

FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENTS TO CONTENTIOUS POLITICS
A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW
ACROSS THE U.S. AND CHINA

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts
in the Department of Sociology,
Indiana University

May 2013

Accepted by the Faculty of Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I owe my deepest gratitude to my professor, advisor, and friend, Dr. Peter Seybold. I have been taking his classes for four semesters, which gave me much inspiration. Without his continuous support, enthusiasm, and mentorship during my studies at Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis, this work would not have been completed.

I am also very grateful to my committee member, Dr. Najja Modibo for his help and suggestions. I have been working for him as a research assistant, and whenever there is a schedule conflict between his work and my thesis, he always gives a priority to my thesis and provides scope for my study.

I also owe my gratitude to Dr. Wan-Ning Bao, she gave me a sense of home when I first came to IUPUI, helping me become accustomed to the life of America. I also learned a lot from her as a research assistant, which will benefit my future study.

Many thanks go to Dr. Carrie Foote for her friendly helps and patience in dealing with my questions and problems during my time at IUPUI.

I would also like to thank the students such as Brandon Mouser and Zhao Liu in the Department of Sociology for being welcoming, non-judgmental, patient, and making my studying and my life very enjoyable.

ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a critical literature review on the studies of social movements and contentious politics in the U.S. and China. Thanks to theories of contentious politics, we can analyze the studies of America's social movements and China's collective actions in the same "frame." By making a comparison, this thesis tries to construct a theoretical dialogue between the studies across both countries. At the same time, it criticizes over-generalizing the mode "democratic-nondemocratic" in analysis of repertoires of contentious politics and downplaying capitalism's role in the social movements. From the various empirical studies in both countries, this thesis argues that a generalization should be based on the diversity of this realm, not just from the western perspective.

Peter J. Seybold, Ph.D., Chair

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

In today's world characterized with increasing inequalities, the slogan "we are the 99%" can best stand for our times. Social movements play an important role in America's social change. Beginning on September 2011, Occupy Wall Street became a new social movement that fights against 1% of people's greed and corruption. Nevertheless, as a newly social phenomenon, there are a few sociological studies about it except in news reports. "We tried to vote change, and that wasn't good enough. We've got to shout change"¹ reported Andy Krow, this sentence stands for the simmering disappointment with the president. Although until now, we have not seen the clear outcomes of social changes, it should not be denied that this movement is rooted in the protesting history since 19 century's Abolitionist movement. The difference is that the society has gone through great changes since 1970s, for example, a declining of middle class (Perrucci and Wysong 2003: 50).

On the other side of the earth, China has witnessed with increasing the frequency the influence of protest movements. Parallel with the economic growth is the great inequality in China. Since 1990s, "the government deepened the reform to include urban areas, which altered the trend in urban economic development. In turn, it contributes to the divergence in the growth rate between the rural and urban areas in the following year, and therefore, causes an upward trend in the rural-urban inequality" (Ho and Li 2007). When it comes to social movements, there is no nationwide movement like what happened in the U.S. Due to varied folk customs and regional uniqueness, "social movements" in

¹ <http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/10/occupy-wall-street-barack-obama>

China seem more complicated, or maybe they cannot be defined as social movement in most cases. At most, they can be seen as the expression of interests. However, considering what China has gone through in the 30 years since the 1980s, we should not underestimate the importance of these collective resistances in China. As Perry and Selden state in their book *Chinese Society, Change, Conflict and Resistance*, “it is commonly asserted that despite far-reaching economic and social reform. China’s political system remains frozen,” (Perry and Selden 2003: 6), in other words, the Communist party-state remains basically intact in a market economy (Perry and Goldenman 2007: 3), and “resistance movements are for the most part small, local and isolated from one another, lacking interconnective ideological and organizational bonds” (Perry and Selden 2003: 17). Further, Solinger points out that “the central dilemma of the present reform is this; the paternalistic state apparatus derives its power and maintain its place as crucial legitimating symbol only to the extent that it continues to fulfill paternalistic functions” (Soligner 1993: 154). All in all, the context of collective resistance in China is very different from the western world.

Nevertheless, thanks to contentious politics, we can analyze the studies of American’s and China’s social movements in the same “frame”. To better understand contentious politics, we can trace it to the article *To Map Contentious Politics* written by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly who are not only the icons of political process theory of social movements but also the “founders” of the concept of contentious politics. In the article, the authors argue that “we concentrate on dominant-subordinate relations based on the hypothesis that contention involving substantial inequality among protagonists and has

distinctive general features that bond social movements to revolutions, rebellion and bottom-up nationalisms” (McAdam, et al. 1996). The authors try all means to break up the boundaries of artificial classification of the kinds of contention and produce a synthesis of available research across the various subfields germane to their concerns, they try to use the same concept and method to analyze the inner logic of these collective actions, which can be seen as an important contribution to academia. In addition, studying across the U.S. and China is also a good case that sheds light on how popular protests are changing in the context of the age of globalization.

Thesis Objective

This thesis tries to compare similarities and differences of contentious politics between the U.S. and China. To be more specific, it compares the repertoires, mechanisms and the social structure behind it. However, due to the limited skill and time, this thesis places more emphasis on peasants’ collective resistances in terms of contentious politics in China. By synthesizing literatures about both countries’ collective resistances and social movements, this thesis hopes to shape a new understanding about contentious politics. We can see that by analyzing different countries’, Tilly and Tarrow (2007: 161) reach a conclusion that “similar mechanisms and processes operate across the whole range of contentious politics.” However, this thesis argues that they may make an over-generalization mistake. The mechanism and repertoires of collective resistances in China, meeting the definition of contentious politics, have a different “face.” Therefore, this thesis tries to prove that there is a diversity of repertoires and mechanisms in contentious politics. Further, this leads inevitably to an analysis of the social structure behind

repertoires. As for social movements in U.S., this thesis compares McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's works with other scholars who study social movements in U.S., trying to emphasize the importance of capitalism or corporate power in contentious politics. Also, this thesis will analyze the role of state in two countries to furnish our understandings of contentious politics.

Theda Skocpol's famous argument "Bringing the state back in" emphasized the importance of state as an actor, i.e., the relative autonomies of the state. When analyzing the autonomies of state, Skocpol (1979: 27) in her book *States and Social Revolution*, points out that "a structure with logic and interests of its own not necessary equivalent to, or fused with, the interests of dominant class in society or the full set of member groups in polity." She analyzes the role of state in the context of revolutions in Russia, France and China. In this thesis, state, along with other "variables" like legal system, economic systems, media, and so on, are analyzed and synthesized as the social structure. However, this study will by no means make an overall comparison of the two countries. Placing social movements and collective resistances and their particular dynamics analytically within the universe of contention is a central goal of this thesis. By doing this, we can build a theoretical dialogue between studies of contentious politics in the U.S. and China, and see the broad outline of contentious politics more clearly. I hope this study can be a critical complement to the study of contentious politics.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Relative Deprivation Theory

Before further analyzing social movements and contentious politics, we need to do a spectrum of social movements which have many things to do with contentious politics, even though the two things are not necessarily equal to each other.

Gurr (1970), in his book *Why Men Rebel*, analyzed the concept----relative deprivation in order to understand collective violence. Gurr argues that “Relative deprivation is defined as actors’ perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their values capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightful entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping” (Gurr 1970: 24). Gurr further classified three patterns of relative deprivation; he referred to these patterns as “disequilibrium.” “Three distinct patterns of disequilibrium can be specified: decremental deprivation, in which a group’s value expectations remain relatively constant but value capabilities are perceived to decline; aspirational deprivation, in which capabilities remain relatively static while expectations increase or intensify; the progressive deprivation, in which expectations, in which there is a substantial and simultaneous increase in expectations and decrease in capabilities” (Gurr 1970: 46). “Frustration-aggression” relationship is the center of his analysis.

Discontent or anger is the essential variable in Gurr’s analysis. According to Gurr, channeling discontent into so-called political violence depends on the intensity and scope

of relative deprivation, justification for political violence, dissident control and other social factors (Gurr 1970: 360). As for Gurr, apparently he sees social movements as a negative phenomenon in society. The most frequent word in his book is “violence.” Nevertheless, this theory still has many limitations. For example, social psychology contributes a lot to Gurr’s theory, but this theory overlooks other outer factors that may be indispensable to social movements such as organization, resources or good opportunities. In addition, it is hard to generalize that all people join in social movements, protesting on the street because of the feeling of relative deprivation.

Rational Choice Theory

The icon of rational choice theory is Mancur Olson whose concern is “free-riding” problem. At first, we should understand “collective or public goods,” which can stand for any goods that provides benefits to more than one individual. “Olson’s concern was the provision of goods or services that provides benefits to multiple individuals, even those who do not participate in their provision” (Heckelman and Coates 2003: 2). There are several Olson’s arguments: when actors benefit from collective goods, they are likely to free ride; large group are more likely to fail than smaller ones; group members who receive larger benefits are more likely to contribute than group member who receive smaller benefits; groups with asymmetric benefits are more likely to succeed than groups with symmetric benefits (Heckelman and Coates 2003: 18). When it comes to large group problem, “Olson's central thesis is that rational, self-interested individuals will not act in large groups to further their common or shared interests unless they are induced to do so by coercion or by some separate and selective incentives. This challenges the ‘traditional

theory of groups' which holds that groups of people having common interests will cooperate in pursuing those shared interests" (Warner and Havens 1967).

Rational choice theory brought analysis of social movements to a rational model. Zhao (2006) speaks highly of "the theory of free-riding," he argues that "Olson's free rider problem is important because it captures the central activity of human society-----the pursuing of public goods, and one of the most important variable that determine whether or not a public good will actually be delivered-----population size." However, rational choice theory seems to emphasize the individual too much and materials, which are criticized by other scholars.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory is also a challenge to Gurr's theory. In other words, it is not necessary that frustrations or grievances can lead to social movements. Sometimes, there is always enough discontent but there is no social movement. According to McCarthy and Zald (1977), "study of the aggregation of resources (money and labor) is crucial to understanding of social movement activity. Because resources are necessary for engagement in social conflict, they must be aggregated for collective purposes." There are also other important arguments. For example, to mobilize resources, professional organizations are required in the process of social movements and resources in turn decide whether or not social movement organizations can achieve their targets. In addition, in accounting for a movement's successes or failures there is an explicit recognition of crucial importance of involvement on the part of individuals and

organizations from outside the collectivity which a social movement represents. Resources are important also because there is sensitivity to the importance of costs and rewards in explaining individual and organizational involvement. “Fundamentally, the resource mobilization approach views social process as the aggregation and disaggregation, orientation and disorientation of human and material resources” (Marwell 1981). In the end of the article *Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory*, the authors mention that “the resource mobilization model we have described here emphasize the interaction between resource availability, the preexisting organization of preference structures, and entrepreneurial attempts to meet preferences demands” (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Resource mobilization theory, at some extent, can be seen as development of Olson’s theory, and it does contribute a lot to understanding social movements since it bring states and authorities into analyses of social movements. However the Resources Mobilization Theory still seems to put too much emphasis on an instrumental model to analyze social movements, while although the authors hope that the theory can be applied more generally, to what extent the theory can be applied to other nonwestern countries is dubious at best. It even cannot explain the phenomenon like Occupying Wall Street which is just initiated by ordinary American people.

Framing Theory

Framing theory tries to make a balance between social psychological and organizational factors. It emphasizes the “solidarity” in the social movements. In the article *Frame*

Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation, Snow and Rochford (1986) used the concept frame alignment to refer to the linkage of individual and social movements' interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and social movement organizations' activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary. Therefore, not like the puppet in the hands of social movement organizations, the participants of social movements also have their own autonomies. Another important point to illustrate the meaning of framing is domain-specific transformation. domain here is a broad concept that includes a variety of life such as social relationships, consumption patterns and social status. Domain-specific transformation frequently appear to be a necessary condition for participation in movements that seek dramatic changes in the status, treatment, or activity of a category of people (Snow and Rochford 1986).

We can see that Framing theory puts social movements into a context of subjective understanding when compared with the Resources Mobilization theory which analyzes social movements in a instrumental model. I believe that maybe it can be seen as a tug between positivism and anti-positivism.

Political Process Theory

As opponents of the theories that emphasize resources and rational choices in social movements, scholars of political process theory believe political context is crucial to understanding social movements and the notion of political opportunities structure becomes fashionable in the analysis of social movements. Political process theory also

emphasizes the mobilization of social movements, which is decided by the political opportunities structure. The challengers' decisions and tactics are seen as the responses to the political opportunities. The good example to illustrate it is the article *New Social Movement and Political Opportunities in Western Europe*, Kriesi and the others used four different countries to explain the relationship between general political context (states) and challengers' strategies. It classifies states as two kinds: strong state and weak state, and "the internal structure of the state institutions, the degree of their internal coherence or fragmentation-----is thought to determine the overall strength or weakness of the state (McAdam and Snow 2010: 73). They also mention that prevailing strategies with respect to challengers are either exclusive (repressive, confrontative, polarizing) or integrative (facilitative, cooperative, assimilative). By combining the distinction between strong and weak states with the distinction between exclusive and integrative dominant strategies, the authors arrived at four countries' (France, Germany, Switzerland and Netherlands) distinct general setting for dealing with challengers. As McAdam (1983) suggested, "the key challenge confronting insurgents, then, is to devise some way to overcome the basic powerlessness that has confined them to a position of institutionalized political impotence" (McAdam and Snow 2010: 479).

Political process theory mainly has two limitations: the first one is that it put too much emphasis on states which are seen as the "authority," while it overlooks other factors that form social structure, for example, the capitalism. The other limitation is that political process theory still sees social movements as a passive respondent to the institutional

systems. Although the latter contentious politics is still closely linked to politics, it also emphasizes the contentious interaction.

CHAPTER THREE: PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS AND LIMITATIONS

To begin with, it is necessary to recognize the limitations of this thesis. The limitations can be seen as a sacrifice for taking a stand, because this thesis will not touch on any studies related to June Fourth Movements (1989 student movements) in China and the so-called Falun gong movement. When it comes to June Fourth Movements, the oversea Chinese scholars and western scholars always use the word “massacre” to describe it, because they take it for granted that the Communist Party is autocratic and it is reasonable to believe that a massacre took place. However wiki leaked a message last year that there was no massacre on the Tiananmen Square and the U.S. government knew that in 1989.² The leaked cables had already confirmed that although the army entered the square, there was no mass fire into the crowd of students, while Chinese soldiers opened fire on protesters outside the center of Beijing, as they fought their way towards the square from the west of the city. As such, it becomes a controversial issue so I exclude it from my study. As for Falun Gong, anyone who has basic knowledge will know its nature, which has no difference with other heresies in the world. I believe there is no need to do further analysis.

It is no doubt that this thesis will focus on the theories of contentious politics and the specific empirical studies about it. At the same time, attention will be given to other studies about it in the U.S. and China to analyze socio-structural variables associated with social movements and contentious politics.

² <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/wikileaks/8555142/Wikileaks-no-bloodshed-inside-Tiananmen-Square-cables-claim.html>

Social Movement and Contentious Politics

In the first Chapter of *Contentious Politics*, the authors make a differentiation between contentious politics and social movements. Social movements are defined as “a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, network, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 8). While in the book *Dynamics of Contention*, the author argues that “By contentious politics we mean: episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claim, or a party to the claim and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants” (McAdam, et al. 2001: 5). Thus said, at some extent, contentious politics is the overlap of politics and social movements because some social movements don’t involve politics and most politics also cannot be seen as “contentious,” to the effect that the social movements or collective actions are only part of contentious politics. As the authors suggest, most forms of contentious politics are not social movements. The best examples are what happened in China since 1990s. Nevertheless, the importance of contentious politics lies in the fact that there are protest incidents happening, which bear the characteristics of contentious politics, not only in the western world, but also in China, exerting an important influence on politics and everyday lives of ordinary people.

Admittedly there is difference between social movements and contentious politics, but they also intersect with many of the same concepts and logics in the works of the scholars

of contentious politics. For instance, in the Chapter 2 of *Social Movement, 1768-2008*, the first two revisited arguments are “from their eighteenth-century origins onward, social movements have proceeded not as solo performances but as a interactive campaigns; social movements combine three kinds of claim: program, identity and standing.” “The struggle we have witnessed always featured programs of political change, but they also include claims that the proponents of those program enjoyed the capacity for autonomous, effective action and that participants had the political standing to speak publicly on the issues at hand” (Tilly and Wood 2009: 35). On the other hand, in the *Contentious Politics*, Tilly and Tarrow also mention that collective claims fall into three categories: identity, standing and program. Identity declare that an actor exists; standing claims say that the actor belongs to an established category within the regime and therefore deserves the rights and respect that members of that category receive; program claims call for their objects to act in a certain way. The authors further argue that “claims and counterclaims do not occur randomly; they take their shape from surrounding regimes, cultures, and interaction. They respond to a regime’s opportunities, threats, and constraints (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 81-83). We can see that they do bear similar meaning and explaining, for example, the interaction is emphasized by both analyses.

Another concept that needs to be illustrated to lay foundation for further analysis is “political opportunity structure.” This thesis would like to use the Tarrow’s analysis of it, after synthesizing the former understanding of political opportunity structure, he argues that “the main variables in most models of the structures of political opportunity are: the degree of openness or of closure of the polity; the stability or instability of political

alignments; the presence or absence of allies and support groups; divisions within the elite or its tolerance for protest; and the policy-making capacity of the government” (Tarrow 1988). After elaborating on these important concepts of contentious politics, latter parts of this thesis will compare specific empirical research of the U.S. and China in regards to the repertoires of contention and its connection to the social structures.

CHAPTER FOUR: REPERTOIRES AND MECHANISM

“Contentious performances sometimes clump into repertoires of claim making routines that apply to the same claimant-object pairs: bosses and workers, peasants and landlords, rival nationalist factions, and many more” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 16). “As the term repertoire suggests, once-constructed strategies tend to persist because they become imprinted in cultural memory and habit, because they are reiterated by the organizations and leaders formed in the past conflicts, and because strategies are shaped and constrained by the rules promulgated in response to earlier conflicts” (Piven 2006: 35). Tilly and Tarrow (2007) states that “by mechanism, we mean a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 29). By making an analogy with biologists’ studies on reproduction, the authors argue that we should disaggregate a familiar process and correlate outputs with inputs. The following analysis holds the same logic.

Disruptive or Institutionalized: Two kinds of Repertoires

Tarrow (1998) states that “collective action can take many forms-----brief or sustained, institutionalized or disruptive, humdrum or dramatic, on the part of constituted groups acting in the name of goals that would hardly raise an eyebrow” (Tarrow 1998: 3). As he summarized, there are three kinds of collective action: violence, convention and disruption, the convention form is also the source of institutionalization (Tarrow 1998: 104). The logic of repertoires in the United States, as Tilly and Tarrow summarized, is occupying public space so as to disrupt routines and gain media attention (Tilly and

Tarrow 2007: 20), while “forms of confrontation are themselves institutionalized as authorities learn to tolerate them or facilitate their use. To win concession that supporters demand or authorities proffer, leaders move from confrontation to cooperation.” (Tarrow 1998: 101).

Piven (2006), in her book *Challenging the Authority*, did a well-rounded work in analyzing the “disruptive power.” She uses the term disruption “in a specific way to denote the leverage that results from the breakdown of institutionally regulated cooperation” (Piven 2006: 21). Although agricultural laborers and industrial workers are powerless compared with the landowners and industrial capitalists, they have the power to disrupt a pattern of ongoing cooperation that depends on their continuing contributions; the result of it may be the reforms to conciliate the disruptors, or the more merciless way to suppress them.

In Chapter 4, Piven (2006) explains “disruptive power” by examining abolitionism movements. Abolitionism made different groups converge together. One of the important sectors is religion; accompanying the development of abolitionism is a religious revival movement. Schisms happened in the main Protestant denominations. Next, the incendiary writings and speeches of abolitionism, Garrison’s *Liberator*, the Under-ground Railway and John Brown, all these brought a sectional conflict that made the compromise impossible. Paralleled with the “unity” of abolitionists was the conflict between the Northern and Southern elites. Although facing increasing pressure from abolitionists, the southern congressmen fought back with the “gag rule” and new Fugitive Slave Law. At

the same time, the emergence of the American Party beefed up the power of the North. In the end, Kansas was declared to be a free state, and Lincoln was elected as President. The only strategy southern elites can take is ordinances of secession, and the Civil War broke out. In the end of Chapter 4, the author pointed out the reason the abolitionists won is they spilt the major party. In Chapter 5, when comparing abolitionists with late nineteenth-century protests, Piven argues that the key to victory of the abolitionists was that they threaten the electoral fragmentation.

Not coincidentally, David and others (1998), put forward a similar analysis about disrupting the “quotidian,” which means the take-for-granted routines of everyday life. They try to clarify a link between quotidian disruption and movement emergence. Although, there are some differences between Piven and David. For example, David analyzes from an angle of community and citizen, while Piven analyzes disruption with electoral politics in America. Both maintain the network or systems, which play an important role in social movements. David and others argue that “we assume that they are variously embedded in social networks and bonds of solidarity, or at least situated structurally such that they are available for mobilization, as in the case of the homeless” (David, et al 1998). As for Piven, the first factor that makes disruption, power activation is how people understand the social relations in which they are enmeshed. Also the ability of effective mobilization of disruptive power is emphasized. However, Piven’s intention is to analyze the interplay between disrupting power and politics, or electoral politics, not just the social movements per se. “It was the potential for disruption inherent

in their use of noninstitutionalized forms of political action that was to prove decisive” (McAdam 1983).

However, according to other scholars, there is a trend of institutionalization of movements. As Tarrow suggests, “like the strike, the demonstration began as a disruptive direct action that was eventually institutionalized” (Tarrow 1998: 100). This thesis would like to take the McCarthy and McPhail’s (1998) article *The Institutionalization of Protest in the United States* to further analyze the institutionalized protest.

The first idea that needs to be pointed out is Public Order Management System (POMS), which is defined as “the more or less elaborated, more or less permanent organizational forms, their guiding policies and programs, technologies, and standard policing practices that are designed by authorities for supervising protesters’ access to public space and managing them in that space” (McCarthy and McPhail 1998: 91). The authors point out specific restriction on time, place and manner of protest movements. In addition, the transformation of protest policing is also a key factor that makes the protest movements institutionalized, no tolerance on disruption, minimal communication between police and protesters, increasing arrests and using force towards violation of law, all these require the professional social movement organization to offset the pressure from police (McCarthy and McPhail 1998: 96-101), and “POMS serve to channel protest in several ways beyond its disruptiveness. The channeling of place occurs at two distinct levels. Within the management systems themselves, some locations in the public forum are off-

limits to protesters, but this is a comparatively inconsequential restriction of protest” (McCarthy and McPhail 1998: 109).

From the book *Occupying Wall Street*, we can also see what institutionalization happened to today’s American social movements.

“They passed out a notice from Brookfield Properties announcing a planned cleaning of the park at 7 a.m., the following day, October 14, and a new set of park rules. Under the new rules the use of tarps and sleeping bags was expressly prohibited, as were tents” (Writers for 99% 2011: 99).

The occupying people were aware of the fact that cleaning of the park was a way to kick them out. To defend themselves, they needed to clean the park. Many social movements organization such as People Meeting, Sanitation Working Group and Legal Working Group, combining with the third parties like National Lawyers Guild and New York City unions, successfully defended themselves by cleaning up the whole park, and postponed official cleaning. Then, the people began to march to the heart of Wall Street. According to Writers for 99%, “police struggle to keep protesters on the sidewalks, an inability to manage the situation that was only punctuated by the question that chanters posed to any who would hear: ‘whose streets?’-----along with its corresponding, booming response, ‘Our street!’” (Writers for 99% 2011: 106), but police still arrested the advancing front of protesters who tried to gain access to New York Stock Exchange, and others were chased by the police (Writers for 99% 2011: 106-107).

Based on the experience of Occupying Wall Street, we can see that although the protest “succeeded” as they believed, the process of institutionalization lied in the interaction between protests and authority. While, it was not a pure “institutionalized” movement, if so, there would be no arrests or injuries. Therefore, this thesis argues that institutionalized or disruptive repertoires can be seen as “ideal type,” if we just concentrate on repertoires per se, in other words, the practical social movements are the combinations of both, sometimes there even are violent repertoires.

In effect, Tilly and Tarrow (2007) have specified social movement repertoire as “creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions public meeting; solemn procession; vigils; rallies; demonstrations; petition drives; statements to and in public media; pamphleteering” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 120). Tilly and Tarrow (2007), Tilly and Wood (2009) put forward the concept “WUNC,” which means worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment, movement participants make concerted public representations of their worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment on the part of themselves (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 119-120, Tilly and Wood 2009: 4-5). All these constitute the main characteristics of social movements’ repertoires in the U.S. As for other mechanisms of social movements and contentious politics, they will be compared with the following literature reviews of that in China.

Rightful Resistances and Struggle by Law

As Tilly and Tarrow suggest, the mode of “contained contention-----democratic regimes, transgressive contention-----undemocratic regimes” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 60-61).

However, violent repertoires, if any, are not the mainstream of both countries, although China is not a democratic country like America. Rightful resistance was put forward by O'Brien and Li as "a form of popular contention that operates near the boundary of authorized channels, employs the rhetoric, and commitments of the powerful to curb the exercise of power, hinges on locating and exploiting divisions within the state, and relies on mobilizing support from the wider public" (O'Brien and Li 2006: 2), and neither transgressive nor contained forms of claims characterize rightful resistance (O'Brien and Li 2006: 51).

The Chinese peasants' contention against local authorities is called rightful resistance, which was first put forward by O'Brien and Li. Rightful resistance is defined as a form of contentious politics mainly relying on reform-minded allies at the central government who use innovative but still conventional tactics of lodging complaints, filing petitions, and imposing pressures to enact regulations to defy corrupt local authorities (Suh 2007). O'Brien and Li's article *Suing the Local State: Administrative Litigation in Rural China* is a good example to illustrate it. The author analyzes how peasants use Administrative Litigation Law against local officials who mistreat villagers in illegal ways. These suits, particularly collective ones, are often preceded, accompanied or followed by non-judicial mass action, such as joint letter-writing, sending delegations to government compounds or media outlets, and group appeals to Party authorities or People's Congress. The authors depict a whole process of this kind of contention: gaining access to court, after a suit is filed, mobilizing support and outcomes. In the phase of gaining access to court, we can see aggrieved villagers have developed a number of techniques to circumvent

information blockades because local officials are afraid that villagers have the knowledge of law and central government's policies which will make villagers "hard to be governed." And it is tough to persuade a court to accept a case due to local Party Committees' intervention, and local authorities try to use the overlap between the Party and government because of the Party's immunity to deflect lawsuits. Villagers, in turn, may turn to dramatic acts like kneeling before a judge when they submit their complaints concerning financial burdens. The struggles between villagers and local authorities even become more severe after a suit is filed. When facing authorities' intervening in the legal process, dictating a verdict, finding villagers' troubles outside court or even committing perjury in the court, the villagers turn to mobilize supports by appealing to higher courts and seeking a helping hand from sympathetic leaders. The outcomes of these are varied, and administrative litigation may enlarge the still small bundle of rights that villagers have (O'Brien and Li 2004).

Before further analyzing the "struggle by law," we need to emphasize two similarities of the two forms of contention, which can also be seen as the difference between its counterparts in America. At first, "strictly speaking, there is no law that allows Chinese citizens to publicize Party policies and state laws. But this is an act whose correctness no one can legitimately challenge" (O'Brien and Li 2006: 83). As for Yu (2004), one of the repertoires of struggling by law is publicizing Party policies or documents to tell other peasants that local government is acting illegally. In addition, "trusting the center and blaming lower levels" (O'Brien and Li 2006: 42) is another similarity. Yu points out that "what the upper echelon or central government bestows still counts as one form of their

‘interest.’ Second, these interests are infringed upon at the basic level of government, and require considered action in order to protect” (Yu 2006: 145).

Nevertheless, according to Yu (2004), struggle by law demonstrates a higher level of political activism and is typically organized. Farmers have started to move from lodging complaints and seeking favorable outside intervention to relying on their own organization in order to defend their rights, which has important implications for political reforms and development in rural China. In the article *An Interpretation Frame for Farmers’ Defending Right in Contemporary China*, he states that struggling by law is a way that directly challenges the object, while rightful resistance is to resort to the legislator or higher authority which is the subject of achieving the goal of contention. The repertoires vary from group petitions, resisting collection, sit-ins and demonstrations. Compared with group petitions of rightful resistances, the group petitions of struggling by law are more organized and mobilized by the contentious elites who play an important role in the communications and networks of the whole struggle.

Based on his empirical study of Hengyang County’s resistance movement, Yu (2006) argues that there is an emerging political awareness of peasants in China, for example, according to Yu, “to do things according to Party policy,” “not doing this for myself,” and “thinking about the mass” are the most frequent phrases used by contentious elites. He introduced his interviews of many contentious elites. Their demands are not about money but have to do with political rehabilitation. And “the peasants use the law as a kind of weapon in the resistance movement to protect their rights and when determining

the bounds of their actions. Sometimes they adopt blurred tactics, like ‘playing Ping-Pong to hit the corner of the table’ or ‘doing a high-wire act’” (Yu 2006: 152). Behind all these is the commitment to the contentious movements, just like Yu’s interviews with Hong Jifa, one of the contentious elites. Hong Jifa said,

“After I told my wife about my work to organize everybody to alleviate the burdens of peasants, she advised me not to do it; alleviating their burdens is not for you alone, your money will be reduced.....I am sacrificing all of my interests, including the financial damages I suffered. So why do I still want to appeal to the authorities? Because I have been influenced by Mao Zedong’s thought.....therefore I will uphold justice for everybody” (Yu 2006: 154-155).

Tilly and Tarrow (2007) cite McCarthy and Zald’s phrase “conscience constituent” to illustrate the mobilization of contentious movements. According to Tilly and Tarrow, “by this term, McCarthy and Zald mean those who support another group or a cause-----not because they would profit if its claim were realized, but out of sympathy, solidarity, or ideological commitment” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 91). We can see beside the character of well-organized protests, Yu’s contentious movements share the “commitment” with the movements in America. Commitment is characterized as resistance to repression, ostentatious sacrifice and subscription (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 91).

In addition to the increasing political awareness, organized protest movements like struggling by law share many other similarities with the social movements in America. In other words, Yu depict a more westernized picture of contentious politics compared with the studies of O’Brien and Li. McCarthy and Zald (1973) define the professional social movements as “a leadership that devotes full time to the movement, a very small or

nonexistent membership base or a thesis membership, attempts to impart the image of ‘speaking for a potential constituency and attempts to influence policy toward that same constituency’ (McCarthy and Zald 1973: 20), and “institutionalization involves a shift from the direct participation of a movement’s constituency to delegation to professional organizers” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 130). Yu argues that struggling by law has a number of contentious elites who are the representatives of peasants and play vital roles in mobilizations and making claims, and it also has an explicit principle or policies of Central government, a division of work among members of protesters, a decision mechanism like People Meeting in Occupying Wall Street, a stimulating binding mechanism (Yu 2004). The collective actions of peasants become more political in the name of legal rights and rights of citizens. “We see that predicting the future of twenty-first-century social movements depends heavily on expectations concerning future democratization or democratization” (Tilly and Wood 2009: 151).

However, to what extent Yu’s study reflects the “real pictures” of contentious politics in China still needs to be discussed, for the reasons that many Chinese scholars also put forward some different suggestions toward peasants’ contentions based on their own empirical studies. Most of them can be seen as the localization of the study of contentious politics in China, although they draw on the theories of western scholars when it is necessary. Generally speaking, their studies show the diversity of contentious repertoires and mechanisms. It is also the reason why we need a dialogue between studies of contentious politics in America and China. The next part of this thesis will further introduce other famous and typical studies of peasant collective actions.

The Diversity of Contentious Politics in China

In the book *Social Movement, 1768-2008*, Tilly and Wood (2009) suggest that contentious politics in China tends to be concentrated around six main issues that are tied to their context: in rural areas, the main issue is taxation and control over land. In urban areas, protests are often reactions to layoffs and cuts in pay and benefits. In ethnic minority regions, the main concerns are religious freedom, respect, and local autonomy. According to Tilly and Wood, the social movements in China with plenty of local color, the marches, sit-ins, and picketing clearly belonged to the international social movement repertoires and formed part of a sustained campaign to influence the government, express programming, identity, and standing claims (Tilly and Wood 2009: 109-110). However, the authors did not probe more into other contentious politics in China, which are not a form of social movements, especially in rural areas, which are so important because they are the places where a large number of contentious performances have been played. What's more, the underlying mechanisms also need to be discussed.

Rational peasants and emotional peasants

Ying (2007) argues that the grassroots actors constructed a very special group with unique goals and logic in their action by making a comparison with Yu's contentious elites. Prima facie, grassroots actors are similar to contentious elites with the characteristics of being better-educated and familiar with law and policies. In fact, these grassroots actors also consider their own situations, balancing the private and the public. When it comes to identities, according to Tilly and Tarrow, "political identities include boundaries, relations across the boundaries, relations within the us and within the them,

plus accumulated meaning assigned to the boundaries and relations” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 79), but grassroots actors have blurred political identities; they are peasants although they are called “elites,” which does not mean the real elites. After contentious bargaining, they just disappear among peasants.

Grassroots mobilization makes the mechanism of interest expression of the peasant group manifest flexibility on the methods of interest expression, dualism on the organization, and ambiguity on the political indirection. For example, ambiguity on political indirection is decided by the predicament of justification. Although these collective actions confront the authorities, the activists take the strategy of “stepping on the line but not crossing the line,” which is a way to prevent contention from causing negative effects for social order. In other words, the contentions should not be disruptive ones. Also, these grassroots activists know how to stop collective actions at a good time. In short, Ying shows a picture of rational peasants’ resistances.

However, in another article by Ying, *“Field of Qi” and the Occurring Mechanism of Mass Disturbances: A comparative study of two cases*, he also talks about “field of Qi,” a special expression of emotions of Chinese, which is important in understanding the mechanism of mass disturbances in China. Aminzade and McAdam (2001) argue that “we assume that all emotions have cognitive, temporal, and somatic dimensions. All emotions presuppose cognitions, but some emotions may highlight cognitions about ‘what is’ while others may emphasize moral aspirations and norms about ‘what should be’ or stress the counterfactual dimension of ‘what could be’” (Aminzade and McAdam

2001: 19). One of the two cases that Ying analyzed explains how a conflict between a temporal worker in a fruit market who declared he was a “cadre” and a peasant led to a disturbance in which thousands of protesters encompassed the district government building. The key point is the people’s anger (Qi) toward cadres in their everyday lives provoked by particular incidents and rumors. Obviously, the mass disturbances are different from social movements. The irrational resistances rise from the structural tension and the lack of social safety valves (Ying 2009).

Ethical contention and structural nets of power/interest

Wu Changqing (2010) contends that due to the influence from the concept of “rightful resistance,” the importance of the ethics may be ignored. According to Wu Changqing, ethical contention is an intemperate contention which cannot be explained by Ying’s “rational grassroots” perspective. Also, ethical contention is different from emotional resistances because it is not a temporal contention but a consistent one. His study is based on the field research in the west of Shandong province in China. The author introduces the experience of a contentious elite, who consistently sued the government, wrote letters to the minister and lodged complaints to upper governments. Ethical contention emphasizes that friends’ and relatives’ social networks exert an important influence on the contentious action from an ethical perspective. The author points out that some people like Shi challenge the authority not for their businesses but for their friends’ interests. From a tactical view, we cannot explain these “excessive” contentions.

On the other hand, Wu Yi (2007), based on a case study of gravel pit disputes, analyzes the dilemma of peasants’ interests in expression and contention with local governments.

The case is simple: there are many peasants' gravel pits in "A town", but the local government wanted to close these pits in the name of protecting the environment because government cannot "sell" the land around gravel pits if the gravel pits exist. The local government put forward a plan to give compensation to the peasants, but the peasants refused to receive it because they thought the compensation was not enough and the gravel pits' closing was put off. In the end, lodging complaints to Beijing became the last choice. After knowing that the peasants had gone to Beijing, the mayor of the local government and other cadres flew to Beijing immediately, coming directly to the State Bureau for letters and calls³ to stop the peasants, while the peasants did not go there because they wanted to exert pressure on local government by this action to make the local government give more concessions. Actually, it was a psychological war between the local government and the peasants. As for the peasants, they knew that they could not avoid the structural nets of power/interests in rural society in China. It is entirely possible that the peasants still need to deal with those officials in local government in the future, so it is important not to let the local government lose "face;" otherwise, the space for negotiation will shrink. As a result, the peasants were persuaded to come back, and the local government provided the peasants a good trip (Wu 2007).

According to Cai, "intervention from central government is not frequent" (Cai 2010: 115). From a case in Anhui province, three peasants' representatives appealed to the central government, whose instructions were ignored by local government, and peasants' leaders

³ A department of central government accommodates people who lodge complaints in Beijing, but it cannot solve problems directly

were arrested (Cai 2010: 117). Michelson's (2008) studies also emphasize that local governments play a more important role in solving peasants' contentious issues.

Nevertheless, in Wu Yi's case, the negotiation failed again. This time, the cadres failed to stop the peasants, who turned their complaint letters to the State Bureau for Letters and Calls immediately when they got to Beijing. When the peasants knew that the cadres also came to Beijing and hoped to talk to them like last time, there was no reaction from the cadres or the central government. The peasants could only go home. The electricity was cut off by the local government; the longer the logjam, the more the peasants would lose. Observing a sign of disintegration of the peasants' alliance, the local government put forward an instruction: the peasants who closed gravel pits early would get more benefits, while those who failed to close the gravel pits at deadline would be forced to close by the government and get nothing. It is not hard to see that the peasants' alliance disintegrated and the "problem" was solved (Wu 2007).

The concept of "Shi"-----a new explanatory framework

Dong (2010) argues that we can use the concept "Shi" to understand contentious politics in grassroots society in China, which is defined as the process of operating power and face, an invisible power based on opportunities, status and resources, etc. The author tries to integrate the former studies into his explanatory frame. The specific repertoires are laid out as perceiving Shi, creating Shi, lending or borrowing Shi and applying Shi, which are in the same right-safeguarding action (Dong 2010), Dong's article *Shi-Based Game: A New Explanatory Framework for Right- safeguarding Action in Grassroots Society* is a study that concentrated on the conflict between the peasants and coal masters in a village,

and the township government was involved as the third party. Perceiving Shi means knowing each other's power; in this case, the coal master become the weak side because the coal mine was facing the pressure of safe producing; creating Shi means making peasants' problem become the governments' problem, for example disseminating the rumor that the coal mine would pollute village's water. In addition, creating Shi includes threatening to lodge complaints to Beijing and slandering the mine masters. Even the identities as weak become a kind of repertoires to make contentions escalated (Dong 2008). Borrowing Shi is to borrow the powers of some contentious elites and social networks like media. Applying Shi is to find a good chance to lodge a complaint, for example during some festivals, or to stick to the important leaders, following the leaders all the time and pushing him or her to give a conclusion or instruction to the contentious issues (Dong 2010).

According to Dong, Ying's and Wu Yi's studies partly reflect the Shi-based game because they can explain the tactics of contentions in rural China. In addition, the author argues that O'Brian and Li's stand Yu's studies stand for the "openly script" for contention, while the "invisible script" is a game between the authority and the peasant, reflecting the power relationships in the rural China, which constructs a comparison to the social movements in the America.

A Concise Summary

From the review of studies of social movements and contentious politics in China and in the U.S., we can see that from the methodological perspective, most of studies in

American analyze social movements like civil right movements, except for the book *Occupying Wall Street*, which is written in narrative way and told the story of Occupying Street but does not concentrate on the analysis of the movement. Unlike *Occupying Wall Street*, other studies analyzes the mechanism or the repertoires in holistic way, the scholars are the “outsiders” of the whole movements, analyzing the organizations in the movement or telling the story of groups not individuals. On the other hand, most of studies of contentious politics in China are based on the scholars’ field study and interviews of some particular individuals, and each research is a different story.

Let’s come back to social movements and contentious collective action. Although. The mechanisms of contentious politics like brokerage or diffusion also exist in peasants’ contention in China, but when it comes to upward scale shift, China has no social movement since 1989. According to Tilly and Tarrow, upward scale shift “moves contention beyond its local origins, touches on the interests and values of new actors, involves a shift of venue to sites where contention may be more or less successful, and threaten other actors or entire regimes” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 95). The absence of upward scale shift is an empirical gap between the studies of both countries.

Furthermore, the “base” of social movements and contentious politics is crucial for us to understand not only the differences among case studies in China, but also the difference of repertoires and mechanisms of contentious politics between America and China. A variety of situations, the nature of conflicts, local customs and practices may explain these differences, and it is also important to make a classification of this realm, otherwise

we can only get the partial truth. Over-generalization risks overlooking the diversity of contentious politics.

CHAPTER FIVE: SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

Power Structure Analysis--An Integrated View

In the book *Contentious Politics*, the authors use the word regimes instead of social structure, which has stronger political colors and refers to government. Two variables for regimes are government capacity and the extent of democracy. As to the extent of democracy, in “both democratic and nondemocratic regimes, most people who engage in contentious politics see themselves responding to threats they perceive to their interests, their values, or their identities” (Tilly and Wood 2009: 58). Tilly (2006), in his book *Regimes and Repertoires*, also mentions the democracy and capacity of governments. In both books, the “power-holders” are implied to be government or political actors. However, this thesis believes we should expand the limits of the meaning of the word regime to better understand the context of contention, to be more specific, we can turn to the power structure analysis, which can be an integrated one.

Compared with China, America’s power structure seems more complicated. Mill (1956) argues that the phrase “ruling class” is not a good phrase because “class” is an economic term; “rule” a political one. “Changes in the American structure of power have generally come about by institutional shifts in the relative positions of the political, economic, and the military order” (Mills 1956: 269). Mills emphasizes the military’s influences on the operation; “it is the military that has benefited the most in its enhanced power” (Mills 1956: 276).

However, “power elite theory draws a picture of an entrenched, almost untouchable and relatively small groups who enjoy a significant concentration of power” (Glasberg and Shannon 2010: 30). This point is usually criticized by other scholars because it downplays the role of mass struggle in history. “On the one hand, there is the increased scale and centralization of the structure of decision; and, on the other, the increasingly narrow sorting out of men into milieu” (Mills 1956: 322).

Perrucci and Wysong (2003) analyze the corporations’ power, as they suggest, “most giant U.S. corporations are largely owned and controlled by a small number of superclass elites who are assisted by their credentialed-class allies” (Perrucci and Wysong 2003: 66). The authors argue the power of capitalism as follows:

“Institutional capitalism is a powerful and pervasive organizational force field. It dominates the economic, political, and cultural arenas, shapes ideas and perceptions on a wide array of nonbusiness activities, and helps conceal the power of large corporations in creating, maintaining, and legitimating the new class system” (Perrucci and Wysong 2003: 282).

This short paragraph lays out the power of capitalism, which also help us understand the following parts of media and education. In addition, today’s Occupy Wall Street is just a challenge to the ruling capitalism; therefore the analysis of it should not be without the background of capitalism structure.

Whether or not it is Mill’s opinion or Perrucci and Wysong’s opinion more close to the “truth,” we can conclude that reducing the “power-holders” to political actors is dubious at best, because this point fails to see what happens behind the “stage” in America.

Furthermore, the political system is a key point to understand the relationship between regimes or social structure and contention. Piven (2006) did good work on that when analyzing American social movements since the abolitionist movement. She argues that what political elites fear is the polarizations that will make winning a majority more difficult. The decentralization system makes parties ineffective; the author points out that “the majoritarian politics of a two-party system demands of politicians that they paste together unlikely coalitions, often in the face of a fractious and divided population, and these coalitions may be acutely susceptible to the divisions that results from the articulation of issues accompanying disruptive challenge” (Piven 2006: 60). Piven calls politics in America “dissensus politics.” The government is decentralized and fragmented, and so is the party. The elites’ strategy is simple-----trying to avoid conflict and maintaining the voter coalitions. In Piven’s opinion, it is not the political elites’, like FDR, subjective intention to call for the policies such as emergency relief and agricultural credit; it is something else that pushes all things to happen, “the something else was the rise of protest movements and the institutional disorder they threatened” (Piven 2006: 104). Holding it together is the target of the Democratic Party in the face of increasing demands of civil rights, environmental protection or women’s issues. Voter preference was by no means the main reason for these big bangs; it was the result of Democratic leaders’ responses to voters who were being activated by the protests. Combined with Piven’s analysis of disruptive power, her view of political structure of America can be seen as a challenge to the elite theory of power.

Capitalist state theories provide another angle to understand “state,” which is not controlled directly by the ruling class, or “state is ‘relatively autonomous’ from the individual competitive capitalist; the fundamental requirements of capital accumulation at the core of the capitalist political economy delimit the state’s range of discretion, not competitive individual capitalist” (Glasberg and Shannon 2010: 135). What’s more, this thesis suggests that this point can be understood with Foucault’s analysis of power, “he argued that there may be conflicts and rifts within the capitalist class (e.g., between large monopoly capitalists and small competitive business) that could interfere with the development of a unified preemptive message and thus with asserting their agenda” (Glasberg and Shannon 2010: 39). In short, with respect to the relationship between state and contentious politics, the state should not be seen as a static and holistic one.

China should be held to the same principle, although it seems to be a common knowledge that China is a party-state (Perry and Goldman 2007, Guo 2003 and Cai 2010). Guo (2003) calls it a “leadership-bureaucracy relationship,” “which is characterized by effective political control by the Party over the effective bureaucracy, both citizen and military, is the essence of the strong party-state in post-Mao China” (Guo 2003: 30). Not like the U.S., the private economic sector never becomes a political power not only in rural but also in urban China. With a sense of insecurity, entrepreneurial or capitalist elites actively seek alliance with the Party. Many of them even apply to join the Party motivated by self-interest or so-called serving people when they feel that they are “succeeded enough” (Guo 2003: 169-173).

However, Guo (2003) cites Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg's model of "fragmented authoritarianism," "the post-Mao bureaucracies at different levels have gained great power. Beijing's ability to oversee how policy is being implemented has declined" (Guo 2003: 21). That's the reason why it is also important to apply the "autonomy of state" to China as well. Here, we can replace the capitalist class with the cadre or bureaucratic elites. Understanding the difference or conflicts between the local and central governments is vital to analyzing the contentious politics in China, because it cultivates a particular political opportunity structure, which in turn will interact with the repertoire of contentious politics. For example, in Chen's (2007) study, there was once a disabled residents' protest movement for the right of using motorized tricycles in Y city. The protests used a slogan that "annoyed the city government since it publicly challenged its policy and implied that the provincial government did not agree with the city government's policy" (Perry and Goldman 2007: 259).

O'Brien and Li (2006), by citing other scholars' studies, prove that "it is a mistake to imagine that agencies always act in consort to oppose or support popular action" (O'Brien and Li 2006: 27), "the divide between the central government and its local representatives creates an opening for rightful resistance-----so long as the Center really means what it says" (O'Brien and Li 2006: 28). According to the authors, there are both phenomenon that local or grassroots level's misrepresentation and Center's efforts to rein in local offices, which makes the particular political opportunity structure for Chinese protestors (O'Brien and Li 2006: 28-30). Nevertheless, "the autonomy enjoyed by local government implies that they have great discretion in choosing the mode of response and

that successful resistance can be highly conditional because of the high threshold of intervention from the above” (Cai 2010: 194), and “local official’s abuse of power and corruption are anything but rare” (Cai 2010: 189). After all, China is still a strong state in the eyes of western scholars (Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

To sum up, we should take a dialectical view towards the structure and the agents of citizens’ resistances in the two countries. The repertoires and mechanisms of contention closely link with the social structures of the two countries, and interaction never stops. On the one hand, in America, despite the fact that the political opportunity structure is a good window to analyze contentious politics, it does not necessarily equate with power structure, which is more complicated than its counterpart in China. On the other hand, generally speaking, understanding the power structure of China, to a large extent, helps to explain the repertoires of collective resistance, which challenges Tilly and Tarrow’s conclusion about authoritarian states and the forms of resistance.

Legal System, the Indisputable Control Power

Friedman (1984), in his book *American Law: An Introduction* makes an analogy of the relationship between social movements and the legal system.

“When we look at the changes, it is clear that over the centuries the legal system has been carried along by great waves of social force. Social movements sweep across it with the strength of a mighty sea. The legal system may seem like a might warship to those on deck, but its power shrinks to nothing compared with that of the ocean it sails on and the wind and weather all about” (Friedman 1984: 255).

However, Friedman also emphasizes the dialectical relationship between the legal system and social changes. To social movements, the legal system is a structure (Friedman 1984: 257). A more specific study of legal control and social movements is Steven Barkan's article about southern civil rights movements in the U.S. Generally, as Barkan suggests, "at the federal level, the Supreme Court, the Fifth Circuit of Appeals, and a few District Judges rendered many decisions favorable to the movements' aims. At the state and local levels, however, the law served as an effective instrument of social control" (Barkan 1984). Barkan uses five cases of social movements in five different cities to illustrate the control of civil right movements. For example, in Montgomery, the legal control of bus boycotters was to ticket and arrest the drivers of vehicles that were part of the car pool that enabled the bus boycotters to get to work (Barkan 1984: 555). Compared with movements in Montgomery, the use of the clubs and dogs in Birmingham marked a significant departure from the nonviolent tactics (Barkan 1984: 559), then the author argues that "the major success of the movement would not have been possible without inappropriate tactical choices by Southern officials" (Barkan 1984: 562).

Let's move back to today's Occupy Wall Street. A book called *Occupying Wall Street* introduces many details of the story of Occupying Wall Street. For example:

"On Tuesday morning, it began to rain and occupiers moved to protect their belongings and media equipment with suspended tarps. According to the website occupywallst.org, one of the main online forums of the movement, police moved in with bullhorns at around 7 a.m., declaring the tarps illegal.....In total, seven were arrested that day and the police walked off with arms full of confiscated blue tarps" (Writers for the 99% 2011: 20-21).

Popowski (2012) posts an article about human rights violations in the U.S. responses to Occupy Wall Street. The author cites a report made by professors from NYU and Fordham law schools. They “catalog 130 specific alleged incidents of excessive police force, hundreds of additional violations, including unjustified arrests, abuse of journalists, unlawful closure of sidewalks and parks to protesters, and pervasive surveillance of peaceful activists” (Popowski 2012).

We can see that the legal system responded to the movement with both nonviolent and violent tactics, which makes the analysis of today’s movement more complicated than that of the past civil rights movements. Another difference is that Occupy Wall Street has more legal resources than the past civil rights movements. As Barkan suggests, “the movement also suffered from a lack of defense attorneys” (Barkan 1984: 555), while the “New York Occupy encampment, since its first weeks, boasted a working group to legal support, an activity that remained a vital part of life in Zuccotti throughout the occupation” (Writers for the 99% 2011: 76).

In China, the legal system plays an even more important role than that in the U.S., for the reason that the state has a strong will in controlling and ordering Chinese society (Ren 1997: 1). Ren (1997), in his book *Tradition of the Law and Law of the Tradition----law, State, and Social Control in China*, did a well-rounded study of the legal system of China and its relationship with the politics. When it comes to the independence of the judicial system, “it is important to note that the lack of judicial independence in China resulted neither from a statutory deficiency nor from an ill-designed legal system. Rather, it is a

reflection of China's tradition and culture in the domain of politics and law" (Ren 1997: 55). "It is obvious that judicial independence is a paradoxical term according to Chinese judicial personnel-----in part because of the dilemma in constitutional law which professes judicial independence at the same time it guarantees the Party's ruling power over the judiciary and in part because of the personnel's political affiliation with the Party" (Ren 1997: 57). In view of these, it is not hard to understand O'Brien and Li's (2004) description of the difficulties of suing the state.

Both Ren (1997) and Cai (2010) mention the legal system's forceful way of social control. Ren discussed "counterrevolutionary crimes" in Chapter 5, as he summarized, "the official suppression of counterrevolutionary crimes is the political manipulation of the judicial process" (Ren 1997: 106), and "state agencies should handle popular resistance based on the following considerations: (1) whether the participants' demands are political, (2) whether there is organized violence, (3) whether there is intentional confrontation, and (4) whether there is support from overseas" (Cai 2010: 50). Ying (2007) points out that the problem of mobilization of peasants' movements in China is not a resource problem but a political problem, i.e. the predicament of legitimacy.

Another point that needs to be mentioned is the discrepancy of local or fundamental governments and upper or central government towards the peasants' requirements and appeals. For example, "an elderly villager was so panicked after county police and township officials rushed into his home looking for his son that he committed suicide. The son went to the provincial Legal Aid Center, where he found a lawyer who

volunteered his time to sue the county Public Security Bureau for conducting a search without a warrant” (O’Brien and Li 2004). This case reflects the struggle between peasants and local governments.

However, Michelson (2008) argues that popular strategies for resolving grievances in rural China are local solutions, and survey respondents indicated that local solutions, often with the involvement of village leaders, were far more desirable and effective. “Villagers’ leaders, like informal relations (including friends and relatives), were evaluated more positively than any source of justice from above” (Michelson 2008: 52). This study by no means contradicts the former ones; rather, it emphasizes the importance of village-level involvement in the process of solving the contentious issues and partly reflects some characteristics of Chinese society.

Media, Supporters or Restrainers?

The media are another institutional factor that needs to be analyzed. From the perspectives of framing theory, as Buechler (2011: 150-151) summarized in his book *Understanding Social Movements*, there are four processes of frame alignment: bridging, amplification, extension and transformation; therefore, it is not hard to imagine the importance of media in the process of social movements, while there are three different attitudes toward the media’s influence on social movements.

The first one takes an obviously positive attitude towards the media’s role in social movements, to the effect that it will help movements become influential. According to

Tilly and Woods (2009), “the broadcast of movement claims with regard to program , identity, and standing through such mass media as news thesis and magazines amplified the audience for social movements and WUNC displays” (Tilly and Woods 2009: 85). The authors cite the example of Charles Edward Coughlin, who successfully organized campaigns by radio and exerted an influence on politics for a time in the 1930s (Tilly and Woods 2009: 86-87). As for the part of China in their book, they also point out that “the widespread use of mobile telephones and blogging is an important influence on the new movements” (Tilly and Woods 2009: 111).

When analyzing the social network and effective resistance in China, Cai (2010) maintains that the “network also helps citizens gain access to the media, another powerful weapon against state agents or other social actors,” especially the Internet, which has become a vehicle for citizens to get information and express their grievances. But the problem is that most citizens do not have easy access to media when they face injustice because of constraints imposed by the party (Cai 2010: 88-89).

However, it is arbitrary to say media are always an impetus for movements in the U.S. From the work of Edward Morgan, we can see the other side of media’s role in the movements in the U.S. Morgan’s book, *What Really Happened to 1960-----How Mass Media Failed American Democracy*, depicts how media shaped the social movements in the 1960s. As the author suggests, “by revisiting the past, we can know a lot about where we are today and why we are here.” According to Morgan (2010), the growth of mass spectatorship actually reinforced capitalism’s tendencies toward elite-dominated market

democracy in a number of ways. As if fulfilling the prophecy of elite theory, postwar culture was dominated by an emphasis on consumption as the path to the good life for all Americans (Morgan 2010: 31-32). One was the media's sense that protest was a kind of deviant act that lay outside the bounds of normal, legitimate political behavior (Morgan 2010: 65). By dividing "worthy" and "unworthy" victims in movements, black activists became the "outsider" in the eyes of mainstream media; dramatic and violent became the imagery of civil movements. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which grew out of the sit-in movement, is a good example. SNCC was dismissed as "hyper-militants." Beyond the boundaries of mass media discourse, the voices of the actual citizens striving for their own empowerment were largely unheard. The same thing even happened to Martin Luther King. "The Poor People mobilization reflected King's growing radicalization, his belief that the nation's deep racial and class inequality was rooted in its capitalist political economy. Needless to say, this Martin Luther King is invisible in media culture's public memory" (Morgan 2010: 75).

Sidney Tarrow (1998) and Steven M. Buechler (2011), in their work, generally analyze the role of media in the process of social movements, taking a comparatively neutral attitude towards media. "The media provide a diffuse source for consensus formation that movements on their own cannot easily achieve," but "how movements are covered by the media is affected by the structure of the media industry" (Tarrow 1998: 116).

Buechler also emphasizes that "there is a mutual but asymmetrical dependency between movements and media. Because movements need the media more than the media need movements, the media have greater power in this dynamic," and "from the media side,

elite audiences will have a greater impact on movement framing strategies” (Buechler 2011: 153); therefore, although their view towards media is comparatively neutral, they are more inclined to discuss the negative side of media in the process of social movements.

Perrucci and Wysong, in their book *New Class Society—Goodbye American Dream*, mention that “superclass elites have long recognized that publicly acknowledged, front-page robber-baron plutocracy is inconsistent with the American cultural ideal of democracy and political equality-----and dangerous to their interests” (Perrucci and Wysong 2003: 119). In Chapter 5, the authors go right for the truths that “this situation begins with built-in structural biases grounded in corporate ownership of the media, leading to owners’ hiring and rewarding of managers and editors who reflect pro-superclass and pro-corporate values and views” (Perrucci and Wysong 2003: 184), so there is no need to explain exalting privatization and depreciating the unions.

From the above summaries, we can see that the media in U.S. are closely related to or entrenched into the economic structure, just like the legal system is embedded in politics in China. Behind these, it reflects the different power structures of the two countries.

Education, A Potential Factor

To understand both media and the education system, we can refer to Gramsci. “From Gramsci’s perspective, what was missing was an understanding of the subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that served to perpetuate all

repressive structures----- a crippling analytical deficiency that held back the advance of political strategy in all previous socialist movements” (Boggs 1976: 38). This lays out the fact that media or other ideological apparatus may play a negative role in shaping the social movement in the U.S. In Gramsci’s words, it is called ideological hegemony. Gramsci suggests “ideological domination rather than direct political coercion had become the primary instrument of bourgeois rule-----a generalization that may help to explain the subtle but effective assimilation of the proletariat in the post-Second War period” (Boggs 1976: 47).

If we take media as a crucial ideological apparatus for elites, another factor that may also serve the same function in this fashion is the education system. In other words, education plays a role in social control. Or we can say that it is the “rule” in John Dewey’s work, “control of individual actions is affected by the whole situation in which individuals are involved, in which they share and of which they are co-operative and interacting parts” (Dewey 1938: 53).

To summarize the role of the education system, it generally has two characteristics: maintaining social order and lack of critical thinking. When it comes to maintaining social order, “once the transition from feudalism to capitalism is made, therefore, the school system becomes less an agent of change and more and more an agent of maintaining the social structure” (Carnoy 1974: 15). In his work *Education as Cultural Imperialism*, the author states, “it not only relates the role of schooling to fit Africans and Asians into European colonial structures, but also how schooling was called upon to colonize people in the United States” (Carnoy 1974: 23), and “the objective of school was to inculcate faith in the capitalist system, especially in its objectivity and rationality, and to prepare people to take their proper place in that system” (Carnoy 1974: 255), and

lower-class school is much stricter than higher-class school (Carnoy 1974: 260). Carnoy and Levin (1976), in their book *The Limits of Education Reforms*, also point out that

“the polity has various properties that will create demands on its educational sector. These properties include such characteristics as the nature of the economic and political system; social religious, and cultural factors; the level of industrial development; and relationship with other societies. Emanating from the polity are a set of demands or socialization objectives for transmitting the culture and reproducing and maintaining the economic political, and social order” (Carnoy and Levin 1976: 30).

The education system is teaching people, especially the working class, to support the existing order, which definitely has a counter-effect on social movements.

Giroux (1981) further links schools with hegemony. By criticizing reproduction theory and correspondence theory, Giroux argues that “the notion of hegemony provides a theoretical basis for understanding not only how the seeds of domination are produced, but also how they may be overcome through various forms of resistance, critique and social action” (Giroux 1981: 95). In short, in Giroux’s work, he analyzed hegemony’s role in the education system, using a dialectical method.

Livingstone and Contributors (1987) put forward the importance of critical pedagogy, which is defined as “empowerment of subordinate groups through shared understanding of the social construction of reality” (Livingstone and Contributors 1987: 8). The authors also analyze critical pedagogy with burgeoning social movements, “the presence of these social movements belies that a critical pedagogy could be theorized in the academy and

successfully handed down to the classroom, with more than token effect” (Livingstone and Contributors 1987: 228). But the authors also criticize the “current” critical pedagogy as a lack of historical perspective and too much emphasizing “agency and resistance,” “in the discourse of critical pedagogy, the elaboration of concepts of agency deflects the innovatory practices which active historical recollection will reveal as central to democratic movements to the politics of education” (Livingstone and Contributors 1987: 230). Nussbaum (2009), in her article *Education for Profit, Education for Freedom*, emphasizes the lack of critical thinking in the U.S. education system, which shows a focus on marketing skills or economic practices but neglects human development. She summarizes three abilities of citizenship: critical thoughts, the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation and the cultivation of sympathy. The ability to see oneself as a citizen is crucial to the democracy, and the contradiction between capitalism and democracy is also an old topic. From today’s literatures, we can see that most American social movements are the signs of “bottom-up” democracy.

In China, according to Guo (2003), the Chinese people lack political awareness and hold negative attitudes toward protest movements because of lack of education: “the low level of political awareness and tolerance among the Chinese people are associated with their level of education” (Guo 2003: 111). By citing a survey conducted by some Chinese scholars, Guo tries to explain how a relatively high education level affects Beijing urban residents with regard to democratic values (Guo 2003: 113). Yu and Feng (2010) put forward the opinion that China needs civic education to achieve the modernization, while “authoritarian education has, however, played a dominant role in China for more than

2000 years, which made civic education subservient” (Yu and Feng 2010). Both authors mention the “deferential nature” of Chinese people, which is shown by the lack of citizenship and the fear of challenging authority. In addition, according to Guo, Confucian political culture further exacerbates the situation, because “coming from a Confucian political culture, the Chinese masses are a deferential people who passively acquiesce in the running of their country” (Guo 2003: 110).

In short, to some extent, this thesis believes that comprehending the education systems and media of the two countries can partly explain the general trend of social movements and contentious politics in both countries, for example the limited influences of local movements in China and limited responses of Occupy Wall Street movements in the U.S.

A Concise Summary

To better understand all these social context factors’ influences on social movements in the U.S., we can again refer to Piven’s work. Piven sums up four prongs that roll back the New Deal / Great Society reforms. The first one is “the war of ideas,” which can stand for a new political culture that is characterized as a “laissez-faire” argument; the result of it is an increasing of corporations’ power and the decline of unions’ power. It is not hard to imagine that elites spread their argument through the control of media, especially when television started to enter people’s lives in the 1970s. The second prong is the lobbying capacity of business. Both Piven and Wysong mention “Astroturf strategies” in their book, noting that, “corporations have discovered that ‘AstroTurf campaigns’ organized by the public relations industry can be very useful in generating positive press coverage,

public opinion, and favorable treatment by policy makers and the courts (Perrucci and Wysong 2003: 195). The privileged elites also cultivate the populist right, generating popular anxieties and opposition to the welfare programs, blurring the class conflicts. The third prong is the “cultivation of the populist right, rooted in fundamentalist churches” (Piven 2006: 132), which is an erosion of the political cultural of the Great Society period. The last prong is successfully connecting business money with the party. Not only Republican Party, but also the Democratic Party, has both become corrupted by money. When “neo-liberalism” becomes the mainstream in political culture, even the “Democratic strategy, in a nutshell, was to beat the Republicans by adopting their positions” (Piven 2006: 135). All the above factors led America to a great inequality in the last few decades. These can also be seen as the factors that impede and shape social movements, but these are somehow underemphasized in the works of contentious politics.

As for China, its judicial system remains deeply embedded in politics, and at the same time, it is a far-flung, many layered state (O’Brien and Li 2004). Although the word “class” still cannot be found in today’s lexicon of China, the recognition of class exploitation by cadres has risen from the masses (Kwan Lee 2002: 213). And since the deeper reformation in the 1990s, regional inequality have been severe in China since regional development is uneven due to various initial conditions and government policies (Ho and Li 2007). The last thing that needs to be mentioned is the Communist Party. China is still a party-state. Guo (2003), in his book *State and Society in China’s Democratic Transition*, suggests that there is a very high percentage of party membership

in village committees in rural China and grassroots self-governments like neighborhood committees in urban China (Guo 2003: 120-127). However, due to the limited literature resources at hand, the discussion of China seems “thinner” than that of the U.S., and it can be seen as one of the potential limits of this thesis.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Challenging authority, apparently, is the same point between the U.S. and China, needless to say, political opportunity structure still play a lot in two countries' contentious politics, but at least, there are two differences between the two countries.

First, the repertoires of contention in China, rooted in its complicated context, have a more varied of "looks" than that of the U.S. Second, contentious politics in China, especially in rural regions, has little to do with democracy; it is an interest expression of peasants, while contentious politics in the U.S. is closely linked to democracy. According to Morgan, Perrucci and Wysong, it is a contradiction between democracy and capitalism. Up to now, being aware of these two differences and above reviews, this thesis can give four suggestions for study of contentious politics:

1, We should not over-generalize the mode "democratic-nondemocratic," and simplify the problems. I would like to use the word "state" instead of "regime." For example, in China contained contention is the common phenomenon, which is different from Tilly's rough distinction as "contained contention-democratic regime" and transgressed form-undemocratic regime," because China is the country "with low political rights and civil liberties." In effect, the reality is more complicated. For example, the central government and local governments, the government and the court, ethic and social networks, all these factors can exert influences on contentious politics in China that has built up a "social-market" economy. Generally, the U.S. and China can be paired up with social movements and contentious collective action. "Contentious collective action is the basis of social

movements, not because movements are always violent or extreme, but because it is the main and often the only recourse that ordinary people possess against better-equipped opponents or powerful state,” (Tarrow 1998: 3). Analyzing these problems can be seen as a complement to the study of contentious politics.

2, It may be better to see the collective resistance in China from another perspective, not from the orthodox western perspective. But I believe that when analyzing the contentious politics, we should not ignore its leading roles and its particular social context, not only in China, but also in the U.S. For example, the theme of 1960s’ movements in the U.S. was civil rights, combining with women movements, environmental movements and antiwar movements, while today’s Occupy Wall Street is another story. The conflicts between cadres and peasants in China also vary from the 1990s to the present. Building a typed classification may be a good idea to study the contentious politics; any attempts to generalize risks missing the underlying particular mechanisms behind over-generalized conclusions.

3, In the U.S., although government is always an indispensable role in contentious politics, capitalism, or capitalist corporations, seems to be underestimated in the works of Tilly and Tarrow, but it’s important when considering the Occupying Wall Street in today’s America. In short, analysis of contentious politics is not intact in the absence of analysis of social class in the U.S., because what is behind the government is the privileged class in the U.S., who are the real “authorities” in the contention.

4, Contentious politics as a way of understanding challenges to authority in societies as diverse as the U.S. and China has some theoretical gaps. In particular, it does little to understand the inherent contradictions of capitalism in the U.S. and the inherent contradictions of a state controlled society with its own traditions and particular issues in China.

In the end, this thesis suggests that future studies of contentious politics should balance the social movements or their mechanisms and the social contexts, synthesizing the macroscopic theories and specific characteristics of each movement in a dialectical way. Although social movements or contentious political events are important social phenomenon, above all, they are the windows for us to comprehend our societies.

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