CIVIC AND NONCIVIC ACTIVISM UNDER AUTOCRACY: SHIFTING POLITICAL SPACE FOR POPULAR COLLECTIVE ACTION*

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China is an authoritarian state with different sophisticated strategies for dealing with popular contention. Research shows that the Chinese state sharply distinguishes between popular protests on materialist claims and those on nonmaterialist claims, but it is rarely recognized that in China civic activism faces a dramatically different political environment than noncivic activism. While the distinction between civic and noncivic activism has seldom played an important role in differentiating state strategies in democracies and some other authoritarian regimes, I contend that the Chinese state has developed sharply different strategies based on this distinction throughout the history of People's Republic. To account for different strategic patterns, we need to investigate the functions that different types of popular collective action can fulfill and the threats they may pose to the regime. Using labor and feminist activism as examples, this article examines the evolution of the space for civic and noncivic activism in three historical periods—Mao's era, the Reform era, and Xi's era. It elucidates how regime transformations interacted with the nature of claims to produce different political environment for popular collective action in China.

China under Xi Jinping is descending deeper into the depths of autocracy. Xi is not only amassing enormous power into his hands, his administration is also undertaking fierce attacks on society. Observers lament that Xi's administration conducted the "worst crackdown on lawyers, activists and scholars in decades (Zeng 2015). The clampdown on civil society is so extensive that "even those used to a degree of immunity have found themselves target[s]" (Minzner 2015).

A consensus among many observers is that the Chinese state has become substantially more repressive toward society. In a recent article, however, Fu and Distelhorst put forth a somewhat different interpretation. They argue that although the transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping severely restricted opportunities for contentious participation—defined as disruptive behavior ranging from grassroots advocacy to outright protests—formal institutions for participation that expanded under Hu Jintao continue to provide channels for dialogue among local officials and citizens (Fu and Distelhorst 2017). By distinguishing between institutionalized participation and contentious participation, Fu and Distelhorst paint a more accurate picture of recent political changes. I contend, however that this is still inadequate: further differentiation is needed to account for the changes in contentious politics in China.

In particular, this article argues that political opportunity structures for popular contention in China are essentially bifurcated: civic activism purported to promote public interests is sharply differentiated by the state from noncivic activism focusing on private interests. The Chinese state uses sophisticated different strategies to deal with popular contention. It is a widely accepted assumption that state strategies in China are often based on a distinction between materialist contention and nonmaterialist contention. The dichotomy between civic and noncivic contention has been rarely recognized as the basis for state strategies.

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A clarification of the role of this dichotomy can help us answer many important questions regarding the dynamics and changes of contentious politics in China. For example, why did Xi's administration intensify state repression? Is the regime trying to close the space for all kinds of popular collective action? Fu and Distelhorst observed three important shifts in state repression under Xi—from sporadic harassment to criminalization, from post facto to preemptive, and from social stability to national security framing. Such shifts might be interpreted as a comprehensive change in state strategies for dealing with popular contention. If we distinguish between civic and noncivic activism it becomes clear that Xi's administration only substantially intensified its repression of civic activism, and its basic approach to noncivic activism remained largely unchanged. It is no coincidence that almost all the examples cited by Fu and Distelhorst are cases of assaults on civic activists or organizations such as rights lawyers or labor NGOs. Compared to noncivic activism, civic activism is more likely to be responded by the state with criminalization, preemptive measures and national security framing. Indeed, there is little evidence that state strategies for coping with social protests regarding private interests have systematically changed under Xi.

Identifying the patterns of state differentiating strategies can improve our understanding of political opportunity structure (POS), which is a key concept in the field of contentious politics. Most studies on POS are concerned about basic features of regime, such as the regime's openness or its propensity and capacity for repression (Tilly 1978; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The im-portance of regime type for shaping political opportunity structure has been confirmed by plenty of empirical studies, including a few crossnational studies of political contexts (e.g., Kitschelt 1986). Some studies also suggest that each type of regimes will have different configurations based on the nature of the involved issues (Giugni 2004; Kriesi 2005; Johnston 2011). As Hank Johnston (2011) pointed out, for example, the former Soviet Union always allowed ecology protests but did not tolerate protests for independence among ethnonational republics. An important task for students of contentious politics is therefore to examine how a regime differentiates be-tween popular contention with different types of claims and explain why.

In this article, I contend that the distinction between civic and noncivic activism has been the basis for state strategies not only under Xi, but throughout the history of People's Republic. To account for the patterns of differentiation, we need to investigate the functions that different types of popular collective action can fulfill and the threats they may pose to the regime. Civic activism tends to fulfill different functions and pose different threats from noncivic activism, and such functions and threats often change over time. China is an ideal case for studying how different regime types interact with the nature of claims to produce different patterns of state strategies. China experienced two dramatic regime transformations in the last four decades: the transition from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism starting from the late 1970s and the transition from post-totalitarianism regime back to neototalitarianism under Xi.

It should be noted that the distinction between civic and noncivic activism is rarely relevant to political opportunities in democracies. Since civil society is open and free in such regimes, the government is unlikely to be particularly hostile toward civic activism. Moreover, few democratic governments are interested in aggressive mobilization of civic activism to achieve its social and political objectives. Unlike democracies, which treat civic and noncivic activism largely in the same way, authoritarian states are more sensitive to this distinction, often regarding civic activism as more threatening. Such a tendency was particularly manifested in the past two decades when a sizeable group of authoritarian states waged war on NGOs with foreign connections.

Compared to ordinary authoritarian regimes, totalitarian or post-totalitarian regimes tend to differentiate between civic and noncivic activism more sharply. They often take a more polarized approach toward civic activism than noncivic activism. This is partly because such regimes tend to view civic activism through a lens of ideological war, and partly because they often extensively use mass mobilization as a political tool. As Linz (1985: 70) noted, in a totalitarian society, citizen participation in and active mobilization for political and collective social tasks are encouraged, demanded, rewarded, and channeled through a single party and many monopolistic secondary groups. Passive obedience and apathy, retreat into the role of "parochials" and "subjects," charac-

teristic of many authoritarian regimes, is considered undesirable by the rulers. The Soviet Union under Stalin, for example, exhorted people to become "men with big characters" who transcend "bourgeois" individualism (Fritzsche and Hellbeck 2009). Such tendencies can sometimes linger after the society has departed from totalitarianism. Putin's Russia, for instance, sponsors a Komsomol-style youth organization, Nashi (Hemment 2015), while launched fierce attacks on NGOs in the mid-2000s as a response to what was perceived as foreign manipulations of the color revolutions (Howell 2015). Among communist and postcommunist regimes, China stands out for its particularly sharp differentiation between the two types of activism.

To be sure, there are huge variations within each category of civic and noncivic activism in China. Civic activism, for example, ranges from the 08 Charter movement, which called for a change of the political system, to regime-friendly efforts to relieve poverty in the countryside or assist victims of domestic violence. No civic activism can possibly "represent" such a wide range of activist goals. In this article, while I will cite a variety of examples, for the convenience of comparisons across time my empirical evidence will mostly be focused on labor and feminist activism, neither of which is exclusively civic or noncivic activism. Labor activism can be found in all historical periods and had an important impact on regime legitimacy and stability. By contrast, feminism did not emerge until in post-Mao era, and is generally perceived as not very politically sensitive. Labor activism and feminist activism can complement each other to illustrate the changing space for social activism in China.

DISAGGREGATING POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES IN CHINA

Most recent studies of contentious politics in China focus on popular contention with economic claims, such as the reduction of taxes and fees for peasants, jobs and severance packages for laid-off workers, pensions for retirees, and compensation for people who lost their land or houses. Clearly, the Chinese government's approach to these types of popular contention is dramatically different than its approach to the student movement in 1989 or Falun Gong movement in 1999. Few studies, however, have tried to systematically elucidate the basic patterns of differential strategies and the rationales behind them. An important exception is Perry (2002), who observes that the party-state sharply distinguishes three types of popular contention: nationalist movements, protest movements with political or religious agendas, and localized protests on subsistence or other economic entitlements. CCP leaders have been very cautious in dealing with nationalist protests because they are well aware of their vulnerability in such events. As they learned from the May Fourth Movement and other nationalist movements in the past century, Chinese citizens could easily shift their target from foreigners to their own government. Although Chinese leaders were wary of student activism in general, they nevertheless sometimes "allowed, even encouraged, educated youths to take to the streets to express their patriotic outrage" (Perry 2002: xi).

In Perry's view, the party-state's strategies for coping with non-nationalist popular contention are essentially based on a dichotomy between economic and noneconomic protests. As she stated, "Claims to a basic subsistence that stay within local confines have seldom been deemed especially threatening by Chinese regimes, and so—in contrast to protests motivated by explicitly religious or political agendas—historically have not attracted a great deal of central anxiety or attention" (Perry 2002: xiv). As an authoritarian regime, the Chinese government's repressiveness toward politically motivated protests is hardly surprising—such protests are directly threatening to the regime. More puzzling is the Chinese government's usual tolerance of protests for basic subsistence or other economic entitlements. Perry attributes such tolerance to the political culture in China; from Mencius to Mao, there is a long tradition in China that recognizes "the natural propensity of those who are hard pressed economically to rebel against rapacious officials" (Perry 2002: 31). Perry's disaggregation of state strategies in China is illuminating. While not all scholars agree with her cultural explanations, the assumption is widely accepted that in China, economic and economic protests involve quite different patterns of government-citizen interactions.

A somewhat similar conceptual framework has been proposed by Lee and Hsing (2010) who distinguish between the politics of (re)distribution and that of recognition (politics of representation is their third type—it is about media expression of ideas and symbols). The politics of (re)distribution includes struggles and claims for material interests among social groups, or between social groups and state actors that spring from their common or differential class locations, whether these are defined by property ownership or their roles in production (Lee and Hsing 2010: 3). By contrast, the politics of recognition is concerned with the discovery and articulation of needs previously denied or ignored, especially the demand for social recognition of certain groups' moral status, political position, and identity (Lee and Hsing 2010: 4). The similarities between this framework and Perry's typology are obvious: Perry's subsistence protests and politically or religiously motivated protests correspond to Lee and Hsing's protests on (re)distribution and those on recognition, respectively.

Lee and Hsing's distinction, however, reveals a rather different rationale for the state's differential strategies: the Chinese state is under international pressure to be more tolerant toward social activism focused on recognition rather than redistribution. This is because the Chinese government actively projects itself as a modern and civilized power, seeking the status and legitimacy bestowed through connections within the international community (Lee and Hsing 2010: 9). This makes the Chinese state subject to pressure from international society, which is often selective. As they explain, "While China is often targeted for its violation of environmental, gender, and religious rights, the sway of global neoliberalism leads to little criticism against rising inequality and redistributive injustice in China" (Lee and Hsing 2010: 9).

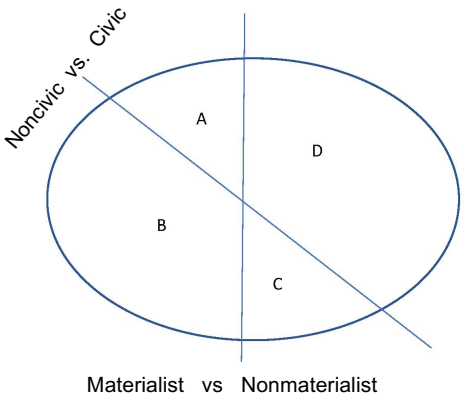
In recent years, however, their expectation seems to be at odds with the reality. Activists and organizations focusing on issues of recognition often experience considerably harsher repression than those protesting material loss. This is not because there is no international pressure on the Chinese government on gender, religious or other human rights. The Chinese government nevertheless enjoys a very strong position in global politics and is also very determined to resist pressure from outside. External intervention may actually politicize social activism and therefore make it more vulnerable. Activist and NGO linkages to international society seldom bring about effective protection. Instead, they sometimes trigger government suspicion and repression. International intervention also has the unintended effect of helping the state create social organizations as repressive actors (Long 2018).

Despite the seemingly opposite conclusions, Perry's and Lee and Hsing's theories share one assumption: the dichotomy between claims to materialist and those to nonmaterialist interests is a basic boundary the Chinese state draws when it responds to popular contention. In this article, I posit that the differential strategies of the party-state in China are often based not so much on the distinction between materialist and nonmaterialist claims as on the distinction between civic activism and noncivic activism. The former is defined as activism advocating for the interest of the general population (public interest), and the latter as activism by specific individuals or small groups in defense of their particularistic interest (private interest). Although civic and noncivic activism involve systematically different patterns of state response, this distinction has often been overlooked by protesters, activists, as well as by observers of popular contention.

The lack of attention to the distinction between civic and noncivic activism in the study of popular contention in China is partly due to the confusion between this distinction and that between materialist and nonmaterialist contention. Indeed, there is considerable overlap between materialist contention and noncivic activism: a majority of materialist protests, such as laid-off workers' or retirees' protests during SOE restructuring and peasant protests over fees and taxes, were staged to defend private interests. Similarly, many nonmaterialist protests, such as the 08 charter campaign for political reforms or feminist groups' demonstration against gender discrimination, were staged for public interest.

As figure 1 shows, however, these two dichotomies should not be confused with each other. Although most cases of well-known popular contention in recent years fall into either type B (noncivic activism on materialist interests) or type D (civic activism on nonmaterialist interests), types A and C ought not to be ignored. type A refers to civic activism that works on materialist

Figure 1. Differentiating the Claims of Popular Contention



interest claims. Examples include labor NGOs' support of workers in their struggle for better salaries or work conditions or environment activists' assistance of villager victims of pollution to obtain compensations. Many civic organizations or activists, including so called right defense lawyers such as Xu Zhiyong, regarded working on ordinary people's daily materialist grievances as one of their primary strategies. The government was not more lenient toward such activists because they focused on economic issues. On the contrary, the government found this approach especially alarming. As a party that rose to power by mobilizing on peasants' grievances, the CCP is certainly aware of the consequences of intellectuals/activists' reaching out to the masses. In an official document passed in the CCP's sixth plenum of the sixteenth Congress, for example, it is pointed out that two of the most alarming trends of the mass incidents in recent years are the tendency of politicizing economic issues, and some international and domestic enemies' efforts to take advantage of mass incidents and incite instability. Nor surprisingly some of the most high-handed recent crackdown cases targeted such activists. Obviously, government response to type A activism has been more similar to its response to other civic activism (type D) rather than its strategies to deal with type B activism on materialist interests.

Type C refers to noncivic activism focused on nonmaterialist interests. One example is villagers' protests against election irregularities in village elections. Such protests were often staged by failed candidates and their supporters who attributed the loss to alleged manipulations. Such protests clearly bear on nonmaterialist claims even though they may involve materialist interests indirectly. They are not civic activism either since the goal of protesters in such cases was simply to defend their own interest in the specific elections in a small community rather than pursue political change in general. The government's response to this type of protests was substantially different from its response to civic activists' advocacy of free and fair elections for the nation. Similarly, peasants who tried to pressure upper authorities to dismiss their corrupt

Table 1. Examples of the Four Types of Claims of Popular Contention

	Materialist Interests	*Nonmaterialist Interests*
Civic Activism	Type A – Labor NGO assistance to worker protests on salary nonpayment – Environment NGO assistance of residents to obtain pollution compensations	Type D – Civic organizations demanding political reform – Feminist groups demanding protection against domestic violence
Noncivic Activism	Type B – Workers demanding higher salaries – Peasants demanding lowering taxes and fees	Type C – Villagers demand the investigation of election irregularities in the villagers – Parents demand fair college entrance exams

village leaders tended to be treated in a quite different way than the activists who advocated assets disclosure by all government officials in China. The government treated them as noncivic protesters rather than civic protesters even though their claims are political in nature. Generally, unruly peasants protesting election irregularities or cadre corruption in their own communities tend to be treated by the government much more leniently than peaceful civic activists who advocate free elections or political leaders' assets disclosure.

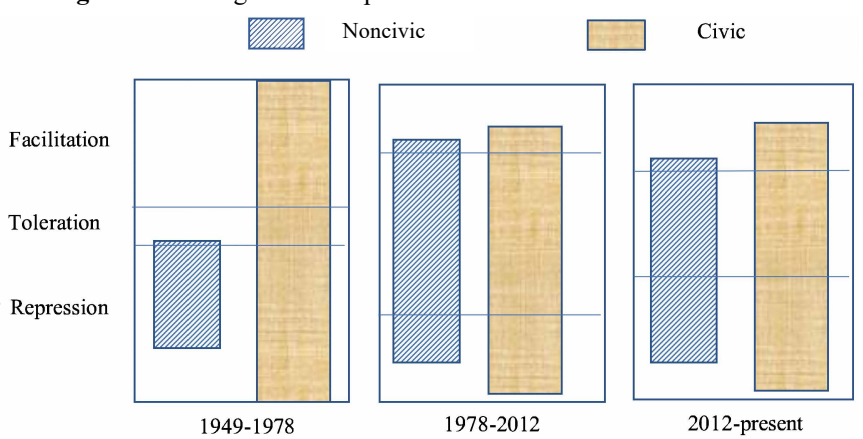
In sum, conventional wisdom assumes the Chinese government treats type A (materialist and civic) activism and type B (materialist and noncivic) activism as the same category while treating type C (nonmaterialist and civic) activism and type D (nonmaterialist and civic) as another category. The above examples, however, indicate that government responds to type A similarly to type C, while responding to B akin to type D. This is preliminary evidence to show that, from the government's point of view, the distinction between civic and noncivic activism is often more important than the distinction between materialist and nonmaterialist claims. Yet, more systematic research is needed in order to determine whether this has always been true, and if so, why.

EXPLAINING HISTORICAL CHANGE AND VARIATION

The sharp differentiation between civic and noncivic activism by the state is not merely a temporary phenomenon, but a consistent pattern throughout the seven decades of People's Republic. This is illustrated by figure 2, which depicts political spaces along Tilly's repression-toleration-facilitation continuum (1978). State response to popular collective action is often understood as either repression or toleration. Studies of autocracy have a strong tendency to overlook the state's role in facilitating popular collective action. State facilitation, however, is not only common, but also constitutes an essential character of some political systems, especially totalitarian regimes. In this figure state response is mapped between extreme repression (e.g., a massacre of participants of popular collective action) at the bottom and extreme facilitation (described by Tilly as compulsion: punishing nonperformance instead of rewarding performance) at the top. Political space is roughly divided into three zones. In the zone of repression, the costs of popular collective action imposed by the state are significantly higher than the rewards; and in the zone of facilitation, the imposed costs of popular collective action are considerably lower than the rewards. The zone of toleration is in between.

When we compare costs and rewards created by the state, we not only consider the size of costs/rewards, but also their possibility. Figure 2 measures two key dimensions of repression-toleration-facilitation: (1) the probability and (2) the intensity of each type of response. The size of the area of each type of activism in the zones indicates the likelihood of the response. For example, if civic activism occupies a large area of facilitation, it means that the state is very likely

Figure 2. Shifting Political Space in Three Historical Periods in China.



to facilitate civic activism by, say, providing resources to civil society organizations. The distance from the zone of toleration indicates the intensity. When civic activism extends far below the bottom line of toleration, for instance, it indicates that such mobilization possibly suffer very high-intensity repression. To measure the political space over time, in figure 2 the PRC history is divided into Mao's era (1949-1978), the pre-Xi reform era (1978-2012), and Xi's era (after 2012). As a big picture painted with broad strokes, this chart leaves out the fine variations within each era. Despite this limitation, the figure helps to illuminate major changes in the basic patterns of state response to each type of social activism.

Figure 2 reveals a consistent feature of the political space over the three eras: the space for civic activism is more widely spread than the one for noncivic activism. In other words, compared to noncivic activism, civic activism is more likely to fall into either the zones of repression or facilitation rather than the zone of toleration. Moreover, civic activism is also more likely to suffer high-intensity repression or enjoy high-intensity facilitation than noncivic activism.

On the other hand, there have also been remarkable changes over time. In Mao's era, the contrast between the two types of popular collective action was particularly stark. State response to civic activism was highly polarized. The authorities often encouraged or even compelled people to participate in some mass activities while responding to other mass activities with imprisonment and even execution. By contrast, the response to noncivic activism was mostly limited to relatively moderate repression, supplemented with a small chance of toleration.

The transition to the post-Mao era brought about dramatic changes. The contrast between the two types of popular collective action became less striking. State response to civic activism became less polarized: the state has dramatically reduced its efforts to mobilize the masses in political campaigns and its response to unauthorized civic activism also became more lenient. Of course, the state still occasionally dealt with civic activism with extreme repression, and the massacre in response to the student movement in 1989 is a case in point. In the meantime, the political space for noncivic action began to spread more widely across the three zones. Such popular collective action became more likely to be tolerated. Remarkably, noncivic activism in the reform era sometimes enjoyed facilitation by the state, albeit mostly de facto rather than de jure. For example, in the waves of peasant protests in the 1990s against arbitrary fees and taxes, the central and provincial governments often showed their sympathy for protesters, and empowered peasants by frequently issuing policy documents that peasants could use to resist village and township cadres.

Some aspects of such patterns continued into in Xi's era. There were, however, some noticeable changes. Both types of popular contention encountered harsher repression than before, but civic activism experienced more dramatic changes than noncivic activism. Many civic activists and organizations suffered brutal crackdown. The assault on defense lawyers in the "709" campaign in 2015 is a case in point. In the meantime, civic activism that fits government agendas began to enjoy stronger state facilitation than pre-Xi era. The governments at various levels invested immense resources to support or sponsor civic activism and organizations. To some extent the patterns of state response to civic activism in this era reversed some of the changes in the reform era and came closer to the more polarized patterns in Mao's era. By comparison, the response to noncivic activism experienced less remarkable changes except a moderate increase of the repressiveness.

How to account for the change and variation in political space in PRC history? The shift of the basic regime character has certainly played a role. Tilly and many other scholars have long emphasized the role of regime type in shaping popular contention. Different regimes have different propensity for repression and facilitation, which is an essential aspect of political opportunity structure. Totalitarian regimes, for example, tend to actively mobilize the masses and also fiercely repress unauthorized social activism. This is well illustrated by figure 2. In Mao's era China was a totalitarian regime, which features large zones for repression and facilitation and a small zone for toleration. The transition to a post-totalitarian regime after the late 1970s led to a dramatically different configuration: the zone of toleration considerably expanded, and the zones

of facilitation and repression substantially shrank. Such general tendencies, at different degrees, affected every type of popular collective action.

In addition to their general propensity/capacity for repression, toleration and facilitation, regime types also shape political contention via their interaction with the nature of the claims. In authoritarian regimes popular collective action helps to fulfill three types of important functions. First, popular contention often acts as a main tool for the regime to attain its political and ideological goals. Mao's regime, for example, mainly rely on mass mobilization to achieve its goals of revolution and social transformation. Second, popular contention also fulfills basic functions for the political system. Upper authorities can garner information from such events to ensure lower-rank government officials' responsiveness and accountability. Third, popular contention can provide important resources and services that benefit the government. Civic organizations and activism are especially helpful for solving many social problems and governance tasks, such as environment protection and poverty relief.

At the same time, popular collective action can pose two main types of threats to the regime. First, popular contention may directly disrupt the regime's political and ideological agenda. Popular contention advocating an alternative political and ideological system is understandably viewed by any regime as a top threat. Secondly, popular contention may not directly intend to challenge the political order, but its disruption of social and economic order can also endanger the rule. Civic and noncivic activism tend to fulfill different functions and pose different threats, and the nature of the functions and threats have also changed over time. For example, in Mao's era, the regime relied on mass mobilization to achieve its political and ideological goals, while in post-Mao era the government especially value civic activism's function in social services such as social support to juvenile delinquents or disabled people. An analysis of functions/threats is thus especially helpful for accounting for variations across time and issues.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM UNDER MAO

Before discussing the political space for civic and noncivic activism in Mao's era, a note on the terminology is in order. When used to describe popular collective action in Mao's era, civic activism look like a misnomer for two reasons. First, it is often believed that most of such mass activities were heavily manipulated by Mao and other communist leaders. Second, they were often violent and detrimental to citizenship rights. It thus merits emphasis that civic activism is understood very broadly in this article, and is not confined to largely voluntary and peaceful actions.

Mao's China is a typical totalitarian regime with extraordinary propensity and capacity for mass mobilization. Maoist ideology made a sharp distinction between public and private interests, and ordinary people were discouraged from narrow-mindedly pursuing private interests. Since the revolutionary era, Mao and the communist party fervently exhorted ordinary people in China to fight for lofty goals such as national liberation or social transformation. As Perry (2002: 114) remarks, active mass involvement was a hallmark of Mao's revolution. Lieberthal (2003: 68) also notes, "Mao made the campaign style a prominent feature of Chinese politics—the country experienced at least one major campaign almost every year until his death in 1976. . . . The campaign form epitomized Mao Zedong's core belief that he could motivate people sufficiently to accomplish almost any goal he set for them."

Fierce mass mobilization in Mao's regime was accompanied with its strong propensity and capacity for repression. Frenzied mass campaigns and deep state penetration left no room for autonomous activities or organizations, let alone dissension and opposition. It should be noted that not only the targets of political campaigns or dissent groups were subject to brutal repression. Even the followers or activists of state-sponsored mass campaigns sometimes suffered harsh crackdowns. This happened to mass campaigns that were divided into factions, with some factions being attacked by their rivals or the authorities. It also happened to activists and participants when Mao found them no longer useful for his agenda. Red guards and rebels in the Cultural Revolution were abandoned or punished when Mao believed that his main objectives in the Cultural

Revolution had been achieved. Although the Cultural Revolution is often understood as a political campaign targeted at party authorities, red guards and rebels suffered much more violence than party or government officials.

The regime's capacity to crack down on popular protests was built upon a set of social and political institutions, especially a work-unit system that created "organized dependency" (Walder 1986). Ordinary people's heavy dependence on their work unit for all kinds of resources made it very difficult for them to challenge the authority. Other institutions, such as the household registration system (*hukou*) and archive system (*dang'an*), worked together contain collective challenges. The deep penetration of the society left little space for unauthorized mobilization. The extensive mass mobilization itself constituted an important coercive tool. Tasks of repression was often accomplished by mobilizing ordinary people to attack the designated targets.

Compared to its polarized approach toward civic activism—either ardent facilitation or harsh repression, the regime under Mao was less dramatic toward noncivic activism. Popular collective action to pursue private interests was more consistently met with state repression, albeit not necessarily as severe. It should be noted that while the regime tried to prevent collective protests on private interests, it also strove to accommodate ordinary people's individualized petitions and complaints. Ever since the revolutionary era petitions and complaints were recognized by Mao's mass line as important tools for ensuring political responsiveness and accountability.

Ordinary people sometimes took advantage of such space to stage collective protests on private interests. Mao attributed such events to the limits of the masses' consciousness. When workers launched waves of protest mainly on wages, welfare and labor conditions around 1956, for example, Mao (1971: 470) pointed out that, "it should be admitted that some people are prone to pay attention to immediate, partial and personal interests and do not understand, or do not sufficiently understand, long-range, national and collective interests."

Mao therefore put forth his famous theory on two types of contradictions under socialism, identifying antagonistic contradictions between the people and their enemies, and nonantagonistic ones among the people. He labeled the latter as collective protests staged by ordinary people for their "immediate, partial and personal interests," and proposed to deal with them mainly with persuasion. To be sure, effective persuasion under Mao usually involved extensive coercion. Still the repression was expected to be considerably less harsh than the "means of dictatorship" stipulated for antagonistic conflicts. Indeed, Mao's theory of two types of contradictions set the limit to the government's response to collective protests on private interests. Such limits , to a large extent, continued to constrain the government's strategies even today, four decades after the end of Mao's era.

The Cultural Revolution and Protests of "Economism"

An analysis of the wave of collective protests of "economism" in 1966-1967, at the outset of the Cultural Revolution, can illuminate how the dichotomy between civic and noncivic activism shaped the dynamics of popular contention in Mao's era. Such protests started when Mao called for the masses to rebel against "revisionist" authorities. While those protesters also labeled their organizations with revolutionary names such as "red rebels," they were not interested in political issues. As Perry (2002: 260) noted, "Dubbed 'economistic' because of their relative disinterest in the political debates of the day, these organizations were not centrally concerned with the issue of attacking or defending party leaders. Their focus was directed instead on improving their own material lot." Such protests were staged mainly by two types of people. The first was workers with an inferior status in factories, such as temporary workers (*linshi gong*), contract workers (*hetong gong*), and outside contract laborers (*waibao gong*). They had no access to welfare benefits available to permanent workers, such as job security, pensions, health insurance for their dependents, and so forth. The second group comprised of former city residents who wanted to come back to the cities. Those people left their city for a variety of reasons. Some of them were mobilized to return to their native places as a result of the retrenchment campaign of the early 1960s, or were arranged to help out with construction in the interior. Others were young people

relocated in the "up to the mountains down to the countryside" and "support agriculture, support the frontiers" campaigns of the 1960s.

Many protesters from across the country staged protests in Beijing because clearly many policies were ultimately made or certified by the central government. At least in the first a few weeks such protests were tolerated. Eager to agitate mass participation in the Cultural Revolution, Mao and his associates were reluctant to crack down on protests of "economism" even though such protesters' goals clearly diverged from the goals of the Cultural Revolution. Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, in particular, showed her sympathy for protesters. The toleration and occasional sympathy from Beijing encouraged the protesters across the country. Shanghai witnessed especially vigorous mobilization. Perry (2002) identified about 354 such protest groups. Other provinces, such as Guizhou and Hunan, also witnessed strong mobilization. Their forceful protests created enough pressure on Beijing and local governments to secure a few temporary but substantive concessions. As a writer remarked, however, workers' struggles were doomed since their claims to particularistic interests pointed to a different direction from the Cultural Revolution, which was a great political revolution with lofty goals of preventing and fighting revisionism (Yang 2016: ch. 11).

Indeed, after a few weeks of toleration, Beijing changed its attitude in early 1967. The government began to ban protesters' organizations, and later easily crushed the protests with the imprisonment of a few protest leaders. The CCP Central Committee issued a stern directive on January 11, 1967 (available at https://ccradb.appspot.com/post/100). As it declared, "A small groups of capitalist road-runners were determined to sabotage the Cultural Revolution and distract us from our struggle targets. They agitated a small number of deceived people to struggle with the socialist state under proletariat dictatorship. They lured those masses toward the vicious direction of economism so that the masses disregarded the national, collective, and long-term interests, and single-mindedly pursued personal and temporary interest." This directive illuminated a dilemma the Party faced when cracking down on noncivic popular collective action. Since protesters were technically counted as among "the people" rather the enemy, the Party had to justify its repression by framing the protests as orchestrated by class enemies, labeled as capitalist road-runners.

The case of "economistic" protests in 1966-1967 illuminates how the relationship between civic and noncivic activism helps account for the dynamics of popular contention in Mao's era. The main claims of such protests were both materialist and noncivic. While the government's "economism" label seems to suggest the importance of the materialist claims, the opening and closing of the opportunity for the protests, as well as the methods of state repression, underscore the importance of their noncivic nature. The political opportunity for such noncivic collective action can be attributed to the CCP's facilitation of political and ideological activism. To boost people's motivation to participate in the Cultural Revolution, the regime was initially very tolerant toward collective protests for particularistic interests. Exactly because noncivic claims of the protests deviated from the direction of the Cultural Revolution, however, the window of opportunity was soon closed. When the CCP decided to crack down on the protests, its repression on ordinary protesters was constrained because the protests on private interests, while undesirable, still belonged to nonantagonist "contradictions among the people."

PRE-XI REFORM ERA

Mao's death was followed by a rapid regime transformation from totalitarianism to a post-totalitarianism in China. Such transitions, as Linz and Stepan (1996: 42-51) suggest, typically involved the loss of interest by leaders and nonleaders in organizing mobilization and the recognition of a certain degree of social, cultural and economic pluralism. In China the decline of leaders' penchant for mass mobilization was accompanied with a dramatic decrease of the regime's propensity and capacity for repression. The transition to a market economy led to an extensive retreat of the state from many social and economic areas, and therefore weakened the

state's capacity for containing collective action. Many social institutions, such as the work-unit system, which were very instrumental for containing popular collective action, severely declined or even entirely collapsed. The state also substantially reduced its use of mass campaigns for coercive purposes. Last but not the least, the state launched a massive campaign for legal reforms since the end of the 1970s. Despite all their limits, legal reforms provided a degree of much-needed pro-tection for citizens.

As illustrated by figure 2, both civic and noncivic activism began to enjoy considerably more tolerant political environment. It should be noted, however, that the change was not linear, and the toleration had its limits. Howell (2015) observes a cyclical pattern between heavy-handed state repression and muted tolerance for civic activism in the reform era. Whether for civic or noncivic activism, moreover, state toleration was often de facto rather than de jure. Millions of unregistered NGOs technically were illegal and supposed to be banned. However, the government often dealt with them with a so-called three-no policy: no recognition, no banning, no intervention (Deng 2010). For noncivic activism, similarly, government officials often condoned collective petitions or protests, such as those staged by peasants against excessive taxation or SOE retirees against pension nonpayment, even when they did not strictly abide by the law.

Besides the impact of the regime's general tendencies that had similar effects on all kinds of popular contention, civic and noncivic activism experienced different effects of the regime transformation. The regime continued to take a more polarized approach toward civic activism than noncivic activism. Despite the regime's decreased interests in mass campaigns for ideological purposes, it still found good reason for facilitating certain types of civic activism. Local governments were particularly interested in civic activism that could provide social services and remedy the scarcity of government resources. Many local officials regarded civic activism as important resources to deal with their governance problems. They therefore often adopted a strategy of "welfarist incorporation": the state relaxed its registration regulations for social organizations and encouraged them to provide social services rather than advocating for rights or representing interests (Howell 2015). The state began to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with NGOs (Spires 2011; Hildebrandt 2013), and NGOs often played an active role as policy entrepreneurs (Mertha 2009; Steinhardt and Wu 2016). The regime is even dubbed consultative authoritarianism because of its remarkable accommodation of civil society (Teets 2013). In the meantime, for civic activism perceived by state leaders as directly threatening to the political system, the state remained extremely repressive. The massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989 is a case in point.

One of the most remarkable changes in the reform era was that noncivic activism started to enjoy a degree of state facilitation, even though such facilitation was merely de facto. In principle, the state still forbade citizens' noncivic collective actions. It nevertheless began to facilitate popular protests through a process of institutional conversion (Chen 2012). To a large extent state facilitation can be attributed to the increased importance of the functions that popular contention fulfilled for the political system. The CCP in the reform era continued to manage its relationship with the society with mass line, which valued citizen complaints and petitions as an important instrument for political responsiveness and accountability. While the CCP in Mao's era had the capacity to largely confine such forms of claim making to individualized actions, it lost such an ability in the reform era due to the decline of a variety of institutions for social control, such as work units. At the same time, accommodation of collective claim making became more important for two reasons. The transition to a market economy led to the growth of a wide range of group interests while the political system still lacked mechanisms for interest articulation and aggregation. Second, the market reform also increased decentralization and the divergence between central and local government made it both more difficult and more important to hold local officials accountable. When petitions and protests were regarded as an indispensable instrument to attain such goals, the political system created pressure for local officials to be responsive to such claims and also constrained their repression. Under such circumstances, petitioners and protesters are often tempted to appropriate state institutions to stage collective action to defend their interests.

The Rise of Feminist Activism in China

The rise of feminism in China is a good example to illustrate how the transformation of regime characters opened political space for civic activism in the reform era. It was hardly surprising that feminist activism did not develop in China before the reform era. An essential feature of Mao's rule was the absence of ideological pluralism. The dominant state ideology assumed that "sexual equality is an expression of class inequality and private ownership is at the root of women's oppression." It therefore emphasized that sexual inequality should be solved in the production process under public ownership (Wang and Zhang 2010: 41-42). The terminology of "feminism" was rejected as being "Western, narrow, and bourgeois." Also, there was no room for relatively autonomous organizations to promote gender or sex-related issues. A state corporatist organization, All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), was designated as the sole agency to speak for Chinese women.

Feminist activism began to develop slowly after the reform started in the late 1970s. Although China still witnessed ideological struggles and purges periodically in the 1980s, state repression mainly focused on politically motivated activism. Feminist activists therefore found a little breathing space. However, there was no breakthrough until the Chinese government hosted the fourth World Women Conference (FWCW) in 1995. Eager to ease international criticism and isolation in the aftermath of Tiananmen incident in 1989, the CCP enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to host the FWCW (Wesoky 2013; Braeuer 2016). This event provided much needed access to resources for feminist activism. Funds from external organizations, such as Ford Foundation, became available. More important, to some extent the state began to recognize the legitimacy of feminist ideology and organizations that were relatively independent from the state. As Wang and Zhang noted, Chinese feminists seized the opportunity and published many articles in the official media, especially in the Women's Federation's newspaper Chinese Women's Daily, introducing women's NGOs from around the world and carefully putting forth the argument that NGOs are not antigovernment organizations (Wang and Zhang 2010: 41). Such efforts helped the Chinese government to accept the legitimacy of NGOs. Indeed, the UN conference was a turning point not just for feminist activism, but for civic activism in general. As Deng (2010: 186) remarks, "It was not until 1995 that the first wave of true NGOs, established from the bottom up, began to appear in China."

The state's embrace of feminist activism, however, had its limitations. The Chinese government and the ACWF's understanding of the functions of feminist activism remained narrow and utilitarian. They clearly favored organizations that could provide social services and tended to be skeptical of activism for other purposes. As a lesbian activist recounted, "Someone from the ACWF once said to me, 'Why do lesbian groups need to fight for their rights? You are not the ones who get AIDs (compared to gays). How come you have a problem?'" (Zhou 2017: 5).

Even in the moments when the Chinese government was especially friendly toward feminist activism, its suspicion of feminism as an ideological threat never disappeared. This is hardly surprising. After all, even some Western scholars agreed that the focus of civic activism on topics such as feminism is "deeply ideologically charged." Its rise in non-Western countries, to some extent, can be attributed to Western governments' active promotion of global activism concerning human rights and gender issues in those countries (Hemment 2007). In China, most feminist activists had no intention to change the political system or challenge government policies, and many of them were not even interested in engaging in any direct relationship to the government. One activist, for example, claimed that what they were doing was "social" movement and lobbying the government was not "their thing" (Zhou 2017). Their tendency toward independent ideology and autonomous organizations was nevertheless disturbing to a government that was obsessed with social control. Many feminist organizations' reliance on foreign funds, and activists' fondness of Western styled discourse, such as rights, freedom and civil society, only exacerbated such suspicions.

The government was sometimes also concerned about the actions taken by activists. Understandably, feminist activists were interested in organizing public events, which were necessary for

them to influence the culture and society. A case in point is performance art advocacy, which centers on live performance in public spaces for a public audience (Guo, Fu, and Liu 2013). Anti-domestic violence (ADV) organizations in Beijing, among other feminist organizations, have adopted this form of activism since 2011 (Brauer 2016). Such actions were not particularly disruptive, but often had the ability to create considerable publicity.

Given the tensions between the state and feminist activists, it is no wonder that state toleration of such activism was limited and fragile. Many feminist groups could not fulfill the requirement to find government sponsors in order to register in the government. They either registered as private business or simply worked underground. Even those registered organizations had to endure police intrusion and even harassment every so often.

SOE Workers' Protests During the Industrial Restructuring

The changing space for noncivic activism is illustrated here with the experience of SOE employees during a dramatic campaign launched by the Chinese government to restructure enterprises in the mid-1990s. The campaign is often described as "grasping the large and releasing the small" (*zhuada fangxiao*), meaning that the Chinese government retained large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) while privatizing small- and medium-sized ones. With massive layoffs and firm closings, the restructuring dealt a fatal blow to a great many workers in SOEs. The majority of small- and medium-sized enterprises in the public sector across the country were either closed, allowed to go bankrupt, or had all or part of their assets leased or sold to private entrepreneurs. In response, SOE employees staged numerous collective protests. Their claims concerned a variety of grievances specific to particular groups, factories or individuals, such as nonpayment or arrears of pensions and salaries.

Compared to protesters of "economism" in the Cultural Revolution, worker protesters in the reform era faced a much more benign regime. State officials, from central leaders to local cadres, often expressed sympathy for workers' grievances. Workers' protests were no longer described by the authorities as narrow-minded pursuit of private interests that were agitated by class enemies. Protesters' main problem, from the government's point of view, was their violation of law and regulations, not their pursuit of private interests.

The sympathy from central leaders is clearly indicated by a speech made by Premier Zhu Rongji to the *xinfang* system, which is in charge of dealing with citizen complaints and petitions, on February 5 in 1999. When he discussed the rising popular contention in urban areas that were triggered by industrial restructuring, Zhu pointed out that pensioners were particularly contentious because they had especially strong grievances. He then cited a doggerel circulated among SOE retirees: "Our youth was dedicated to the Party, but no one cares about us when we get old. We are asked to rely on our children, yet all of them lost their job." "No wonder they were outraged," he remarked, and then expressed he and the central government's determination to solve workers' problems (Zhu 2011).

Such an attitude not only provided SOE employees with spiritual support, but also an effective frame for their mobilization. In this authoritarian system, few justifications were more powerful than statements made by national leaders. Like rightful resisters in the countryside studied by O'Brien and Li (2006), SOE employees often effectively demonstrated their rightfulness by citing leaders' speeches or policy statements. The central government also designed and adjusted a variety of legal and administrative procedures to ensure the responsiveness to petitions and protests. Such institutional mechanisms were very instrumental for workers' mobilization.

To be sure, the government's accommodation and facilitation of SOE employees' claim making was not merely driven by state leaders' sympathy, but also based on their recognition of the important functions that petitions and protests can fulfill for the political system. The same speech by Premier Zhu nicely summarized the main benefits of popular contention. He pointed out that the *xinfang* system designed for responding to petitions and protests is essential to the regime because "normal channels" between the masses and the Party might not work (Zhu 2011). Such an institution provided SOE employees and other ordinary people a perfect cover to gather

together and make claims to the government. SOE workers did not hesitate to take advantage of such a system. They were aware that if they fully followed the rules and only delivered their complaints and petitions moderately, they could go nowhere. They therefore often employed a variety of "troublemaking" tactics to create bargaining leverage against the government. By blocking highways, sitting in inside or around government compound, marching on the street with banners of slogans, and employing other "troublemaking" tactics, SOE workers often generated strong pressure on local governments to make concessions. Even very large and highly disruptive protests were always framed by them as inevitable extension or reasonable escalation of orderly petitions. Since petitions were not allowed to be delivered by more than five people, most of such activities technically violated law or regulations. Although local officials had good reason to crack down on them, their repression was often severely constrained because upper authorities did not want to block the channels of petitions and protests. Indeed, local officials were often under pressure to make expedient concessions. Although SOE employees won very few substantive policy victories, it was far from rare for them to obtain expedient concessions from the government, which encouraged more protests and petitions.

A comparison of feminist activism with SOE workers' mobilization suggests that they were perceived by the authorities as two social forces with quite different functions. Accommodating feminist NGOs helped to enhance the Chinese government's reputation and legitimacy in the world. Some NGOs also helped the government to solved social problems, such as AIDs prevention among homosexuals or gender equality in employment. By contrast, the government accommodated SOE workers' collective actions mainly because they provided important feedback to government policy and also helped the government to hold government officials accountable.

Feminist activists and SOE protests also posed quite different threats. Feminism was often viewed as ideologically threatening and described as an issue of national security partly because many feminist organizations had connections to international civil society or foreign governments. Meanwhile, the actions taken by feminist activists were usually too peaceful to be considered endangering social stability. In contrast, SOE workers' protests and other noncivic activism were sometimes perceived threatening to social stability. Indeed, SOE workers' protests during industrial restructuring and peasants' protests against excessive and arbitrary extraction of taxes and levies since the 1990s created a deep sense of crisis to Chinese leaders. Worried about social stability, Chinese leaders expanded and strengthened its stability-maintenance apparatus. Importantly, national security framing and social stability framing had somewhat different effects. When civic activism was viewed as threats to national security, the government usually strengthened its surveillance and repression on such activism. By contrast, the concern about social instability did not simply motivate the government to become more repressive. Instead, one of the government's primary strategies was to demobilize popular contention with expedient concessions. It should be noted that the government's willingness to bargain with peasants or workers was not primarily due to protesters' materialist claims. Labor NGOs and activists who assisted migrant workers to raise wages or obtain injury compensations rarely enjoyed such opportunities, even though they also focused on economic issues. Fighting for public interests rather than their own particularistic interests, they tended to arouse strong suspicion from the government.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM UNDER XI

After Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China witnessed another remarkable regime transformation. One of the most noticeable changes was the increased repressiveness of the state. To a large extent this can be attributed to the state's improved capacity for coercion. The Chinese state made great efforts to recover the social and economic space it gave up when economic reforms started. The Party diligently built branches and tried to repenetrate nonstate institutions and organizations, such as NGOs and private enterprises, which became increasingly dependent on the state for resources and recognition. The state also strengthened the infrastructures for monitoring and controlling in urban space, where population mobility and spatial ineligibility posed great challenges to social control. For example, a grid system (*wanggehua guanli*) enabled

the state to reach deeply into almost every neighborhood in most cities. The Chinese state has been adept at using modern technology for surveillance and repression.

While the enhanced state coercive capacity has shrunk the space for both civic and noncivic activism, the change in state propensity has had uneven effects. The regime's repressiveness of noncivic activism only moderately increased, while repression of civic activism increased dramatically. Some studies show that the Chinese government became more repressive toward noncivic protests under Xi's rule (Jay Chen 2017). The regime's basic approach, however, hardly changed. As discussed, the Chinese government's toleration and de facto facilitation of such activism was primarily based on its recognition of the functions that such claim-making activities could fulfill for the political system, which did not change after Xi came to power. An instruction issued by Xi in July 2017 can nicely illustrate the basic position of the CCP. In this instruction to the eighth national conference on *xinfang* work Xi pointed out that the government's primary goals for handling petitions and protests should be "to understand people's feelings, use people's wisdom, defend people's interests, and boost people's support." Government officials should focus on the problems raised in popular claim making (Xinhua News 2011). Local governments were still required to contain popular contention, but they should do it mainly by solving people's problems. To be sure, repression was often necessary for coping with collective protests, most of which were still technically illegal. Due to the emphasis on the responsiveness to petitions and protests, however, government repression often remained considerably constrained.

For civic activism, by contrast, Xi's administration raised the intensity of ideological struggles to a new level. In what is described by Lubman (2016) as a neo-Maoist ideological campaign, the CCP declared civil society as one of the seven main perils from the West. The heightened alert to civic activism can partly be attributed to international background. The CCP has long been wary about "peaceful transformation" of the regime. A series of color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, followed by the Arab Spring revolutions, alarmed Chinese leaders about the threats from outside, including international NGOs. The dramatically intensified repression on civic activism, however, was also accompanied with considerably stronger support of civic organizations by local governments than the pre-Xi era. The number of social organizations, many of which were relatively autonomous, increased substantially in many localities. In Shenzhen, for example, there were 5,019 registered social organizations in 2012, and the number increased to 13,180 in 2018. Unlike in Mao's era when the regime facilitated civic activism with top-down mass campaigns, in Xi's era, the dynamics mainly came from local governments with pragmatic objectives. The government's approach toward civic activism in Xi's era was even more polarized than the earlier reform era.

Feminism under Xi

Even before Xi's rule, feminist activists often experienced harassment and repression from the authorities: their social media accounts were sometimes closed, their public events were often cancelled, and so forth. Yet the repression on feminist activism was remarkably escalated after 2012. One of the most well-known events was the arrest of the "feminist five." Shortly before International Women's Day on March 8, 2015, five young feminists were detained in China. The police accused them of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" because they were planning to distribute leaflets in several cities to raise awareness of sexual harassment on public transport. The arrests shocked international society. After all, the planned activities were neither political nor disruptive, and the turnout was expected to be very small.

Many NGOs that focused on advocacy on women's rights and other gender or sex related issues were banned or forced to close. One of the most famous victims was Zhongze Women's Legal Counseling Service Center, which was founded by a public interest lawyer, Guo Jianmei. It was one of many NGOs that were established right after the Fourth Women's World Conference in Beijing. When legal assistance to women was regarded as a relatively safe issue, this NGO received strong support from Beijing University and some government agencies. It was also well recognized by the international society. Like many other NGOs, Zhongze suffered repression

before Xi's era. It was forced to cut off from its sponsor, Peking University, in 2010. None of such measures, however, was as harsh as its forced closure in 2016. Similar to most other cases of crackdown in that period, the NGO's linkage to foreign funders was cited as a main reason (Cao 2016). On the other hand, the government became remarkably more supportive of social organizations that could provide social services and did not have connections to foreign countries. In Shenzhen, for example, the government-sponsored Women's Federation worked as an incubator to actively nurture and support social organizations that provided assistance to various women groups, such as single moms and unemployed women.

Labor Activism under Xi

Unlike civic activism, noncivic activism under Xi did not witness a dramatic escalation of repression. Workers' struggles for their private interests were seldom regarded as direct threats to national security unless civic activists from outside got involved. Even though state repressiveness may have somewhat increased in recent years, the government did not try to shut down the channel of contentious bargaining. Workers and other subordinate groups still got the opportunity to mobilize collective actions to elicit relatively favorable response from local governments.

China Labor Bulletin, a Hong Kong-based NGO, has monitored labor activism in China in the past two decades. From 2015-2017, it finds that labor collective actions were still frequent and kept growing in that period (China Labor Bulletin 2018). About eighty percent of the 6694 incidents were focused on salary-related claims. To press the management or the authorities to solve the problems of nonpayment and arrears of salaries, workers resorted to demonstration, sit-in, highway blockade, strike, and other trouble-making tactics. Clearly, workers under Xi did not become more quiescent. Nor did they become more radical or violent. Another finding of the CLB report is that workers were rather rational and their bargaining with the management or the authorities became even more orderly than before. Despite the increased state repressiveness, the space for workers to stage collective action has not dramatically shrunk.

Nevertheless, there were quite a few cases of harsh crackdown on labor activists in recent years, especially a massive crackdown on labor NGOs and activists since around 2015. In Guangdong, where labor NGOs were particularly active in recent two decades, the government almost wiped out labor NGOs with links to Hong Kong or foreign countries. In most of such cases, the government primarily targeted labor NGOs or Marxist college students who came to agitate or support workers' struggles. One of the most famous cases was workers' protests in Jasic Inc. in 2018 in which a few Marxist activists, especially some university students, who offered their support to workers struggling for better working conditions and other related goals, were ruthlessly crushed. In such cases, although outsider activists mostly focused on economic issues, they suffered much harsher repression than worker protesters who struggled for their own particularistic issues. When it comes to the government's response, whether the protesters focus on materialist or nonmaterialist claims is less important than whether the activists were struggling for public or private interests.

CONCLUSION

This study elucidates how the Chinese state coped with civic and noncivic activism according to substantially different logic in all three periods: Mao's era, pre-Xi reform era, and Xi's era. The state was often tempted to take advantage of civic activism to achieve their political or ideological goals or to solve problems in governance. Yet it was also wary of the subversive potential of civic activism. As Nathan (2003) remarks, authoritarian regimes are inherently fragile because of weak legitimacy. It is therefore not surprising that the Chinese government has been anxious about domestic and international challenges to its legitimacy via civic activism. By comparison, noncivic activism was treated with a less polarized approach. The regime relies on citizen complaints and petitions to ensure government responsiveness and political accountability. Although collective protests with troublemaking tactics are formally outlawed, they have often been condoned

to a degree, especially when government repression has become more difficult and costly. To some extent the functions and threats of each type of popular collective action changed when the regime transformed. Political space thus evolved accordingly for them.

A clear understanding of the difference between civic and noncivic activism is important not only for academic research, but also for strategic decisions by protesters and activists. The Chinese government's willingness to negotiate with workers or peasants in their noncivic activism sometimes created unrealistic expectations for civic activists, which can be very dangerous. For noncivic activism, contentious bargaining in the reform era often followed the logic of "small troublemaking leads to small concessions, big troublemaking leads to big concessions." For civic activism, by contrast, aggressive protest tactics usually only prompted harsh repression.

This is not to suggest, however, that political opportunities for civic activism are unrelated to those for noncivic activism. Many structural conditions, such as basic regime characters, have a similar impact on civic and noncivic activism alike. Moreover, the opportunity opened for one type of activism can be taken advantage of by the other type of activism. In 1966, for example, contract or temporary workers seized the momentum created by Mao for revolutionary mass campaigns to stage their protests to press their private issues.

This study of social activism in China raises important questions about the general relationship between authoritarian states and popular collective action. The conventional understanding of state strategies as either repression or concessions proved too narrow or conceptualizing such a relationship. State facilitation of popular collective action is not only common in authoritarian regimes, it sometimes even defines the basic nature of the regime. Just like in China, civic and noncivic activism in other authoritarian regimes can fulfill different functions for the political system. Either type of popular collective action can also help to bring down the regime, albeit through somewhat different mechanisms and processes. Only by taking into account different configurations of such functions and threats can we explain the variations and changes in the political environment for civic and noncivic activism in the context of authoritarianism.

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