social movements are not only judged on what immediate policy and political outcomes. Identities are thought as one of the reasons why people decide to participate in movements, and strengthened identities are actively sought by social movement organizations.

Linking identities to medium, Manuel Castells points out different ethnic and movement identities and their associated communication processes across long historical times. Language

²¹ Zhao, Yuezhi. 1998. *Media, market, and democracy in China: Between the party line and the bottom line*. University of Illinois Press.

²² Polletta, Francesca, and James M Jasper. 2001. Collective identity and social movements. *Annual review of Sociology*: 283-305.

has been in the center of forming collective identities in cultures and other movements that can effectively mobilize constituencies through various types of media channels.²³ Media usage is resonated Tilly's term repertoire of contention.²⁴ Although they are not solely referred as communicative tactics, many choices social movements actors make in terms of how they use media fall into different types of repertoire. This thesis focuses on cultural repertoire when examining what media forms resisters in Chinese are appropriating and what culturally symbolic values are embedded in these media forms.

Anderson's notion of "imagined community" is resonating in the aspect that he particularly identifies the materiality and its relationship with nationality. It is relevant to our study on many media artifacts because this perspective helps us see how the properties of media play a role in defining its practices which construct culture and politics. Although his project primarily responds with claims such as "the end of the era of nationalism," he has also appropriated a wide range of artifacts to redefine the concept of nationalism as imagined community. He argues, "the artifacts once created, they became 'modular,' capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations."²⁵ Some of the artifacts he uses as examples include the Unknown Soldiers Tomb and newspapers that create universality. What complicates the discussion of adopting this concept to explain the implications of the media artifacts and identities is histories. The cultural roots of the artifacts he identified such as the rise of capitalism and the decay of dynastic realm have evolved in a long period.

²³ Castells, Manuel. 2003. *The power of identity: The information Age: Economy, society and culture*, Volume II (The information age).

²⁴ Mark Traugott. 1995. *Repertoires & Cycles of Collective Action*. Duke University Press.

²⁵ Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso Books, November 17.

Another challenge to understand media artifacts as a form of national imaginings is multicultural reality especially in the age of new communication and technologies. Some associated cultural meanings might be totalizing the complexities of the use of media in different regions of a country. In addition, the diverse practices of writing and reading big character posters from people in different socio-economic backgrounds can be the problematic factor in explaining a universal property of the imagined communities. The sociable media artifacts on the one hand make the messages of communal interests more spreadable than before, but on the other, the lack of standardized appropriation of the digital forms that are analogous to the big character posters has created individual cliques, each of which is not completely comparable.

From Structuralism to Multi-dynamics

This study situates in the paradigm shift from structuralist tradition to relational dynamics in social movement studies. Traditional theories such as political process theory explain social movements as the outcome of political opportunities, the mobilization of resources, and strategic framing. But Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein argue that these theories exaggerate the role of the state and underestimate other institutional factors (2008). Social movement theorists, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly write: “We come from a structuralist tradition. But in the course of our work on a wide variety of contentious politics in Europe and North America, we discovered the necessity of taking strategic interactions, consciousness and historically accumulated culture into account.”(2001) For a large country like China, Guobin Yang drew a great deal from this recent development and proposed a multi-interactionist perspective to capture the complexity of contentions in the contemporary Chinese online world (2009). He calls for the study on the dynamic interactions between political, social, cultural, economic actors at structural, institutional and individual levels.

In this literature review chapter, we examined major theoretical approaches that are relevant to our research inquiries and each of them can enrich the discussion in our topic in different aspects. The theories on hidden transcript and rightful resistance in China give us a larger picture of where our research question resides and laid the foundation of our non-adversarial media strategy thesis. We also situate within the paradigm shift in social movement studies that we should focus on the dynamic change of the movement course instead of framing movements follow a strict structure. In our following case studies, we incorporate this perspective by examining the frames of movement change over time and the outcomes. Fields of power framework has the merits of looking at movements in context and avoids oversimplifying actual movements on the ground. Media opportunity structure and media practices theories lead us to seeing the cases through the lens of media. It is necessary to include this perspective because both old and newer forms of media artifacts are deeply associated with movement practices and often times they define the growth and outcome of the movement. In the following case study sections, even though I mainly use media practices and the media opportunity structure as analytical lenses, our discussions also integrate the aforementioned perspectives in the hidden transcript topic.

Chapter 3 Case Study: Wukan Protest

The village of Wukan in Guangdong Province was known to the world at the end of 2011 because of their radical protest. Local villagers were angry at the deal made by the village communist committee members with real estate developers. Their lands were taken with insufficient compensation and their representative who brought their petition was tortured to death in the police station when he appealed to the city government. It triggered huge anger among villagers, so they expelled the village leaders and started self-governance.²⁶

Big Character Posters as Media Practice

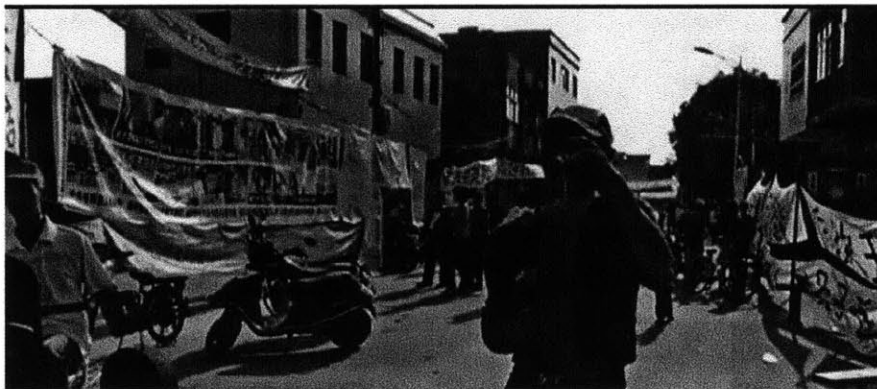


Figure 1 Wukan protesters hung banners and posters on streets

²⁶ The narrative of Wukan Protest is summarized based on several news articles in either English or Chinese, including, Michael Wines, "Wukan Protesters Seek Return of Xue Jinbo's Body," *New York Times*, December 18, 2011, accessed April 30, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/world/asia/wukan-protesters-seek-return-of-xue-jinbos-body.html>; Zhang Jieping and Lu Wen, "Wukan Uprising," *Isunaffairs*, February 12, 2011, accessed April 30, 2013, <http://www.isunaffairs.com/?p=1626>; Wu Liwei, "Wukan Land Dispute and Families Conflict," *Sanlian Life Weekly*, December 20, 2011, accessed April 30, 2013, <http://www.lifeweek.com.cn/2011/1220/36080.shtml>; Zhu Wenqiang, "Wukan Diary," *Economic Observation Net*, December 23, 2011, accessed April 30, 2013, <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2011/1223/218689.shtml>.

As can be seen from Figure 1, which was footage from a protester self-produced documentary,²⁷ protesters still hanged big character posters along the streets in their village. The practice of reading and discussing in public space has not changed much since the media practice was first widely adopted. Some of the posters were still handwritten with brush pen, but some were printed with photos that listed the evidence of their appeals.

Big character posters were widely used as a form of political expression in China during the Rectification Movement and the Cultural Revolution. After the 1989 Tiananmen Movement, the communist leaders outlawed the use of big character posters because of the messages critical of the party. However, the political meaning has been embedded in this form and the present protesters have exploited this media to mobilize constituents and advocate their causes. This section examines various media forms associated with the big character posters, and then looks at the social practices and political history surrounding them. I will explore the linkages between the old media to new technologies in the present resistance tactics.

The primary sources of this section are reprinted big character posters on newspapers, books and hand-written papers from Harvard Yenching Library. The newspapers and books were well preserved, and the hand-written papers that transcribed the content on the posters were valuable because of limited copies. For economical reasons, the thin papers, which look half transparent, were widely used in the 1960s and the characters in blue ink on these materials preserved today became less distinguishable. They were produced in the 1950s to 1960s, so when we examine them we do not only try to understand the content on the posters, but also intend to understand the forms that interact and remediate the historical and social processes of the big character posters. The secondary sources include a 2010 published book which is a

²⁷ "Love Wukan," video on Youtube, accessed April 30, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flIsbcFjX7w>.

collection of big character posters at a Tea Factory in 1957,²⁸ and another book published in 2001 that describes details of ordinary people's use of big character posters in participating in the two political movements.²⁹ Other references of the present digital forms that are analogous to big character posters include clipped webpages of blogs, microblogs, and online videos in this section.

Public Writing and Reading

It is difficult to define big character posters, as there are so many types of them and every form to some extent addresses different properties of the media. The media forms affiliated with big character posters include newspapers, chalk written characters on the wall, communist artistic drawings, books, posters broadcast through radio, and the posters in political parades and gatherings. For example, Mao's big character poster was originally handwritten on the margins of the newspaper of People's Daily on June 1st 1966, but the next day, this poster was printed in People's Daily front page with the title of "Bombard the Headquarter," and broadcast through Central People's Radio, which is often thought as the mark of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Not only the prominent figures' posters were printed, but also ordinary people's posters could be reprinted on local newspapers and broadcast in local radios. They could also send the manuscripts as letters to magazines, which reproduced the content on the big character posters.

Even though this wide range of practices existed, I argue that the central feature of the big character posters is the practice of public writing and reading across different historical

²⁸ Huadong Normal University Contemporary Chinese History Research Center, *Tea Factory 1957 Rectification Big Character Poster*. Shanghai: Dongfang Press, 2011. 华东师范大学当代中国史研究中心, 茶厂 1957 年整风大字报, 上海东方出版社, 2011.

²⁹ Luo, Hanping. 2001. *Life on the Wall: Ups and Downs of Big Character Posters*. Fujian People Press. 罗汉平. 2001. *墙上春秋: 大字报的兴衰*. 福建人民出版社.

periods. The definition of big character posters in Xinhua Dictionary is "words of opinion expression, which are often written in big characters and posted. It was thought as a form of 'socialism of wide democracy' with popularity during the Cultural Revolution', but later it was outlawed." It addresses its particular association with the Cultural Revolution, but it omits the aspects of public writing and reading I am focusing on in this section. I searched the pinyin of the big character posters, Dazibao, in Oxford English Dictionary and found this definition, "In the People's Republic of China, a wall poster written in large characters that expresses a (political) opinion or other message." It specifically defines it was a wall poster, and the "wall" where the poster was contained has explicitly made this medium public.

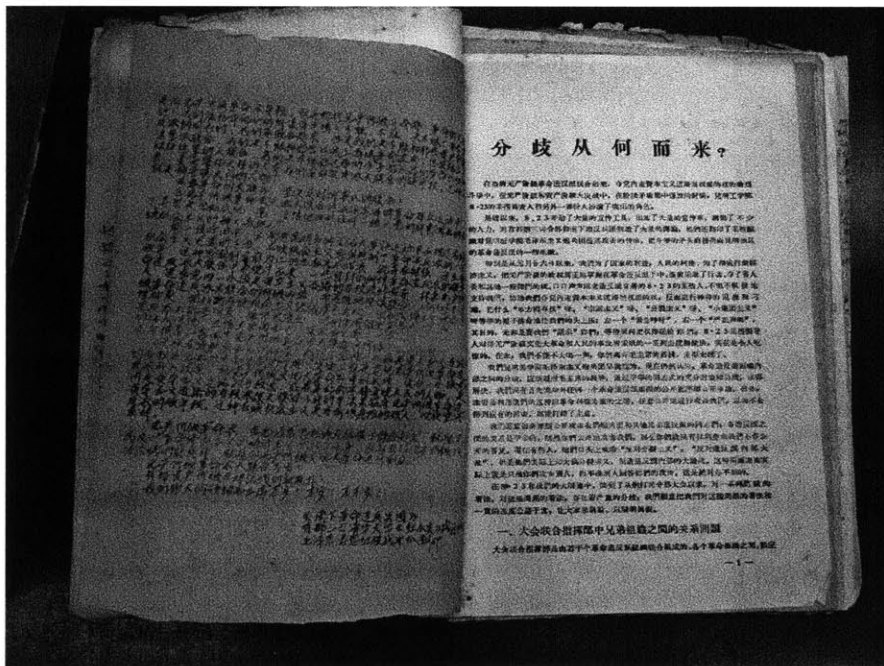


Figure 2 Transcription of a big character poster

The common practices were that people gathered around in front of the walls that were full of the posters, and some copied the content on the posters onto their own notebooks. The transcribed posters were further handwritten copied or reprinted, so that they could be distributed to a wider audience. Figure 2 shows a transcribed poster that was originally written by a group called "Capital City Third Division Tsinghua University 'Little Red Guards' Fight Group," who went to Kunming, a city in the southern China, to spread their words. The picture shows a local group in Kunming who copied the poster, and bound them with other transcribed posters.

In another case, as described in the book *Life on the Wall*, on the wall of Liedong street in Sanming city in Fujian Province, Zhao Dazhong from a local agricultural machine company had a poster criticizing "the Gang of Four" in 1957. The next day a poster with the pen name of Hong Feng responded back about Zhao's criticism. Zhao's wife immediately posted another one debating with Hong's words.³⁰ The discussion and debates were not possible if the posters were not in a public space and the wall in the local communities provided such public channels.

The authors of the big character posters anticipated an audience who actively engaged with the text and each other in public space, and this aspect defined their writing too. Many of the posters were anonymous, and the identities of the authors can only be guessed by limited information, such as "a revolutionary worker" as the signed name. On the one hand, it encouraged criticism and reflections, but on the other, there was much condemnation based on no fact. However, in local context, even though the authors did not leave their names on posters, readers still knew them, because within a community where members were closely related, enmity between people was easy to identify. Another reason for anonymity was that the authors might want to justify their criticism by constructing a shared identity of the public. For example,

³⁰ Luo, Hanping. 2001. *Life on the Wall: Ups and Downs of Big Character Posters*. Fujian People Press, 247. 罗汉平. 2001. *墙上春秋: 大字报的兴衰*. 福建人民出版社, 247.

the use of collective identity, "Fight Group" or "Little Red Guards," was powerful in the inclusion of the readers, and many identified as one of their members.

Remediated Posters in Political Resistance: from pro-Maoist to Anti-government

What complicates the widely practiced criticism around big character posters is the political movement context. Big character posters were most popular during the Rectification Movement and the early years of the Cultural Revolution. They were often stern denunciations of specific individuals perceived as acting improperly. Also targeted were undesirable political phenomena such as "bureaucratism" among cadres or party leaders, including Deng Xiaoping, who were accused of "taking the capitalist road."³¹ The content of big character posters was mostly criticism to others, but some can be "appraisal, self-criticism, reasonable suggestions, interrogation, and response."³² Criticism on big character posters probably was not the same as rational deliberation or debates, but rather they were highly ideological and contextualized in the political movements.

These movements were both anti-rightists, as Mao believed that many members of the communist party had become corrupted since they were in power after 1949. He initiated such movements to encourage ordinary people to criticize public officials; however, the big character posters were mostly the leftists' weapons in the movements, and the discourses had to be pro-Mao's ideology. For many posters I examined, they often put a sentence of Mao's words in front of the text. This was also why such a public debating tool was appropriated into irrational

³¹ Esarey, Ashley, and Xiao Qiang. 2008. Political expression in the Chinese blogosphere: Below the radar. *Asian Survey* 48, no. 5: 752-772.

³² Luo, Hanping. 2001. *Life on the Wall: Ups and Downs of Big Character Posters*. Fujian People Press, 91. 罗汉平. 2001. *墙上春秋: 大字报的兴衰*. 福建人民出版社, 91.

criticism based on no facts as long as the content on the posters was politically correct in the leftist movements.

Closely looking at the change of the headlines containing the word "big character posters," we can also see the transition of China from Mao's revolutionary society to the China afterwards.³³ For example, one sample headlines in the People's Daily in the beginning period of the movement read "Beijing uses big character posters to promote healthcare" in 1958,³⁴ and the last time the word appeared on the newspaper was in 1992, with the title of "Zhou Fulin was detained because of writing insulting big character posters."³⁵ Indeed, this media form was primarily associated with the revolution period, and as the party shifted its political focus, it has disappeared from the official discourses. By looking at the headlines we might get a sense of the media's rise and fall as the political landscapes have changed as well as political attitude toward this type of media.

Although the big character posters were most popular during the leftists revolutionary movement, we cannot simplify this medium as communist propaganda and mass mobilization tool. Examining the People's Daily reports, we can see that the reason why the party outlawed the use of big character posters in November 1979 was the appearance of subversive expressions to the communist regime. As the report said, "some use democracy as excuses. If we give those people 'democracy', the democracy of our nation will be harmed."³⁶ Another memorable political use of big character posters was by Wei Jingsheng, who wrote a poster entitled "The

³³ Newspaper articles were retrieved from People's Daily database.
<http://www.oriprobe.com/peoplesdaily.html>, accessed April 30, 2013.

³⁴ Xinhua News Agency, "Beijing uses big character poster to promote healthcare," *People's Daily*, February 22, 1958.

³⁵ Reporting from Changsha, "Zhou Fulin was detained because of writing insulting big character posters," *People's Daily*, March 13, 1992.

³⁶ Xinhua News Agency, "People's Standing Committee 12th Meeting Discussing Socialist Law," *People's Daily*, November 28, 1979, accessed April 30, 2013.
<http://58.68.145.22/print?record=333&channelid=101&back=-1&searchword=%D5%FD%CE%C4%3D%28%B4%F3%D7%D6%B1%A8%29>.

Fifth Modernation” on Xidan Democracy Wall, where he criticized Mao’s domination and expectation of democracy of China. As political landscape shifted from Maoist revolutionary China to development focused China at the end of 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, this medium as expression tool afforded the change of the political discourse from pro-government to anti-government.

In line with such change, one of the examples that marked the height of the anti-government type of use was the 1989 Tiananmen Movement. The students set up numerous large posters, banners and flags. Many of them were handwritten brushed characters on a large white or red sheet (often they wrote on their bedding sheets from their dorms). Some were strong and catchy phrases, while some were lengthy proposal letters making specific political requests to the regime. When we think of the pro-Mao values with the posters in the 1960s and anti-government discourses on the posters in the 1980s together, the technology itself might not be linearly understood as liberal or democratic, but rather the political context where the technology situate defines the appropriation of it and human intervention with it.

Although the big character posters were outlawed by the communist party in 1992, political meaning has been embedded in this form, and present protesters have exploited this media to advocate their causes. The use of them in the 1989 Movement shows that this widely practiced media cannot be easily erased from society or from memory. The content of this media has been transformed from pro-Mao to pro-democracy. These roots of the rebellious nature as appropriated by these social movement actors have also provided a repertoire of resistance tactics for current political challengers.

Continuities in Appropriation of Big Character Posters

In the beginning of this chapter, we saw that present Wukan protesters hung big character posters to express their grievances, which can be seen as continuous with political appropriation of big character posters in the 1960s and 1989. However, what made their tactics different was that various technologies were adopted by the activists in Wukan protest in order to remediate messages in the form of big character posters.

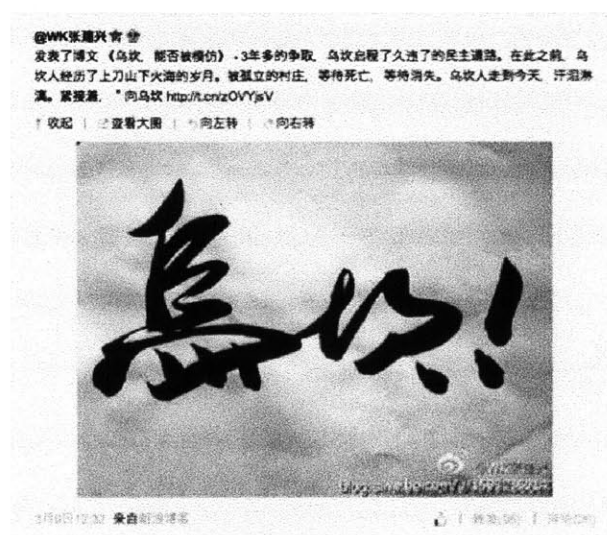


Figure 3 A Weibo post with an image of handwritten characters attached

For example, in figure 3, this was a microblog post by one of the young digitally literate protesters with a picture of "Wukan" characters written in brush pen. The typed post said "Three years of resistance brought Wukan to a road of democracy. Before that Wukan villagers have experienced life of misery. An isolated village was waiting for death, but our sweat and tears lead us today."³⁷ The power of the medium was exemplified when the message was not only the typed words, and the message embedded in the form of the artifact has been expressed as the

³⁷ Zhang, Jianxing. Post on Weibo, <http://www.weibo.com/1593236014/y9ae4naSE>, accessed on April 30, 2013.

poster was remediated by the new communication technologies. The message in the old media form reached a wider audience in the digital space because the hyper-localities enabled by the new technologies gathered constituents nation wide. Watching the documentaries (some of which were made by professionals but some of which were recorded by protesters themselves) we can identify a wide range of media practices, such as mobile phones to record visual and audio materials, and to send microblog posts. They also turned an Internet cafe into a temporary newsroom to integratively curate their messages to the outside world. Note that these media forms are not separated channels, but rather the messages were referenced to each other across these objects.

Opera Stages for Mobilization in Rural China

During popular protests, squares become the space where people can gather and express their appeals collectively, for example, Tahrir Square in Cairo during the Arab Spring, or the Red Square in Moscow during the fall of the Soviet Union. For Chinese protests, Tiananmen Square used to be the center of many large-scale movements; the most recent one was the 1989 Student Movement. However, in rural China, not every village has a square and many rural protests have their assembly in another space -- the opera stage. Stages, like squares, offer spaces for protesters to get together, and this medium has embodied more complex cultural materials. This section will describe how the stages provide cultural contentious repertoire for rural resistance in China. First, the obvious properties of the stages will be laid out and then how the stage was used in history will be discussed. Last we will see the role of the stages as sites for the repertoire of cultural contention in the mobilization of Wukan villagers.

Media Practices Surrounding the Stages

The most obvious property of the stage in a village is to offer a space that can host hundreds or even thousands of people. The stage is often situated in the center area of the village, and when there are operas showing, local villagers will come together to this place and watch. The stage is not inside a theatre, but rather it is self-contained, located in the open space. In front of the stage it is actually like a square, and there are no seats for the audience. They bring their own seats, which are quite low and short, therefore convenient to carry around. The operas used to be the major form of entertainment for rural Chinese people, so it is no doubt that the space will be crowded with local villagers. Sometimes young people climb up the trees beside the stage, and sit on the branches to watch if they cannot find a better place. In comparison with other architectures of local residency surrounding it, it is not only clearly higher but also serves as the symbol of the village.

The content of the operas is often drawn from the traditional Chinese cultural repertoire and many of them are offered as ritual activities for gods and spirits. Shexi, a type of opera that is quite popular among people in Shaoxing, an eastern city, refers to all the religious, ritual and folk performances taking place in She, a temple housing the village deity. When the dates of the celebration of the gods come, there are many kinds of activities, and the whole village celebrates like festivals. Offering operas are only part of the celebration, and local villagers organize a market called Huishi, where every household brings out their own goods and trade with each other. Operas are the most popular activity during the celebration: every household donates some money to ask opera groups to perform. The local villagers also invite their relatives to come and prepare the best food for them to watch the operas. In traditional Chinese society, Shexi was not offered once or twice a year, but rather it was shown all year around from February to May of the

Chinese calendar. The operas with the themes of good wishes, family safety, the harvest year and driving away plague were frequently shown.³⁸

After the heyday of traditional operas, the role of the stage has also changed as history proceeds. Traditional art, like operas, was challenged during the Cultural Revolution period because according to the Mao's ideology, traditional art is old and should be eliminated. Liang Dongxing, an artist specialized in puppetry performance, recalled his experiences during the Cultural Revolution: he said his puppets, cases, stages, and scripts were all destroyed; they were hundreds of years old.³⁹ During the Cultural Revolution, the hidden symbolic meanings of the art forms were exemplified through their contrast against Mao's communist ideology. The imagined enemy of the Mao's ideology in art forms included many of the historically rooted media that embody traditional Chinese culture. Only by eliminating these art forms can revolutionary ideology become the dominant values that penetrate all aspects of people's lives.

However, in fact the hundreds of years old art forms have survived in today's world as they continuously resonate with Chinese culture. Liang said, "After 1976 when the Cultural Revolution was over, some people secretly began to invite me over to perform, so I only went to several small villages and sang in low voices."⁴⁰ In the 1990s, he was often invited to perform during the festivals, funerals and weddings in villages. However, as entertainment from TV and the Internet becomes prevalent in rural China, a smaller audience is interested in traditional art, but he said, "they invited us not for people, but actually we perform for gods."⁴¹ As can be seen from Liang's case, although history has made this type of art experience ups and downs, the very spirit of ritual tradition has always been in the art form. The destiny of the stage, as the platform

³⁸ Xie Yongtao and Gao Jun. 2003, *Shaoxing Traditional Opera Stages*. Shanghai Social Science Academy Press.

³⁹ "Three Chi Opera Stage, Life of Ups and Downs," Southern Countryside Newspaper, March 22, 2012.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

where the performances take place, should not just be understood as an object, but rather should be associated with the deeply rooted cultural symbols and ritual traditions.

Symbolic Power of the Stages in Social Mobilization

The Wukan Protest attracted attention from large news agencies because during its first phase, they mobilized the local villagers of all ages, and their collective actions of expelling the village officials seemed to follow people's will. Perhaps it is not objective to say the old opera stage of Wukan was more important than other forms of media in mobilization, but it is worth noting that many of their assemblies took place in this space and the communal experience of watching traditional operas contributed to the mobilization process.

The stage in Wukan originally was built to worship Mazu, an indigenous goddess of the sea who protects fishermen and sailors. Wukan is the coastal area in the southern part of China and many local villagers still make a living by fishing. Although the role of the goddess in modern society is not as strong as in the traditional society, local families still often go to worship the goddess and make good wishes.

The mobilization process in the Wukan Protest was quite similar to the opera performances, and I think the cultural practices surrounding the stage actually propelled the collective actions. Usually the date of opera performances in rural China is during festivals rather than randomly selected. Thus it creates an anticipation of the audience to gather around the stage for operas. The climax of the Wukan Protest was December 21, 2011, three days after the death of the activist. The number three in Chinese culture indicates a limit of tolerance, and the previous two smaller protests happened on September 21 and November 21. Around this date the grievances kept accumulating and the anticipation of action was growing. In traditional Chinese rural society, when the performers asked villagers to come out, they beat drums and struck gongs,

and villagers gathered in front of the stage. This tactic was used in Wukan Protest. Even though modern technology of cell phone and Internet can inform people with information about the protest, the old tactic is still practiced in rural settings.



Figure 4. The candidates gave speeches on Wukan Opera Stage. (Central European News)

The picture above shows candidates giving their campaign speeches during the election of the new village leaders. The stage looks new though it has a history of around 200 years, and in fact it was frequently renovated. There are three levels of roof decorated with the sculptures of holy creatures. Although this picture does not clearly show the color of the top of the roof, it is actually yellow or gold. On each side, there are three pillars: one is intricately engraved, and the other two mainly support the whole structure. The front rafters were painted in colors, and usually they demonstrate historical stories or folktales. On the banner it says "great time, clear mirror," (盛世明鏡) which is a metaphor of honest politics. The design and the decoration of the stage have created a grand image. When people sit in front of the architecture, they will feel in awe of the things happening there. This type of magnificent public space, which has a rich

history of communal memories, is best for Wukan villagers to gather around and make their claims collectively.

The Wukan protest is not the only collective action to use the stage in the village to mobilize people, but during the aforementioned movement in the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards, Mao's faithful supporters, built up their own stages in villages to replace the originals. Xihan Village in northwestern part of China has a stage with a length of 15.7 meters and width of 12.4 meters. Its most interesting feature is that it has many Cultural Revolution characteristics such as Mao's words on the architectural spine, and instead of the traditional stage, whose engraved characters show the old folklores, the engraved characters of this stage is Mao's slogan -- replace the old with the new.⁴² Even though Mao intended to destroy the old cultural form, in fact it is impossible because the media of the stage has been so integrated into the lives of rural Chinese people. Interestingly, the movement of Cultural Revolution itself was borrowing the power of the form to achieve its own goals in the local villages.

Even though nowadays not as many performances are offered on the traditional opera stages as in the old times, the stages in the villages have been embedded with rich history and culture that have sustained everyday life in rural society. Looking at the obvious properties of the stages, the size of the stage and the decorations and paintings on the pillars and rafters, we can imagine the central role of the stage in the public life of local rural communities. The cultural practices surrounding the stages are particularly rich: in traditional societies, the performances on the stages were linked with rituals and celebrations; during the Cultural Revolution, the performances and decorations of the stages were appropriated into Maoist ideological forms.

⁴² Yang, Ruiliang. "A Opera Stage in Cultural Revolution was Found in Qi County, Shanxi Province," October 20, 2009. Third National Cultural Relics Survey Website, <http://pucha.sach.gov.cn/tabid/139/InfoID/12724/Default.aspx>, accessed April 30, 2013.

This section above applies media practices as analytical lens to see how the culture surrounding the old opera stage of Wukan provides protesters with the repertoire to mobilize and organize. In comparison with other approaches in social movement studies, the literature on the power of symbolic objects is not as prolific, and this section also attempts to comment on this gap.

Media Opportunity Structure at Wukan

The village of Wukan attracted many reporters at the end of 2011 because of their radical protest. This revolt was covered by international news agencies, and the Chinese major media were censored in the beginning. Then, on Weibo, a widely used micro-blogging platform, more messages about Wukan began circulating before being deleted by the censorship machine. Then a short piece of news on this incident appeared in Southern Metropolitan Newspaper, a city newspaper but nationally recognized, escalated the attention to a wide public.⁴³ Though not being found in major news portal websites, newspapers, and televisions, pictures from the village kept circulating among netizens. The turning point of the story happened when provincial leaders had a meeting with elected representatives from the villagers. After they reached an agreement to appropriate lands properly and compensate sufficiently, villagers halted the protest very quickly.

Initial Stage: From "Unrest" to "Investigative" Frame

The main character of the initial stage of the Wukan protest was that both parties, the activists and the local authority, maintained a balanced relationship because the authority saved

⁴³ Yue, Xuan, "Lufeng Wukan Incident, Five Villagers Arrested," *Southern Metropolitan Newspaper*, December 11, 2011, http://qcontent.oeeee.com/4/8c/48cedfcf2b8c1e69/Blog/e22/57869a.html?bsh_bid=50559374, accessed April 30, 2013.

"faces" and the activists achieved the goal of conversation and negotiation with the city government.

The first round of protest in Wukan was framed as "unrest" by the city government, but the representatives of the villagers adopted a cooperative frame as they stated, "we will ensure the stability of Wukan." The day right after the protest that happened on September 21, 2011, a news article appeared on Shanwei Party and Government Information Net,⁴⁴ which is accountable to the city government of Shanwei where Wukan Village belongs, saying "a small number of villagers purposely cause disturbances and damages to properties." Also in this publicly issued article, this protest was considered an "abnormal petition," "causing injuries to several policemen," "villagers spreading rumors." Then on September 24, another article issued by the city government saying, "Working group from Shanwei Government will investigate, and representatives of villagers will ensure the stability of Wukan."⁴⁵ In fact, after the unrest on September 21, the police arrested four villagers; if the activists adopted adversarial strategies, they could have made use of the anger aroused by the arrest to make further demand. However, their response was to accept the frame by the city government and maintain the opportunity for negotiation.

This "unrest" frame developed by the authority shows how highly repressive regimes see social disturbance as abnormalities of society, but the "investigative" actions from the government was another strategy used to show the resilience of the authoritarian regime. From the perspective of outcome of actions, this investigative frame was an achievement of these actors. In other words, the state says "sure, we'll look into it."

⁴⁴ Lufeng Propaganda Office, "Few villagers cause riots and purposely destroy properties in Wukan, Donghai County, Lufeng City," September 22, 2011, <http://www.shanwei.gov.cn/160506.html>. Accessed on November 23, 2012.

⁴⁵ Southern Daily, "Lufeng September 21 Event has put to an end," September 24, 2011. Available at <http://www.shanwei.gov.cn/160623.html>. Accessed on November 23, 2012.

Except for the media directly or indirectly controlled by the city government, the frames in the coverage of Hong Kong media and online media mostly portrayed the adversarial contentions between the activists and the authority. The Sina Weibo search results showed 11,558 posts containing the word Wukan from September 20 to 25, 2011. Many of the posts being widely retweeted were censored, but from the comments such as "Government is hiding the truth" and "China is in a turning point" netizens tended to interpret Wukan with a larger frame that was closely linked to social issues of corruption, political reform, and a free press. Stories from media that were not directly controlled by the authority adopted a more aggressive frame. The footage from TVB, a television network in Hong Kong, showing injured villagers lying in hospital, police cars severely damaged, and appearance of special force police. This footage was collected by netizens and posted on several forums such as Shanwei Home Net, a local forum, and Net Ease, a national online forum.⁴⁶ These stories portrayed a more adversarial side of the incident, and the attention gained in this process in fact laid the foundation for the second stage of protest.

Contestation and Transformation: Non-adversarial Tactics

The second stage was characterized by the activists' reaction against the frames developed by the international media as well as the local authority. After the protest in September, the promises from the local authority were not realized, and villagers started another round of protest on November 21. This time the protest was reported by Caixin, a national magazine that is known for its coverage of sensitive events, and it was escalated to a higher

⁴⁶ Available at <http://www.swjyw.com/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=4118>. Accessed on May 28, 2012.

level.⁴⁷ On December 21, it was reported on Dayang Net, Guangdong Provincial portal site, that Shanwei government framed the incident as "International force instigated this incident, which changed the inherent nature of the protest."⁴⁸ Similar to the logic of the response in the initial stage, local government chose this frame mainly because it easily directed attention to a political issue, whether the protest was "within the domestic system." The boundary determines if the action was politically legitimate. Often "international instigation" falls out of the boundary, but a frame of "interest conflicts within the village" is acceptable for this authoritarian regime. For the social movement activists, the non-adversarial strategy involves creating frames within the boundary.

⁴⁷ Wang Qingfeng, "Protest in Lufeng Guangdong," November 21, 2011, Caixin Website, <http://china.caixin.com/2011-11-21/100329824.html>, accessed April 30, 2013.

⁴⁸ Qiu Aibang, "Guangdong Shanwei reports Lufeng Collective Actions: Foreign Forces Involved," Dayang Net, December 9, 2011. http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail_2011_12/09/11224826_0.shtml. Accessed November 23, 2012.



The content on the posters is transcribed as follows:

To the media friends

Wukan Village is happy to see so many members of the media to our village events, please also positive reports, to avoid the “uprising”, “uprising” and other words, we are not revolt, we support the Communist Party, our love of country. Thank you for your attention!

Wukan

Figure 5. Wukan villagers' poster to international journalists⁴⁹

International reporters flooded into Wukan during this round of protest. A protest representative was found dead in the police office, which aroused extreme anger of the village. They expelled the village party leaders and set up barricades to prevent police from getting in. As mentioned above, in the process of contestation, the resisters were aware of the role of international media. On the one hand, they wanted to expand the influence brought by international attention, but on the other hand they needed to carefully craft their frames which should not fall outside the political boundary. According to the footage in *Wukan Three Days*, a documentary produced by an activist who stayed in Wukan from December 19 to 21, 2011,⁵⁰ the local resisters did not decline interview requests from them, and they offered them free

⁴⁹ The picture is a screenshot from an anonymous user's Weibo photo album.

⁵⁰ Ai Xiaoming, "Wukan Three Days," <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDD64A25754AE9929>, accessed April 30, 2013.

accommodations and food. At the same time, they had posters for international journalists encouraging them not to frame them as "uprising" as shown in figure 5. It is hard to measure to what extent this tactic influenced international media reporting, but what matters here is that protesters established their own position, "We love communist party" to the government.⁵¹ It opens up discussions on the complex relationships between the local protesters and international media agencies: They have to carefully position themselves among different frames while maintaining visibility in international media coverage.

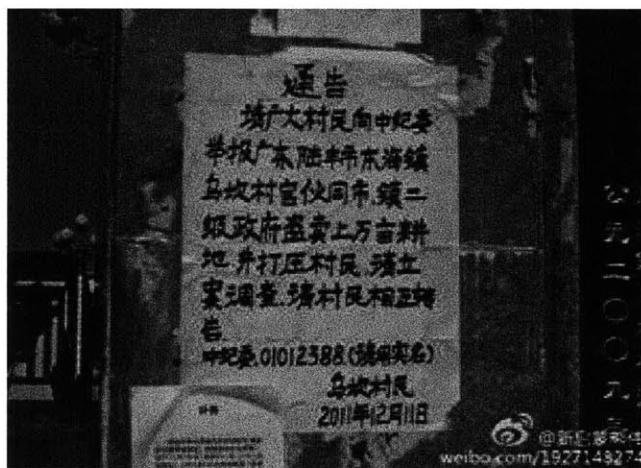


Figure 6. The villager held two cameras on the right side

Various types of technologies were adopted by the activists in Wukan protest. A QQ group (a widely used group instant messaging system hosted by Tencent in China) called "Wukan Hot Blood Youth Group" initially mobilized many local young villagers to participate in the first petition to the provincial government in 2009. In the figure 6, the man holding two non-

⁵¹ Image from Ye Zhusheng's Weibo account.
http://photo.weibo.com/1781461195/album/detail/photo_id/3393850552913582#3393783899834325.
Accessed December 23, 2011.

professional cameras on the right side was a member of the group. Apart from the QQ group, they also produced their own narrative of the protest. Together with other young villagers in Wukan, they recorded events such as removing a tree as barricades after the protesters reached an agreement with the provincial government. This picture shows Xue Jianwan, the daughter of the dead villager, participated in voting for the open election of new village leaders. Other types of media they appropriated to advocate for their cause include Weibo post, blogs, mobile phones and so on. These media forms are not separated channels, but rather they afford messages that are referenced to each other across these objects. For example, their self-produced documentary was later posted to Weibo and other social media sites to amplify their messages.



Translation: "A Notice

Please report to Central Discipline Committee: Guangdong Lufeng City Donghai County Wukan Village officials with county and city governments stole and sold tens of thousands farm land and suppressed villagers. We are calling for the investigation. Please spread the word among villagers. Central Discipline Committee, 01012388

(please use real name) Wukan villagers December 11, 2011."

Figure 7. The black white poster was transformed into Weibo post

The pervasiveness of the new technologies in this protest does not mean the old media forms are discarded, but in fact the deeply culturally embedded values associated with them have been transformed into the new technology. As can be seen from figure 7, this was a hand written black and white poster calling for villagers to report to Discipline Committee of Central China Communist Party in their real name. In contrast with printed posters, this representation might be more powerful in expressing grievances and criticism because it did not only give the human agency back to the audiences, but also this form resembled the big character posters which were widely used during the Cultural Revolution as tactics of rebellion. This was why the activist captured this media form by his mobile phone and shared the message to his Weibo followers. The message in the old media form reached a wider audience in the Internet space, and this remediation process empowered the old media form with new communication effect.

Channeling the Power of the Official Ideology

When Wukan got the spotlight from the whole nation and even international coverage, the key stakeholders were no longer the city government and the activists, because the public expected response from a higher level of government. The protesters held the banner calling for the central government to step in and used phrases such as "save us," which attributed the wrongness to the local government instead of the higher authority. On December 20, vice party secretary of Guangdong, Zhu Mingguo, in a news conference, framed this protest of land disputes as "an inevitable result of the policy that overemphasizes on economic development and ignores the societal development." He also openly criticized the frame imposed by the city government to the action: the original frame "social disturbances causing damages of public properties" was changed to "local government has made mistakes and villagers' irrational

behaviors are understandable."⁵² This transformation of the frames by the government was a significant achievement for the social movement actors, because it legitimized their subversive actions of starting self-governance and requesting open elections of new village leaders.

Both the higher level of the government and the resisters secured their own interests by carefully framing this incident. For provincial leaders this incident put in media spotlight was no longer possible to be completely repressed, and the public expectation and awareness put pressure onto the government; a frame that met public opinion was the best choice. For social movement actors, their frames in line with the party discursively resonated with the official ideology and thus avoided falling outside the political boundary. Moreover, as indicated by their practices, firm positioning in line with the ideology required some tactics, such as how to work with international journalists. In sum, looking at the frames by different stakeholders in the process of contestation, we can see that activists' non-adversarial strategies successfully contributed to the transformation of the frames from the authority. Achieving the subversive effects does not have to be oppositional to the state. In fact, getting to know the media frames, and making use of them, can avoid being marginalized outside of the political boundary and maintain the chances of negotiation and existence.

Radicalization Process in Adversarial Activism

The media reporting of grievances raises the sympathies of the audience. In the case of authoritarian China, the international media attention might assist protesters by raising the awareness of rights groups in democratic countries, who then put diplomatic pressure on the Chinese government to meet the expectations of democratic values. This process is well modeled

⁵² Lin Jie, "Zhu Mingguo: Appeals made by Wukan is reasonable," *China Youth Daily*, December 22, 2011. Available at <http://news.sohu.com/20111222/n329840779.shtml>. Accessed on November 23, 2012.

by Keck and Sikkink's boomerang pattern, in which international NGOs seek opportunities from the state to pressure another state. Thus it forms a transnational network in which protesters, international media, rights groups, and democratic regimes are linked to fulfill their own interests.

We can see the existence of the transnational network in the Wukan case as the international journalists flooded in during the third round of mass protest; however, what makes them different from a typical complete transnational network is that they clearly are aware of the dangers of appealing to democratic values, and thus they took advantage of the openings brought by the international media and put forward their own agenda.

Social movement actors create dramatic episodes to make headlines, but at the same time in order to keep in spotlight, they are pressured to maintain the momentum by creating even more striking scenes. For example, during Wukan's three rounds of protests, the later one was more radical than the previous one, and the media attention escalated as well, from the local level to national level and international level. The runaway of the former village leader finally made their episode dramatic enough to produce the frame of "For the first time on record, the Chinese Communist party has lost all control."⁵³

If we look at a movement from its start to its end, the rise and fall of the movements are heavily shaped by the media coverage. As Todd Gitlin described, the mass media reproduced the hegemonic values through their routine news reporting practices. The New Left actors were framed as unimportant from the beginning stage but later as the violence increases, they made their headlines but were framed as illegal at the end.⁵⁴ This is not to say the media coverage leads to the failure of these movements, but it matters how these media report them after the social

⁵³ Malcolm Moore, "Inside Wukan: the Chinese village that fought back," *the Telegraph*, December 13, 2011. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8954315/Inside-Wukan-the-Chinese-village-that-fought-back.html>. Accessed on November 23, 2012.

⁵⁴ Gitlin, Todd. 1980. *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the new left*. University of California Press.

movement actors successfully seek the opportunities of the media coverage. Craig Calhoun examined the relationship between the international media and the escalation of the 1989 student movement in China. The visit of the liberalization leader Gorbachev to China brought reporters' attention, so the students marched in front of Tiananmen to welcome him, which secured the position of the front pages. However these foreign media which were unaware with the local situations, failed to double check information sources, leading to distorted reports. When the news reaches out to a wider audience, the primary frame is no longer controlled by the protesters. They may turn offensive when the frames are not accurate, or adopt more aggressive tactics to keep the momentum.⁵⁵

The increasing radicalization cannot last long especially when resisters do not have a comprehensive political agenda. To make an impact through the international network persistently, protesters or resisters have turned to a path of oppositional ideology against the regime. Weiquan lawyers (the group of lawyers who prominently advocate the rights that are not realized by Chinese law), overseas dissidents and activists have their influence not through the escalation of drama, but rather through their presentation of adversary agenda against the authoritarian state.⁵⁶ This adversarial position is the fulfillment of the expectations of the audience who hold the values of freedom and democracy, or the audience who is disappointed at the repressive nature of the regime.

When mentioning some names of Chinese activists and lawyers, such as Hu Jia, Ai Weiwei, Teng Biao and Cheng Guangcheng, people might immediately identify them as the camp of regime challengers; however, what should be noted is that their growth of being more

⁵⁵ Calhoun, Craig J. 1994. *Neither Gods Nor Emperors: Students Struggle for Democracy*. University of California Press.

⁵⁶ Hualing, Fu, and Richard Cullen. 2011. Climbing the Weiquan Ladder: A Radicalizing Process for Rights-Protection Lawyers. *The China Quarterly* 205, no. 1: 40-59.

and more confrontational is not completely controlled by themselves. For example, Ai Weiwei's artistic work often targets the "Central Party," and Weiquan lawyers often defend the most controversial cases against the authority. I do not intend to argue that their professionalization is the only representation of their radicalization, but in fact their adversarial work has been integrated with their own professions. These professional activists' approach has fundamentally alienated themselves from those grassroots villagers who seek change of the local authority through spontaneous rebellions.

In order to seek changes continuously, these activists' adversarial approach is established step by step as they involve with more series of controversial work. Fu and Cullen's article laid out the process of Weiquan lawyers who "climb up the ladder of weiquan lawyering."⁵⁷ Specifically, in the beginning stage, the lawyers such as Chen Guangcheng and Gao Zhisheng practiced "moderate" lawyering, but as their frustration with the system accumulated, their actions became more radical. There are other reasons for their radicalization such as their sympathies as they analyzed in their article, but they also mentioned the reporting from foreign media and establishing an international profile have made them more confrontational to the legal and political system of China.

Media Opportunity Structure afforded by non-adversarial strategies

Activists of resistance create striking episodes to gain media visibility, which puts pressure on the authoritarian regime in China. However their risks of being suppressed are high if they are framed as revolt by state media, which are accountable to the state. The framing process primarily takes place within the complex media ecosystem in which different agencies, such as progressive domestic media, international media and the state media, produce their own

⁵⁷ Ibid.

frames. Chinese social movement actors strategically use non-adversarial frames: They consciously align themselves with the official ideology to gain the legitimacy of resistance, which are likely to be picked up by domestic media, and thus maintain the chances of internal negotiation with the state.

To show the relationship between the non-adversarial media strategies and the political outcomes of the movements, we compare Wukan case with other radicalized advocacy activities. Their interactions with a wide range of media are examined to illustrate how the contestation of frames result the different outcomes of their actions. The former strategically channeled the communist ideology and distanced themselves from the frames proposed by the international media. The latter actively produced discourses that oppose the authoritarian regime, and became radicalized in line with the growth of international media coverage. The non-adversarial media strategy is effective to achieve political outcomes for movement actors within the domestic media environment, but the compromise is abandoning democratic discourse.

Subversive effect can be achieved even in non-confrontational settings. Wukan reached subversive results at the local level by replacing its corrupt village leaders and the resistors were successfully elected as new leaders. In the beginning of its course, their actions were quite confrontational to the local authorities, such as the county government and the city government, but as the event continued, higher level of government, the provincial government stepped in, we can see a transformation of their strategies in facing the state, changing from adversarial to non-adversarial. This transformation opens up opportunities to have dialogue with higher powers. Their subversive results of holding an open election may not be possible if it was not the provincial government stepping in.

Chapter 4 Case Study: New Workers Art Group

New Workers Art Group: Singing for Workers Rights

China's society is fractured, as theorized by sociologist Sun Liping.⁵⁸ What comes with Chinese economic growth is a stratified society that separates rural from urban, and many other institutional arrangements have prevented vital social mobility. Taking the construction industry for example, in China buildings are erected in cities at high speed, symboling its growth in GDP in recent decades. Migrant workers move from the countryside to urban areas for jobs in the construction industry because their earnings are significantly higher than staying in the countryside. For business owners and urban investors, their labor is cheap and they have no fear for lack of workers. Making a home in cities is hard for migrant workers because social security, education, healthcare and housing resources in cities are not allocated to them by policies. The group of migrant workers is one of the most vulnerable in the larger picture of China's role as world factory.

New Workers Art Group (NWAG) was born within this social context. In 2002, there were three young migrant workers who were enthusiastic about music, and they formed a band to sing for their fellow workers and promote workers rights. In 1998, Sun Heng, one of the three, gave up his job as a high school music teacher in Kaifeng, a medium sized city in the central area of China. As many fellows in underprivileged areas left home to become migrant workers in large cities, he was also one of them and went to Beijing. Every night he went to construction sites to sing for the workers to make a living, and this experience made him think of how he

⁵⁸ Sun, Liping. 2003. *Cleavage: Chinese Society in 1990s*. Beijing: Social Science Works Press. 孙立平, 2003. *断裂: 20 世纪 90 年代以来的中国社会*. 北京: 社会科学文献出版社.

could produce music that expresses the voices of these grassroots groups. He began to write new songs addressing issues faced by migrant workers, and his songs were extremely well received by these workers. In 2004, their album, "Workers are a Family," came out and sold 100 thousand copies. Then in 2005, they used all the money earned from this album and opened a school in Pi Village in the outskirts of Beijing for migrant workers' children. For the workers, the living expenses in Beijing are not as affordable as for local residents. Sun Heng found collecting second hand clothes from local people and reselling them at low prices could be a great help for workers to reduce living expenses. In 2006, he opened a second hand shop, Tongxin Huhui Store. This social enterprise also provides funding for his school. His approach of building up the culture of this marginal group has extended, and in 2008, a museum focusing on the history of migrant workers was built next to the school. Many workers sent their materials for exhibition including Permit of Temporary Residence in cities, Certificate of Health, letters to their families, and many other things that represent the lives of this group.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The summary of New Workers Art Group's work is based on several news articles including Zhang Yanping, "Kaifeng Man 'Hike' in Panlong River in Kunming," *Yunan Information Newspaper*, October 19, 2011, <http://news.ynxxb.com/content/2011-10/18/N96333664937.aspx>, accessed May 1, 2013; Liu Ke, "Feel History at Migrant Workers Museum," April 18, 2008, http://www.bjd.com.cn/10zdtj/200804/t20080428_455901.html, accessed May 1, 2013; Wei Hao, "Kaifeng Sun Heng Hold Migrant Workers Spring Festival Gala for 300 million Workers," *Henan Workers Daily*, February 4, 2013, http://media.worker.cn/sites/media/hngrrb/2013_02/04/GR0102.htm, accessed May 1, 2013.



Figure 8 New Workers Art Group sings for migrant workers at construction sites.

Unlike other professional bands, they did not have lights or speakers, and they only have two guitars and a harmonica. But they do have a stage: construction sites. They travelled around different construction sites in Beijing and migrant workers would stay after work, sit on the ground, and listen to their songs. In their first performance, they sang this song and the lyrics resonated with the audience:

We work hard the whole year, but are not paid at the end. Boss Zhou is friendly looking but black-hearted. He hides somewhere with our money. My whole family is waiting for me to come back in winter. I cannot go home with nothing in hand and we have to ask our money back! Old brother Wang is experienced and he stepped out to lead us. We shouted: "Brothers, Let's stand together and get our money back!"⁶⁰

This performance was a success for their audience as their voices finally found channels to express, but it was soon terminated by the manager of this construction site. They were afraid

⁶⁰ Zhang Yanping, "Kaifeng Man 'Hike' in Panlong River in Kunming," *Yunan Information Newspaper*, October 19, 2011, <http://news.ynxb.com/content/2011-10/18/N96333664937.aspx>, accessed May 1, 2013.

such performances would call workers to rise against them. In an interview with the founder of NWAG, Sun Heng, by Yunan Information Newspaper, he explained that he did not intend to call for an uprising, but he insisted on getting as written by law; they were expressing workers' rights.⁶¹

It is true that organizations and activists are seeking rightful and lawful discourses to legitimize their activities but the nature of their resistance should not be ignored. Forming a rightful discourse can be effective to disguise resistance, but many other equally smart tactics have been deployed to construct this movement by this group, such as taking a nonprofit organization role, media practices to construct collective identities, and their strategic interactions within the broader media ecology. We will unpack these media forms, practices and opportunity structure in this chapter, but for now let us focus on the larger picture of their resistance.

What are they resisting against?

Before we propose a non-adversarial resistance mode that has been less discussed in literature, we first need to answer why activities like NWAG's are resistance. We mentioned briefly in the beginning of this chapter that China's fractured society provides rare opportunities for this migrant workers group to stay in the cities. How do they respond to such inequality? Are they captured by the hegemonic values that come with modernization? Do they have their own voices expressed in Chinese political processes? These questions are centered around workers' awareness of their subjectivity.

If we think about the trajectories of migrant workers in the cities, they might have jobs but have very low income. Houses in cities are not affordable for them. If they have their

⁶¹ Ibid.

children in the cities, they have to pay for special sponsor fee for them to go to school in cities. Many children are sent back to the countryside to stay with their grandparents. These depressing social conditions have left them very limited choice, and many migrant workers save every penny they have made in cities to build a house in the countryside. This type of house for them is more of symbolic self-consolation, rather than a real home, because they have spent almost their entire life in cities and many of them are not willing to take up agricultural production. In several interviews with migrant workers in the book *China New Workers: Lost and Rise*, they seem to share similar anxiety that they are highly uncertain about their future and are not satisfied with their current urban existence.⁶² When the author of this book asked one male worker in his early 30s about his happiest moment in cities, he jokingly replied, "no happy memories, did not win any lotteries yet." Then he was asked if he would be back to home in the countryside, he stated firmly, "Impossible, won't be back."⁶³ That is where the contradiction lies in: even though they are nostalgic about life in the countryside, all their social relations are in cities where they cannot have a decent life.

Are migrant workers aware of this inequality? Are they eager to change the current situation? Answers to these questions are not simply binary. Some of migrant workers whose rights are severely deprived definitely fight against the unfair system through means such as petition to government, but for those whose life has been stably carried on, most only feel "life is unfair but that's just the way it is." They see the inequality exists, but this inequality has not pushed them to the boundary to actively change the current system, and also they have the hope to move up in the social ladder by becoming more capable at work. This general lack of

⁶² Lu Tu, *China New Workers: Lost and Rise*, Beijing: Law Press, 2013.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 31.

awareness of unreasonability of inequality from migrant workers is what organizations like NWAG are resisting against.

Modernization in China is not simply an economic process, and what comes with it is the transformation of society in value systems and culture. Discourses favoring urbanization and industrialization have penetrated into all aspects of people's life. Migrant workers' "it is the way it is" belief is an example of such value system and they perceive their chance of changing their status is to become the powerful side within the current unfair social relations. It is not their fault not realizing the source of the inequality, but rather the stabilized hegemonic values exemplified in media and other mainstream discourses have made them internalize these perceptions. One of these dominant discourses is leveraging China's economic growth: to maintain the momentum of China's development, workers and peasants have to sacrifice. Even though in the narrative of official documents and state media, the word sacrifice has never been explicitly raised, the marketization policy and the commercial urban society keep requiring cheap labor from the rural society.

Another much held belief among migrant workers is that their lower social status is because they are less capable according to over one hundred interviews by the author of *China New Workers*. In an interview with a 27 years old male migrant worker by the author of *China New Workers*, he said, "Sometimes I have to blame myself, I did not do well at school, and secondly my family is poor...Why are some people who are not good looking still confident? Because his family environment brings them confidence."⁶⁴ Many workers like him know their disparities in education and other social resources in contrast with what are possessed by urban residents, but they do not see this initial disadvantage unjust and they think what makes them lower status is their capabilities. Such belief is one of the hegemonic society imprinted to them,

⁶⁴ Ibid, 281.

so resistance to this unfairness requires them to realize the linkage between initial disadvantage and capabilities, and break the myth "it is the way it is."

Grassroots Spring Festival Gala as Media Practices

In the previous section, we discussed some of the media forms such as songs at construction sites. In fact NWAG appropriate various types of media: they later published several albums, built a migrant workers museum and held grassroots spring festival gala (Chunwan, 春晚) for migrant workers. We will spend most of this section focusing on this gala because this medium has been embedded with thick meanings in Chinese popular culture. Although NWAG's spring festival gala (Chunwan) is not the same as state sponsored ones, the cultural resonance has been brought up by channelling the images of CCTV's Chunwan. When we mention Chunwan, most people in mainland China will think of CCTV's Spring Festival Gala, which is an annual TV show from CCTV (China Central Television) broadcast on Chinese New Year Eve. Since 1983, the first time CCTV live-broadcast Chunwan, having a gathering with family and watching Chunwan have become a cultural practice that almost everyone in China does to celebrate Chinese New Year.

Chunwan and Chinese Social History

Why is this show so popular in China? Of course the fact that this state sponsored program is broadcast across all major channels in China is one reason, but more essentially, the content, the design and the celebrities of this show have been entertaining the nation with Chinese characteristics. In the 1980s, mainland China has just gone through the period of Cultural Revolution and this giant country also just turned its direction to an open market policy. Even though China had not been integrated to the western world by early 1980s, places such as

Hong Kong have become its aspiration of the future. In 1984 Chunwan, one of the most memorable moments was a song called "My Chinese Heart" by Zhang Mingmin, a Hong Kong celebrity. The selection of such a song for the Chunwan did not only suit the need of maintaining the national pride, but also provided mainland viewers an opportunity of connection with the capitalist world. In 1993 Chunwan, we saw another song quickly rise popularity quickly, "Sound of Sea Goes On" by a mainland singer Mao Ning. There is a metaphor that the sound refers to the relationship of a couple. It was a hit and a surprise because singing for love was unimaginable in highly constrained Confucian tradition and during revolutionary period, songs for the country and communism were the mainstream. In the early 1990s, as economic activities revived in the private sector, mainstream culture has been giving way to modern style; as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, modernity does not only bring economic activities, but also culture changes. The popularity of this love song exemplifies such a cultural process of turning into a more diverse and open environment. Another characteristic of the social change China was experiencing is that mainstream values encourages people to seek money, but ordinary people have been having a difficult time in contrast with people with higher social capital. This social reality was portrayed in a catchy conversation in a comedy skit called "Idea Company" in which one comedian asked "do you know how to make your wallet full of money?" and the other one answered "make large bill into small changes."⁶⁵ It left ordinary Chinese audience lasting impression because the mockery lay in everyone's mind. As examined in several programs, Chunwan, as a medium, has been associated with China's social history of the recent several decades. With its spectacular design of its stage, well-known celebrities, funny comedians, and infrastructure to enable live-broadcasting to the whole nation, Chunwan has been

⁶⁵ CCTV compiles images and videos of past Chunwan programs at <http://chunwan.cntv.cn/yingxiangguan/1/index.shtml>, accessed May 1, 2013.

a major entertainment element for Chinese popular culture. However, the key of this entertainment is never separated from its social reality, which is the foundation arousing resonance with viewers' minds.

Chunwan as propaganda?

As mentioned before, some of the programs have been devoted to build national pride and some studies suggest that Chunwan has been changing traditional family gathering into "national reunions."⁶⁶ The concept of "private" in Chinese context is always very problematic especially when TV as a medium has afforded state sponsored programs penetrate into everyday life. Lack of other forms of cultural practices both in rural and urban local communities also makes TV easier play the role as primary entertainment technology. Thus the agenda of these Chunwan programs is worth examining to provide us a snapshot of how this technology has been appropriated for nation building. A quantitative study by Xiao Wang, who coded programs in 26 years of Chunwan, shows 12.2% programs with the themes of patriotism, and 11.4% programs to praise the Party and the Army. The total number of these two items which can be thought as explicit nation promotion is around 20%. However, it is interesting to see its softer means of promoting mainstream values through programs that focus on social education and stronger economy, which occupy the total programs 25.1% and 31.2% respectively. It should be noted that it is not that only media forms that explicitly promote the Party's agenda are counted as ideology. The system of ideology is so prevalent that it incorporates every aspect of daily life. For example, social education programs on members of community helping each other in fact were referred as promotion of "harmonious society," which was a keyword labelled for Hu

⁶⁶ Bin, Zhao. "Popular family television and party ideology: the Spring Festival Eve happy gathering." *Media, Culture & Society* 20.1 (1998): 43-58.

Jintao's 10 years rule.⁶⁷ There is never a clear distinction between the national space and private space in China and the ideological media forms such as Chunwan are mediating messages from the state into everyone's mind.

We discussed what themes were promoted in Chunwan and it is equally valuable to figure out what themes are left behind. Many social issues and emotions of the public opinion have been touched on by Chunwan programs, for example, the common anxiety of people's lack of money in their pocket as shown in the "Idea Company" comedy skit. However, this show never pays real full attention to discuss and dig into these social problems and realities. Entertainment is its primary goal, rather than empowerment. There are roles of illiterate peasants, left-behind children, migrant workers as safeguards and so on in comedy skits but Chunwan portrays an idealized world where their problems are solved with audience's laughter. The most typical character of Chinese peasants from Chunwan's lens is Zhao Benshan, who played many roles of the imagined peasant approved by mainstream value. Although his roles are mostly successful peasants who work hard to have the privilege to be interviewed by famous anchors, or participate in Olympics Torch relay, the moments when audiences laugh are when his characters behave funny or silly in contrast with urban style. The impression left is of his peasant image, patronized by power; it is safe for him to make fun of the weak rather than the powerful.

Chunwan reinterpretation by NWAG

In contrast with the fact that voices from workers are left out in CCTV's Chunwan, New Workers Art Group organized their migrant workers to perform for their own Chunwan, which was recorded and later shared to Web2.0 video platforms. Sun Heng, the organizer, said in an

⁶⁷ Wang, Xiao. "Entertainment, Education, or Propaganda? A Longitudinal Analysis of China Central Television's Spring Festival Galas." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 54.3 (2010): 391-406.

interview "at first we held our Chunwan mostly for kids whose parents are migrant workers in Beijing."⁶⁸ Those kids, from Tongxin Experimental School, located in Pi Village, a suburb area in eastern part of Beijing, have been practicing dancing in their after school hours, and the first Chunwan was initially planned for them to show for their parents. Perhaps it is difficult to say to what extent NWAG realizes this meaning of their interpretation of Chunwan against the official discourses on images of migrant workers from the beginning. At least they sought out a niche position that did not only serve needs of migrant workers groups but also enabled them to present their approach of urban discourses that have been left out.



Figure 9. Children performed at workers's Spring Festival Gala (Chunwan) in 2012.⁶⁹

Their first Chunwan was held at a small stage next to the school in January 2012. Some of their performances were children's singing and dancing, but many of them are from members of NWAG who travel between construction sites and sing for migrant workers. A migrant

⁶⁸ Wei Hao, "Kaifeng Sun Heng Hold Migrant Workers Spring Festival Gala for 300 million Workers," *Henan Workers Daily*, February 4, 2013, http://media.workercn.cn/sites/media/hngrrb/2013_02/04/GR0102.htm, accessed May 1, 2013.

⁶⁹ An image from Sohu Nonprofit News Website, <http://gongyi.sohu.com/20130122/n364327274.shtml>, accessed May 4, 2013.

worker said to a newspaper, "Why can't we have our own culture? Why are their voices heard by more people? We cannot wait for them to pay attention to us. Migrant workers have to build our own stage and we perform! Initiating Migrant Workers Chunwan, Sun Heng is a good model for us!"⁷⁰ It is interesting to see these words uttered through migrant workers mouth because too many times, their voices are expressed through mediated channels, for example, academic groups. Even though the public realizes how oppressed this marginal group is, if it is not expressed by this group themselves, the discourses against urban mainstream values do not inherently belong to migrant workers. Their self-awareness and consciousness are the bottom up approach to start solving the complex problem of social inequality imposed to them.

Social media assists small grassroots groups

As a grassroots nonprofit organization that is not affiliated with government organizations in China, NWAG has to channel synergies from many other stakeholders and adopts an integrative strategy to expand their influences. As argued in an interview with Southern Metropolis Newspaper, Jing Wang emphasized the importance of Web2.0 technologies for under privileged groups in China.⁷¹ Her metaphor of social media is "borrowing a boat to sail" which means if grassroots NGOs do not have the resources to build their own large media platforms, they should take advantage of social media which has already been established for everyone to participate. In fact this is what NWAG has been doing for their communication work.

While NWAG was planning their first Chunwan, some of them proposed to invite Cui Yongyuan, a well-known TV show host in China, to host their show. Cui is also known for his

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ma Jinxin, "Web2.0 is a Communication Tool for Grassroots," Southern Metropolis Newspaper, January 21, 2013, http://epaper.oeeee.com/A/html/2013-01/21/content_1796586.htm, accessed May 1, 2013.

images of civic mindedness in China and the likelihood lies in how to reach him. What Sun Heng did was to contact Cui Yongyuan via Weibo (a major Chinese micro-blogging site) messages. Cui replied and posted on his timeline that he would host their Chunwan and called for participation of other celebrities and corporations to support this event. His words on Weibo were "This Chunwan is 300 million migrant workers' Chunwan."⁷² This move definitely helped to scale up their communication outreach to a wider audience who were not familiar with the civic sector because of the celebrity synergy channeled.

Their collaboration with Cui Yongyuan is their publicity work that draws everyone's attention, but their daily work of serving migrant workers and developing partnerships with universities, internet companies and volunteers from all walks of life are the key to sustaining their constituencies.

In an interview I did with NWAG's web editor, Yang Meng in December 2012, he explained to me their practice of integrative collaboration with different stakeholders. The most important stakeholder for them is migrant workers. He finds their use of new media tools are helping migrant workers write diaries. He keeps in touch with them through QQ groups, WeChat, and emails to invite them to publish their diaries on their website. When I asked if smart phones are affordable for migrant workers, he replied, "Almost everyone has one!" What I have to clarify here is that the smart phones in Chinese market are not the same as the products in the US. Since Android system is open source, many local smartphone manufacturers have adopted this system and sold their products targeting customers who have lower income. The availability of cheap smart phones in China is an advantage in building up the infrastructure where civic uses of new communication and technology tools can grow among migrant workers.

⁷² Sun Heng, Weibo post, <http://www.weibo.com/1566294041/zcNV7tq35>, accessed May 1, 2013.

Another prominent part of collaboration of NWAG comes from Internet companies and academic institutions. Sohu is one of the largest portal websites in China and Yang Meng told me their web editors have been volunteering for NWAG for years. At first they held workshops for nonprofessional web editors, and then as they knew better of each other, they made feature stories for NWAG, embedded videos, and promoted their activities on Sohu's sites. In addition to their cooperation outreach, academics are also very interested in NWAG's work. Professors and students at Communication Research Center of Chinese Social Science Academy have volunteered to help them lay out communication plans and strategies for years. "Even though helping us is not their job, I deeply respect their social responsibilities," said Yang Meng. The social responsibilities both from corporations and academia are in fact their resources to channel the synergy from other sectors into their nonprofit work.

New Workers Museums: Collectively Reconstruct History

Narratives around migrant workers have been dominated by the official accounts and urban values. One of the prominent narratives from the government in the recent decades is built around economic reform. The ample cheap labor has been appropriated to construct a labor-intensive type of economy while workers' benefits are ignored. Wealth accumulated by export is not fairly distributed to the workers group, but rather has stayed in the state and property owners in the cities. Workers are thought as a sacrifice to the development of the country, and hope someday when the country becomes stronger, they can be finally paid back. This narrative is urban centric and lacks perspectives from workers themselves. What do they think of the deprivation of social benefits? Do they in fact believe the central policy that let some people be rich first and then others? Answers to these questions from workers themselves can construct an alternative history.



Figure 10. Many permits and certificates a female migrant worker need to work in cities⁷³

Sun Heng's New Workers Art Group is actively constructing this alternative narrative through their practices of building a museum. It is located in Pi Village too, where the elementary school for migrant kids, the workers theatre, and the second hand clothes store are. Participants at NWAG called for donations of items that represent lives of migrant workers. Through their concert tours around construction sites, they mobilized fellow migrant workers to donate their personal items. Various artefacts were collected from these workers: certificates to live in cities, job contracts, books, special school clothes for migrant kids, and so on. The items they received most were certificates that allow migrant workers live in cities issued city governments. The social background of the existence of such certificates is Chinese Hukou system, which ties many social resources to the places where people originally are. For migrant

⁷³ This photo was taken during my visit to the museum in December 2012.

workers, their Hukou is in the countryside, so they need many types of certificates to work and live in the cities, but their social security, healthcare and other benefits are still in the countryside. Migrants workers care most about these certificates. If they forget bringing them with them, they will be sent back to the countryside or get a penalty. The items they see at the museum can remind them of their own experiences surrounding these media. Sun Heng summarizes his purposes of insisting making this museum happen, "I'd like to let migrant workers construct their own history and let others in society see the value of labor. How glorious it is to be contributing to society."⁷⁴ The success of collecting all the materials from fellow migrant workers have proven that the values embedded in this media practice are shared among them, their collective identities are awake, and this success is not his own, but belongs to this group.

Media Opportunity Structure: Channeling Official Ideology to Lower Political Risks

The research question I focus on is to identify what media strategies NWAG used in Chinese media environment, and I am proposing, in this politically sensitive environment, a non-adversarial media strategy that is effective for movement actors to address their practical appeals. In Sun Heng's case, his strategy is non-adversarial by positioning their NGO in alignment with the official communist ideology. Even though China's capitalist economy has resulted in the working class as the vulnerable group, the communist ideology and Mao's revolutionary ethics still put proletarians as the leading class, as stated in Chinese constitution and the party's statement. Sun Heng is clearly aware of this advantage of addressing the issues of this group by channelling communist ideology, as he said in the interview, "We prefer state owned media to amplify our voices and it makes our movement more legitimate." Then when I asked him to give

⁷⁴ Liu Ke, "Feel History at Migrant Workers Museum," April 18, 2008, http://www.bjd.com.cn/10zdtj/200804/t20080428_455901.html, accessed May 1, 2013.

more details of their media choices, he said, "We do not accept interview requests from international media, to lower the political risks." He also specified the risks which include that they might frame him as the leader of the public or human rights fighters. "Domestic media would not do that because there is the system of censorship," he added. Based on his experiences of media practices, our conversation has strengthened my suppositions about non-adversarial media strategy.

Reading the lyrics of New Workers Art Group's songs, I see their experiences as migrant workers and their strong sympathy towards this group are the source of their art. One of their songs, named "Workers, Workers, Most Glory," has such lyrics as "Skyscrapers are built by us. Broad roads are built by us. We have done the arduous and unpleasant work. Be a decent man. We make a living by laboring." The view expressed in this song is a contrast to the condescending attitude toward migrant workers held by most urban residents. Laboring work has been looked down upon in popular culture and voices expressing pride of their contribution to the cities from migrant workers are very weak. Sun Heng said, "Like many people, I did not know much about migrant workers. Until I became a migrant worker, I experienced the hardships and isolation of being away from home, but I was deeply moved by their unyielding characters. If you never knew them, you would not understand their moral qualities. This emotion has driven me to do the work for this group." What he said perfectly explained the source of his art works, and his attitudes arise from his frustrations and struggles as a member of this marginal group. His approach of empowering this group is to transform the frustration into confrontational voices against popular ideologies.

When he was asked about his ideas that drive him to do this series of work, his answers resonate with many of the theories of neo-leftists. "I think the essence of the popular culture in

cities is consumerism, and it is too luxurious for migrant workers. That's why we should build up our own culture and our art group is an example," Sun Heng said. Resonating with his view, many academically trained theorists might agree that the industrialization has led to a polarized urban society where the poor and the rich are not only materialistically different, but also unequal in many other ways. From the perspective of communication, Manuel Castells highlights the embedded inequalities in his theorized networked information society, and Jack L. Qiu specifically puts Castells's theory into Chinese context and claims a new working class is rising in the larger social context of inequalities.⁷⁵ Specifically, Qiu theorized the rise of "have less" ICT class in China which are basically the same group as migrant workers. Their practices of lower end phone are examples of showing how the mass media where dominant ideologies penetrate is not relevant to this group. The essence of Sun Heng's work is a subversive and active response to the dominant ideologies imposed on the underprivileged groups in urban Chinese societies.

⁷⁵ Qiu, Jack Linchuan. *Working-class network society: Communication technology and the information have-less in urban China*. MIT Press, 2009.

Chapter 5 Case Study: New Rural Reconstruction Movement

In the last chapter we closely examined the social background of the rise of workers rights groups using New Workers Art Group as an example; a fractured structure between the urban and rural society does not only impact migrant workers in the cities, but also influences their social relations with their hometown in the countryside. When the current social structure makes it difficult for them to stay in the cities, the question becomes if the deprived countryside can be revived to absorb their labor and provide resources for them to stay in rural society.

Solving the rural problems has been a continuous effort across many generations of intellectuals. In the 1920s under the rule of Nationalist party, China went through a rapid period of economic development, and peasants were facing similar problems as today's peasants. One of the western educated intellectuals who adopted rural reconstruction in China was Dr. James Yen, who wrote, "we do not want to sit in chairs comfortably and make empty plans, so we find questions in peasant lives, to solve problems. We'll get rid of Japanese glasses, Western glasses, urban glasses but we put on peasant's glasses."⁷⁶ Yen's words represented a practical approach that required academically trained scholars to solve problems of social importance by being in the field. Rather than only criticizing the social structures that resulted in rural problems, Yen himself was the change maker who practiced his theories of rural reconstruction in real-life. This intellectual tradition that encourages academics to step out of theories has been admired by many other scholars as well and Wen Tiejun is one such intellectual. As the professor and dean of Agriculture and Rural Development School at Renming University, he is widely recognized as a

⁷⁶ James Yen, "Speech to Guests," in *James Yen Anthology*, ed. Song Enrong. (Hunan: Hunan Education Press, 1989), 221. 晏阳初著，宋恩荣主编，《在欢迎来宾会上的讲话》，选自《晏阳初全集》第1卷，1989年，湖南教育出版社，第221页

scholar as well as a practitioner. In 2003, at the same place where James Yen had his rural reconstruction experiments, Wen Tiejun started a nonprofit institute teaching peasants new techniques of rural reconstruction such as organic farming, organizing cultural troupes, setting up cooperatives.

Few associates Wen's name with activism, but my argument is that his activities are hidden resistance and in authoritarian countries this type of resistance to certain extent lowers risks of conflicts with the state. What is he resisting against? In an interview with a Chinese magazine, he said "China's mainstream values promoting Western's privatization, marketization, globalization and liberalization are the biggest lies."⁷⁷ As analyzed in the case study on New Workers Art Group, the industrialization process in the recent decades in China indeed brings wealth to some people in the cities, but apparently not to migrant workers, factory workers and so on. This is one of the results of China's policy "Allowing Some of People to Become Rich," so the idea behind Wen's work is to fight against the ideology the Chinese government has adopted since the economic reform.

Resistance against urbanization

Because of the government's emphasis on economic growth in the past decades, there is a gap between urban and rural society. What Wen Tiejun did was to find a way to revive the countryside, so that peasants can find a job around home, instead of all becoming migrant workers in cities. In 2003, he founded a training center called James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute, which brought in villagers from all over China, trained them to learn new methods of agricultural production. Then they went back to their villages and started their

⁷⁷ Lin Hai, "Interpretation of Wen Tiejun and Sannong Problems," *Southern People Weekly*, January 22, 2008, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-01-22/154214801571.shtml>, accessed May 1, 2013.

own cooperatives. In this way they reconfigured social and economic relations within rural society.

In the mission statement of James Yen Rural Reconstruction Institute, they listed three principles, "human life as foundation, multi-culture as base, cooperative and mutual help as plan." This approach is a critique of Chinese urbanization policy and an alternative solution proposed by intellectuals to the problem of deprivation of the rural society. In a short video that records Wen's speech in front of a class at the institute, the first question he asked to the peasants was how they understood "new rural reconstruction" and his answer was "human as foundation"(以人为本), which exemplifies his approach of rural revival that reconstructing human subjects is the priority in rural China.⁷⁸ It pushes our discussion further on the current peasants' lives: aren't peasants in China treated as human? I think the word "human" in the new rural reconstruction context has a complex meaning that should be explained in the larger picture of urbanization and industrialization. Urbanization process treats peasants as excessive and cheap labor that is exploited by the development of cities. In Wen's words, "the vulgar economic growth caused by the capitalization of resources is not the only objective we strive to achieve."⁷⁹ The official narrative is that China as a developing country has to go through a process of primitive accumulation, which results in the transfer of labor from countryside to the city as the state backs many policies to enable this process. Wen's peasant lives first approach is a sharp critique of unbalanced development that favors the city rather than the countryside. Bringing the scope of human back into the discussion on development in China is the first step to avoid brutally treating peasants as cheap labor.

⁷⁸ A documentary directed by Duan Jinquan at China Central Television, <http://buqu.cntv.cn/documentary/society/womendetudi/classpage/video/20100117/100300.shtml>, accessed May 1, 2013.

⁷⁹ Tiejun, Wen. 2007. Deconstructing modernization. *Chinese Sociology & Anthropology* 39, no. 4: 10-25.

What is a human peasant in the new rural reconstruction approach? In their mission statement, they aim to coach peasants with independent spirits, commitment, and ability to innovate and reconstruct rural China. Especially in the recent decades, the images of Chinese peasants have been mostly associated with marginal and vulnerable groups. Changing this image is not a task that can be completed by one person or one organization. The method Wen Tiejun adopted was to educate a small portion of elite peasants who were motivated to change their villages, introduce principles and concrete programs of rural reconstruction, provide outside help when they went back to their villages to implement what they learned at the institute. This was a snowballing strategy by training elite peasants who would mobilize hundreds or even thousands of villagers locally.

The human approach also suggests solving rural problems by targeting the core. As James Yen said, "Relief has its place. But what the people need is not relief, but release—release of their own potential for development."⁸⁰ Coaching their techniques of rural reconstruction is necessary but it can only be effective after peasants realize their own power in change and development. We'll see more details in later sections on what these peasant trainees did in their villages after attending the institute, but here I listed the lines in a comedy talk show performed by participants of the institute to show their own perceptions of their capabilities.

Three and a half lines show at the graduation party⁸¹

Authors: collective participants in the training program of August 2006

President Hu leads China

No.1 Document is good

⁸⁰ International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, <http://www.iirr.org/index.php/aboutus/history>, accessed May 1, 2013.

⁸¹ Pan Jiaen, "Ivory Tower and Mud Wall," *Taiwan Social Science Quarterly* 77(2008): 253-87.

How do peasants become well off

Learning

Pondering about learning goals

Upset cannot find a community

Long sleepless night

Searching

There is a James Yen in Hebei

Having experiences in rural reconstruction

What do peasant trainees do?

Action

Many shows at today's party

Laughter around great shows

Feeling fulfilled and going home

Byebye

The three and a half lines talk show is a form that is widely recognized in Chinese culture. It is simpler to produce than other artistic forms such as composing lyrics for songs, but its straightforwardness and humor of the last line in each section are celebrated by the mass culture in both rural and urban societies. In the lines, the peasant participants expressed their longing for changing their hometowns and they seemed to find a solution by stating their commitment to taking "action."

Institutionalization of Resistance

As mentioned in the previous section, participants of this institute were self-motivated before joining the program, and one of the motivations they had was to fight against corruption and unfairness of distribution in their local villages, and establish new order of governance. They were often the ones who lead local petitioners to Weiquan practices (petitioning to higher level of governments to claim their rights to be protected). They attended the institute and went back to their villages to practice "new rural reconstruction," and later many of them were elected as village official leaders.

Ma Yichang, from Jiangzhuang Village in rural Shangdong province, was such a peasant leader who mobilized local villagers to file a petition to end the term of current village party secretary in 2003. He was trying to hold a public vote to initiate the revocation process but failed. Even though the village party secretaries resigned because of the pressure, large amount of debts left by them were not cleared. Then Ma Yichang and his fellow villagers chose to go for Weiquan and petitions to the county, city, province and even central governments.

In Beijing, Ma Yichang was introduced to the program of James Yen New Rural Reconstruction, which gave him new ideas of serving his community. He was quoted in a case study in a book edited by Wen Tiejun, "My time in Beijing made me realize that central policies are good and correct, which benefit our peasants. Our petitions have good motivations but at the same time brought unnecessary trouble to us and our country. From then on, my attitude changed from strong opposition to finding a more proper way of construction as response."⁸² His change of strategy does not mean he gave up what he has been fighting for, but rather he began to act

⁸² Wen Tiejun, editor, *The Practical Exploration of New Rural Reconstruction*. Beijing: Wenjin Press, 2006, 38.

civically and constructively to bring deeper changes to his hometown. This form of action is hidden and less paid attention to since the contentious element is not as obvious as other forms of resistance. The task of reconstruction is not less difficult.

He made use of local village radio station, which was widely used for mobilization during the Cultural Revolution, to spread his experiences learned in Beijing and Heibei James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute. Then he mobilized his fellow villagers to invest in their collaboratively owned cooperative that supports group purchase and sale to lower the cost in agricultural production.

Ma Yichang was one of the Weiquan leaders who changed their strategy to reconstruction, but their challenges lie in local politics. The side effect of former resistance leader as village party leader is that the county or city level government officials often do not trust the former resistor. Some of the failed cooperatives reflected that they should have communicated with leaders more often. Even though they might be widely supported by their fellow villagers, how to receive endorsement from county party officials was a task they have to complete in this authoritarian country. Because their Weiquan petitions to higher level of government often were positioned against previous corrupted local officials who more or less were endorsed by county officials, these Weiquan leaders had to reposition themselves from opposition to collaboration with officials of higher level.

It was not an impossible mission as long as they could re-establish their relationships with local higher level officials. For example, Yang Yunbiao, from Nantang Village in Anhui Province, was a figure who led villagers' petitions against county officials but later he was the organizer of Nantang's cooperative. He realized that without endorsement from the county officials their work of rural reconstruction could not be effective or even exist long, so from the

beginning he often reported to county officials and asked them to give advice on his work. He also invited them to go to their cooperative meetings so that these county officials would not feel Yang was a threat forming an opposing organization.⁸³ This case exemplifies that hidden resistance such as rural reconstruction practices in rural China has to take into local politics as consideration even though resisters have secured other techniques to succeed.

Cultural Troupes as Media Practices

One of the techniques that have proved successful in many villages is to start cultural troupes for women and the elders. These groups were later evolved into groups of organic agricultural production and cooperative finance.

One of the cases in which local villagers were mobilized primarily because of cultural troupe is Lankao County. It is located in the northeastern part of Henan province, with a population of 742 thousand, a national level poverty county. Half of the local villagers are migrant workers in the cities, and the rest of them live with annual income 2000 yuan, about 300 US dollars.⁸⁴

From August 2003 to November 2005, He Huili was the deputy county mayor of Lankao, and her other role was associate professor at Chinese Agriculture University. So during her service at Lankao, she tried to bring theories on rural reconstruction to practices and initiated cooperatives to reconfigure relationships between urban and rural society.

He Huili wrote in her report that reflected her experiences in Lankao, "The key to success lies in local cultural troupes and elders associations."⁸⁵ Five cultural troupes were set up in

⁸³ Ibid. 53.

⁸⁴ Wen Tiejun, editor, *China New Rural Reconstruction Report*, Fuzhou: Fujian People Press, 2011. 80.

⁸⁵ Wen Tiejun, editor, *The Practical Exploration of New Rural Reconstruction*. Beijing: Wenjin Press, 2006, 98.

Lankao County. Chenzhai Village cultural troupe consisted of about 20 women who routinely practiced waist drum, which is a folk dancing and musical performance that is popular in western and northern part of China. They choreographed performance that lasted about one hour, and in 2004 this group performed over 30 times across the county.⁸⁶

The industrialization and urbanization process comes with migration of labor to the cities, so most women, elders and children were left in the rural villages. Social relations based on routines of agricultural production activities were destroyed. As He Huili noted in her report, their goals were to build a cultural troupe in the village where women and elders can live happily, stand together, and have a positive attitude in their lives.⁸⁷

Initiating a cultural troupe in rural China was not as straightforward. The success of Chenzhai Village came from the rise of a local well-off organizer, Zhao Fenglan. Zhao mobilized local resources to help He Huili initiate Chenzhai's first cultural troupe. Caijianglou Village did not have such local organizer as Zhao. What He Huili did was to invite three local villagers to go to Zhao's village to see their performance, and then Zhao's cultural troupe went back to Caijianglou to have another performance and recruit Caijianglou members to start their own group. Around 40 villagers signed up and Zhao's group spent seven days teaching their folk songs and dances. The role of He Huili in local mobilization and organization also included supporting collaborations between these cultural troupes in different villages and bringing outside resources. They did not only perform within their own villages but also they traveled to other villages, and even to universities in Beijing to perform.

Before local villagers adopted these types of cultural practices, their spare time was used mostly in watching TV or playing Majiang (a traditional Chinese game often associating with

⁸⁶ Ibid. 84.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 98-100.

gambling). For these left-behind villagers, media practices such as joining cultural troupes are forms of exercise in both health and team spirit. It cultivated a sense of community, where they found things to do together and succeed together.

Media practices of waist drums, traditional opera performing and folk dancing have low cost and low political risk but high efficiency in mobilization and organization. The cost to establish a cultural troupe of 20 people was about 2000 yuan including subsidies to trainers, and cost of instruments.⁸⁸ Villagers were also willing to buy performance clothes or instruments out of their own pockets. In comparison with the return to themselves as well as the community, the cost was affordable to an average village.



Figure 11. Lankao cultural troupes performed at Agriculture University of China in Beijing where He Huili is a professor.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid. 99.

⁸⁹ Xue Wu, Xinhua Net, available at http://net.xinhuanet.com/market/school/2005-07/18/content_4661525.htm, accessed May 4, 2013.

Waist drums, traditional opera and folk dances have deep roots in rural culture. Older women more or less know the basics of these media forms. During festivals, holidays or even nights after their daytime work, they used to come out of their own homes, gather together, and do folk dancing as soon as they hear sound of beating gongs and drums. Because of lack of organization, now the practices are not as prevalent as they used to be, but re-initiating it is easier than adopting new forms of art. The properties of media forms have already lent practitioners of rural reconstruction a helping hand in mobilization and organization.

Cultural resonance deeply rooted in these media practices can lower the risks of political sensitiveness: these people organized together did not directly go for social or political reform in their areas, and they positioned themselves as cultural troupe. However, what should not be neglected is that the cultural troupes are also institutions and organizations. The effect of local villagers' participation does not end with peasants' own satisfaction of singing and dancing. Their shared sense of community and motivations in contributing to local rural society are also the outcome.

From Media Practices to Holistic Rural Transformation

Life is an organic whole. The basic problems of the people – poverty, ignorance, disease and civic inertia – interlock. To address one problem, we must address all. Hence our emphasis on an integrated program of livelihood, education, health and self-government.

— James Yen

He Huili's approach realizes that the linkage between practices of media and transformation of cultural capital into other forms of capital. Members in the cultural troupes were also the core members in economic cooperatives in each village, as analyzed in Wen Tiejun's book, "this art forms devoting to rural cultural construction, creates public

consciousness in rural development and spirits of rural China."⁹⁰ What Wen points out is that media practices are the foundation in reconfiguring social relationships within communities in rural China.

Economic cooperatives in local villages were established based on trust between members within communities formed by their participation in cultural troupes. He Huili was planning to start economic cooperatives within villages from scratch, but she did not succeed in doing so because she did not find initiating cultural troupe was the entry point for her to reorganize rural society in Lankao. She persuaded local villagers who have higher economic capacities to donate money for cultural troupes, and local village party secretary was in support of these art activities. An institution or organization of cultural troupes was not a dream that cannot be reached anymore. The members of cultural troupes worked together, cultivated team spirit, and nurtured cultural capital for cooperatives to emerge from. Huzhai Cooperative was such an organization. When members at the cultural troupe at Huzhai village were encouraged by the achievement of their performance, cooperative groups specialized in raising pigs and farming were recruiting for their economic cooperatives. Because members at cultural troupes were already organized and they trusted each other, it was not as difficult as before to mobilize them to join economic cooperatives.

Villagers' collaborative experiences at cultural troupes laid the foundation for them to transform into other forms of collaboration. Huzhai Village's cooperative had four sub-groups: crop farming, breeding, planning and cultural troupes. The head of this cooperative, Wang Jiwei, participated in a training program at James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute and started this cooperative after months of preparation and mobilization. About 80 households joined one or more subgroups at this cooperative. For example, they collaboratively farmed onions and

⁹⁰ Ibid. 81.

pumpkins on over ten Mu land (mu is a Chinese measure of land area), and then they sold these products in group so that they had more bargaining power in market. Another economic advantage of forming such cooperative was to establish locally sustained micro-finance system, which played an important role in reviving the rural society. Some villages at Lankao organized cooperatives by requesting members to put a small amount of investment in their economic groups. They made micro-loans to members as long as they could return within one year. According to He Huili's report, all the 47 loans to villagers were returned on time to the cooperatives.⁹¹ Having the locally sustained micro-finance system lowers the risks of overdrafts because members within a cooperative know each other well, which increases accountability. In addition, an ecosystem at the village level was established to sustain these financial practices, which essentially benefits individuals within the communities.

Discussing the economic production and financial practices afforded by cooperatives in rural China does not only address the argument that cultural capital accumulated by media practices can be transformed to social and economic capitals, but also what should be emphasized is a holistic view on rural reconstruction. Cases at Lankao villages have proved that cultural troupes cannot be separated from other groups in cooperatives. Even though the practices in villages other than Lankao do not have to exist in forms such as cultural troupes, it is still essential for members to build up a community based on trust and cultural reconstruction. Ethos such as contribution to community, working hard to succeed, participation in public life and help each other in crisis would not be cultivated without practices such as cultural troupes. Once these ethos are routinized in everyday life, no matter it is production cooperative or financial ecosystem in villages, it eliminates many hurdles for members to collaborate and innovate possible changes in reconfiguring complex social relations within Chinese rural society.

⁹¹ Ibid. 101.

James Yen as cultural Symbol

"Wear plain clothes, have homemade food, tobacco rod tied around the waist, wear straw hat, hold farm tools, work hard in the field, bear bad weather, merits as high as sky, actively pay grains as taxes after farm work, no peasants who can live in the world?" This is the lyric of a song composed by James Yen, and it is still remembered and sang by local villagers at Dingzhou, Hebei, China.⁹²

When Wen Tiejun was searching for places to hold his reconstruction project, local officials at Dingzhou (which used to be called Ding County) came to Wen Tiejun and proposed to use the name James Yen, who was widely recognized by his reconstruction movement in the 1930s in Dingzhou for this project. That was how the name James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute came from. Some might argue that differences exist between their approaches, but I think the consistence lies in the power of the cultural symbols of the name of James Yen. As a household name, James Yen does not simply represent a past educator who devoted his life to changing rural China, but also his name was imprinted in the minds of Dingzhou people. The older generation can still remember songs composed by him, and those cultural elements associated with the name have been passed on across time. When Wen Tiejun uses the name of James Yen, the new movement channels the messages that already exist in everyone's mind.

⁹² A documentary directed by Duan Jinquan at China Central Television, <http://bugu.cntv.cn/documentary/society/womendetudi/classpage/video/20100117/100300.shtml>, accessed May 1, 2013.

Media Opportunity Structure: Media Visibility and Invisibility

Wen Tiejun is not a name like some activists whose names are banned in the mainstream domestic media in China, even though his work constructs a social movement targeting some of the fundamental issues of the society. Rather, his name can be frequently seen from state televisions, major newspapers, portal websites and other channels in the domestic media ecology. In 2003 he received an award from China's largest state television CCTV for his advocacy for building a stronger rural society.⁹³ Gaining mainstream media visibility does not mean his words represent mainstream values, but rather he leverages prevalent media channels lowering political risks.

In his several books, Wen used whole chapters to develop theories that emphasize the rural reconstruction movement should still insist "Government Leadership."⁹⁴ In many public speeches he gave, he cited some most important central government's policy documents. This is not only an ideological statement that has to be made in socialist China, but also it represents a practical technique that has been approved in many real-life cases in the movement. For example, rural elite peasants who used to lead petitions do not live in a political environment where they can make a change only by themselves. Especially when they challenge the authority and existing power relation system, they have to rearrange power relations by dealing with every stakeholder in the political environment. The worst scenario for hidden resisters is that they are thought of as direct threat to higher level of government, so they have to carefully position themselves in line with a higher authority and rearrange power relations at the lower level.

⁹³ CCTV, Annual Economist Award, December 29, 2012, <http://www.cctv.com/financial/special/C11359/20031229/100646.shtml>, accessed May 1, 2013.

⁹⁴ Wen Tiejun, editor, *China New Rural Reconstruction Report*, Fuzhou: Fujian People Press, 2011. Wen Tiejun, editor, *The Practical Exploration of New Rural Reconstruction*. Beijing: Wenjin Press, 2006. Wen Tiejun, editor, *The Theoretical Exploration of New Rural Reconstruction*. Beijing: Wenjin Press, 2006.

The domestic media system in China cannot be totalized as the voice of the party. Some liberal media outlets, especially in the southern part of China, are known for their practices of reporting sensitive news before the censors are able to act. Critiques from liberal media questioned Wen Tiejun's motivations of positioning in line with central government. In an interview with *Southern People Weekly* magazine, he was asked, "what do you think of your relationships with politics? You give the public an impression that you are the expert on peasants, agricultural, village problems, and you mentioned in different settings that you reported to many high level leaders." He said he is only a researcher even when one day the regime changes.⁹⁵ In an authoritarian political environment, it does not matter how Wen answered to such a question. The hidden relationships between resisters and power holders are not exemplified by transcripts on the media, but activists' positions on the media influence perceptions of power holders. The authority does not necessarily need scholars to identify themselves as think tank, and scholars maintain images of intellectual independence. This is the media opportunity structure where every subject in the political environment seeks their best position.

Hidden resistance is not risk-free, and often times the crackdown from the state happens off-stage too. In 2008, New Rural Reconstruction Institute was closed down, even without proper notice; their power was cut off suddenly; villagers and trainees were dispersed. Journalists from newspapers tried to reach Wen Tiejun, and he replied via phone "before everything is clear, I will not comment on anything."⁹⁶ If not responding in these words, what else could he say about this closure? In fact, he did not have many choices left, because it would push him to the opposition of the authority easily if not being thorough before media.

⁹⁵ Lin Hai, "Interpretation of Wen Tiejun and Sannong Problems," *Southern People Weekly*, January 22, 2008, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-01-22/154214801571.shtml>, accessed May 1, 2013.

⁹⁶ Wen Shiyou, "Rural Reconstruction Institute was Closed, New Ding County Experiment Failed?" *Economic Observation Newspaper*, January 8, 2008, <http://www.eeo.com.cn/eo/jjgcb/2008/01/07/90690.shtml>, accessed May 1, 2013.

Similar to Wen's passive response, their media practices on the Internet also did not adopt an aggressive strategy. Instead they only put up a brief note for update, "James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute's volunteer and internship programs have ended. We do not accept new applications, because of work adjustment."⁹⁷ "Work adjustment" is as ambiguous as many government issued notes on changes of government officials. In the political system, the interpretation of these words indicates uncertainties of the future. According to a journalist's account on his visit shortly after the closure, there were four name signs hanging at the front door of this institute, "James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute," "Rural Reconstruction Training Center of Renmin University," "National 985 Plan Training Center" and "Zhaicheng Cooperative at Dingzhou City Hebei Province," but now the first three names were removed. It was unclear which level of the government made the decision of closing this institute, but it was clear that they wanted the retreat of the involvement from Wen or organizations other than local people in the countryside. At the end, Wen's rural reconstruction project in Hebei province ended with this "work adjustment" notice.

Mainstream domestic media in China have their own agenda of reporting, so some events that are important to activists are not necessarily picked up by mainstream media. For example, in one of the cooperatives set up with the help of He Huili, who was also a professor at China Agriculture University, their organic rice were over produced and selling at low prices would not make their income meet the end of cost. This situation was not rare in rural China as local villagers usually lack market information in comparison with buyers. It could hardly receive media attention at their local areas. He Huili shipped their rice to Beijing and became the salesperson at supermarkets. It was quickly picked up by media in Beijing as the news professor selling rice in supermarkets made catchy headlines. Even though she did not have the plan to

⁹⁷ Ibid.

implement a comprehensive media strategy, the move stepping outside local media ecology and creating opportunities in other places were some practices local groups borrowing external help can adopt.

After James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute was shut down, rural reconstruction practices did not stop because it has already become a movement that organically grows into many other forms and organization. For example, one of the organizations is Little Donkey Farm in outer rural space in Beijing. Social media such as Sina Weibo microblogging sites can facilitate their green products sold in Beijing urban markets. Even though the organizers were trained with new rural reconstruction theories, they do not use social media as a policy advocacy platform, but rather it performs as a service that lists chemical free grocery targeting urban citizens who seek healthy lifestyles. We did not discuss the role of social media in Wen's James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute because on the one hand it was not until recent years social media took off in China, and on the other hand, mainstream media outlets are still very effective in positioning themselves in Chinese political environment. In this case media opportunity structure around such hidden movements requires a position in the public transcript on mainstream media, and the extent to which social media exemplifies hidden transcript still has no firm answer.

The shutdown of James Yen New Rural Reconstruction Institute does not mean the end of the movement because from the beginning Wen adopted a distributed strategy in letting the movement grow even though the training center does not exist. As mentioned in the beginning the institute trained peasants from all over China, and they were seeded with ideas of rural reconstruction. Their local practices sustain the growth of the movement. In addition, apart from the local peasants, after participants of the institute were dismissed, several disciples of Wen

implemented their own versions of new rural reconstruction in some provinces, for example, He Huili in Henan, Qiu Jiansheng in Fujian and so on.⁹⁸ Their roles in this rural reconstruction movement are neither the same as Wen, who constantly provides intellectual foundation that symbolizes the movement, nor as peasants who organize at the local level, but rather they sustain the movement both intellectually and practically.

Another important transformation of this new rural reconstruction movement is that it changes its framing and positions across time. In late 1990s and early 2000s, the phrase “agriculture, peasants, village” (三农) was frequently mentioned in mainstream media reporting and issues of government’s documents as well. It was also the time when James Yen New Rural Reconstruction institute was established and surged. Solving the rural problem was framed as to solve the “agriculture, peasants, village” problem in both the institute’s work and the communist party’s work. In recent years especially after 2010, the movement transforms its framing into organic farming and green agriculture. For example, in Beijing, Guoren Rural Construction Center and Little Donkey Farm, are incarnations of the movement. We cannot see the name of the institute associated with these new organizations, or Wen stands in front of many peasants educating the rural reconstruction approach; however, the green agriculture practice is another framing for the long term transformation of rural society. As long as the rural society has not seen its expected revival, the rural construction movement adapts to its other forms that suit the discourse that helps them exist.

⁹⁸ Liu Sunan, March 22, 2013. Southern Metropolis Newspaper. Available at <http://www.massedu.cn/portal.php?mod=view&aid=58>

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Local resisters in China face a dilemma when appropriating media and interacting with media agencies. On the one hand, media visibility helps them scale up their contention and gain sympathy from the public for their movements. However, on the other hand, the risk of the involvement of media agencies is that the media frames of movements are not completely determined by social movement actors. For example, in the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement, some images of student leaders were constructed and radicalized by extensive international media reporting, because media agencies tend to seek dramatic and confrontational elements in stories and thus construct social movement actors as resisting heroes. To avoid such uncertainties in media reporting, especially in international media reporting, local resisters have to be careful and strategic when positioning their movements in the media system. In our first case, Wukan Protest, local villagers were consciously dealing with the dilemma by posting a note to international journalists claiming they support China Communist Party. It lowered their risks of repression in the Chinese political environment.

For these local resisters, media visibility is not the end goal, but the means. The media visibility serves multiple purposes, so the strategies of being amplified in different types of media are constantly changing. For example, the Wukan protesters were transformed by trying to reframe their protest to lower their international media visibility; New Workers Art Group prefers domestic media reporting; Wen's work is largely amplified in mainstream media. They are largely co-opted into a larger media opportunity structure. The most effective movements are those that learn when to cooperate, and when to make demands.⁹⁹ Social movement groups and

⁹⁹ Sasha Costanza-Chock, personal email, cited with permission.

activists know how to effectively switch back and forth between confrontational and cooperative stances.

Not all resistance is amplified in a media saturated environment all the time. Then this naturally brings up a question about the definition of the success of this hidden type of resistance in China. As defined by Jing Wang, "being successful in that context means surviving the authorities' attempt to shut down the operation so that activists will be able to take an incremental approach to generate social change."¹⁰⁰ The hidden aspect in media in fact sustains their existence under the repressive regime. In categorization of social movement outcomes, hidden resistance perhaps is not effective in generating oppositional discourses, but it contributes to the reconfiguration of relations that solve social problems.

The paradox of resistance in Chinese politics lies in the fact that resisters are finding cracks in a very seamless authoritarian regime. "Domination is not total; resistance is never complete."¹⁰¹ One should not treat the regime as the totalizing state within which resistance does not exist. As the Chinese have a saying "the most invisible place is the spot right underneath a light,"¹⁰² resisters perform under the control craft a space where they exist and resist from within rather than seeking outside shelter. For example, in the case of NRR, Wen Tiejun's role as the dean of a Chinese university that is directly attached to the government provides him with such a space where they can exist and perform experiments that drive social change. The multi-layered government structure gives resisters chances to scale up their movements but at the same time they can also adopt a strategy to main in a space when stakes of control exist in another layer of surveillance.

¹⁰⁰ Personal email, cited with permission from Jing Wang.

¹⁰¹ Wang, Jing. Chinese Popular Culture and the State, positions: east Asia cultures critique, vol. 9, no. 1, 2001, p. 69 -104

¹⁰² Wang, Jing. "The Politics and Production of Scales in China: How does geography matter to studies of local, popular culture," in J. Wang ed., *Locating China: Space, Place, and Popular Culture*. p. 1-30

This thesis approaches hidden resistance through two theoretical and analytical lenses, media practices and the media opportunity structure. A focus on media practices helps us see various types of media forms beyond mass media; this lens also brings our scope back to human agency appropriating these media forms. In our three cases, our analysis of media practices ranges from big character posters on streets, opera stages for mobilization, crowdsourced museums, local peasant art troupes, to popular digital media such as online websites and Weibo posts. I do not intend to claim that media tools themselves can bring social change in resistance, but rather I situate them back to human agency and social history when discussing these media practices. Cultural meaning and resonance embedded in media are curated by people who use them at specific moments in history. Media can be viewed as practice in the sense that they construct collective identities and discourses in communities that resisters represent. No matter what their goals are that they might aim to build up a more revived rural society or more inclusive urban society, their media practices have been internalized as part of their resistance and channel the disguised resistance messages embedded in media across history.

Applying media opportunity structure as a theoretical lens helps us see how and why resisters strategically interact with media agencies. In the case of Wukan, we find it is not always helpful in reaching consensus with Chinese authorities to involve extensive international media reporting. Maintaining a distance from undesirable media frames opens up opportunities in the domestic political space. Local resisters leverage more of the power of the domestic media system because players in this space have already mastered the skills of existence and resistance in an authoritarian regime. It should be noted that the domestic media system should not be viewed as a totalized censored space that cannot afford any assistance in resistance. Theories on Boomerang Pattern discuss the power of international organizations and media in amplifying and

scaling up domestic movements in non-democratic countries, but our cases in this thesis open up new discussion on the affordances of the domestic media system in assisting hidden resistance. Chinese mainstream media reporting on resisters' activities help legitimize their actions and provide certain protection. Also, the multi-leveled media system in China, that is, media owned by central government, provincial media, media in counties and others, gives local resisters alternatives when voices from one level of media are controlled and censored by the government at this level. Thus it creates another domestic boomerang effect but it does not require the involvement of international media coverage.

When the local resisters in authoritarian China focus more on low politics, they consciously align themselves with the official ideology as a strategy of response to the undesired frames in the media ecosystem, and thus can create opportunities for the internal negotiation with the authority. But when movement actors' claims target the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime and address the oppositional ideology, their media strategies are adversarial and contentious. Although alignment with the official ideology is effective to reach agreement with the government in the short term, the compromise of this strategy is the lessened possibility of generating alternative discourses in the long term.

This research comments on resistance in authoritarian politics incorporating the perspective of the media ecosystem. Although the supportive nature or cooperative tactics have been discussed in the body of literature on Chinese politics (O'Brien and Li, 2006), few systematically examine these non-adversarial strategies particularly in the mediated spaces. No matter whether the resisters truly believe in the official ideologies or the non-adversarial frames are simply their tactics, the highly contested media environment has complicated the current debate on contentious politics. On the one hand, radical, spectacular, physical confrontations

may gain media visibility, but on the other hand, discursively, non-adversarial frames may help them gain legitimacy in the media system where the state still plays a large role.

Existing studies have shown how Chinese local resisters gain visibility through new information communication technologies (Yang, 2008). However, few studies pay attention to their challenges in the media space after gaining visibility. Conceptualizing the media sphere as a power-laden space, where narratives are contested and transformed by hegemonic powers (Gitlin, 1980), this thesis examined how resisters strategically produce their own frames and confront challenges in media system.

This research contextualized the debate about the impact of new media technologies on democratization in Chinese contentious politics and avoids a techno-determinist view. If we only look at prominent activists' use of the Internet, such as Ai Weiwei's online documentary production against the repressive regime, we lose the bigger picture where their tactics are situated. Creative media production circulated in the transnational information network have their merits of generating greater democratic discourses, but complicated filtering systems by the state have blocked these voices from being heard by the wider domestic audience. Local resisters who claim their rights use the technologies distinctively from these renowned dissidents. Their supportive frames embedded in the media forms might not be as discursively democratic; however, technological empowerment for local resisters has contributed to the political outcomes of their protests.

Lastly, this research built on the body of literature on multi-relational dynamic approach in social movement theories. The paradigm shift from the structuralist tradition to relational dynamics can be found in social movement studies. The political processes, political opportunity structures, and resource mobilization theories developed primarily in 1970s have been

challenged by theories focusing on other factors such as historically accumulated culture and multi-interactions of institutions. This article adopts this perspective and examines the dynamics both within the movement and the interactions with different stakeholders. Instead of proposing a universal framework, this research discovers the mechanisms of the processes through resistors' media practices, dynamic interactions and the cultural backgrounds.

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Appendix

1. Semi-Structured Interview Guide for NGO practitioners and activists of social movements
 - 1 What types of media did you use in the process of your actions?
 - 2 Why do you choose to use these types of media?
 - 3 What are the effects of the media when your story gets out?
 - 4 How do you find the attention you get through the media?
 - 5 If you contacted newspapers, or other traditional media organizations, did they come here and report?
 - 6 How did you interact with reporters?
 - 7 Do you find the story from the media is what you want to say?
 - 8 If not, did you have a second round of interactions with the reporters to express your opinions?
 - 9 Did you set up any social media accounts to spread the information?
 - 10 What choices did you make to select what to get out or not to get out?
 - 11 Did local governmental officials have any responses when the information was disseminated?
 - 12 Is there a difference of their responses to the social media vs traditional media?
 - 13 How do you find the effect of micro-blogging in your practices?
 - 14 Would you adopt another media strategy if you could have another chance? Why?
 - 15 Do you have members particularly in charge of the media?
 - 16 To what extent do you think the media have played a role in the success of your movement?
 - 17 Do you find the social media is easier to get out of control?

2. A website that showcases various types of media practices in company with this thesis

write-up: hiddenactivism.wordpress.com