Contentious Politics in Two Villages

Anti-High-Speed-Rail Campaigns in Hong Kong and Taiwan

Stephen W. K. Chiu

Li Hang

香港亞太研究所

KONG INSTITUTE OF ASIA-PACIFIC STUDIES

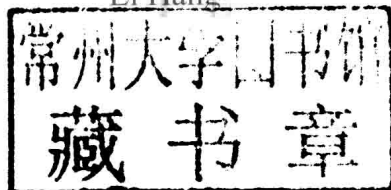HINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

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Li Hang

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong

About the Authors

Stephen W. K. Chiu is a Professor with the Department of Sociology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Director of the Public Policy Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.

Li Hang is a research associate at the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.

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A Tale of Two Villages

Land appropriation for development purposes is almost a quotidian activity in Hong Kong. Before 1997, during the colonial period, vast amounts of farmland were appropriated to build reservoirs or to provide space for new industrial and residential towns (Chiu and Hung, 1997). Recent examples include the island of Chek Lap Kok, where an old village had to be relocated to make way for the construction of the new Hong Kong International Airport. While government land appropriations for a wide variety of development projects had previously mostly been received with acquiescence, the plan for the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (hereafter, XRL) met with a very different response from society.

To connect with the railway system in the Mainland, the proposal is for the Hong Kong section of the XRL to run in a 26-kilometre long underground tunnel from the West Kowloon Terminus to join the Mainland section at the boundary at Huanggang. Midway between the West Kowloon Terminus and the Futian Station in Shenzhen, the plan is for an emergency rescue station and stabling sidings to be located in the New Territories. After the XRL plan was officially approved by the Executive Council in 2008, residents living in Choi Yuen Village (菜園村) received notification from the government to vacate their homes by the end of 2010 to make way for the construction of the XRL (see Figure 1 for the location of Choi Yuen Village).

Immediately after they were told to leave in November 2008, a majority of the villagers formed the Choi Yuen Village Concern Group (菜園村關注組, hereafter, CYV Concern Group). Following the formation of this group, more resources and support also came into the picture. When petitions to the government still failed to change the villagers' fate, their campaign escalated into territory-wide fight, with

Figure 1 Map of Hong Kong and the Location of Choi Yuen Village

Source: Agenda paper no. PWSC(2009-10)68 of the meeting of the Public Works
Subcommittee of Finance Committee of the Legislative Council held on
2 December 2009.

resources pouring in from the wider Hong Kong society. Thousands
of concerned individuals joined various rallies and demonstrations in
December 2009 and January 2010 (*Ming Pao Daily News* 明報, 16
January 2010 and 17 January 2010). However, the fate of the Choi
Yuen villagers could not be changed in spite of the unprecedented
support they garnered from different sectors of Hong Kong society.
The HK$66.9 billion funding for the XRL project was approved by
the Legislative Council (hereafter, LegCo) on 16 January 2010. Choi
Yuen Village was eventually demolished.

The most common explanation for the extraordinarily high
degree of public participation in the anti-XRL movement singles out
the emergence of a new social stratum in Hong Kong—youngsters
(aka the post-80s) who have new and different visions regarding the
future development of Hong Kong. Some commentators link this
phenomenon with the rise of post-materialistic values and the so-

called new social movements in Hong Kong. Another explanation focuses on the emerging mobilization potential created by social networking sites. In this paper, however, we attempt to go beyond the above explanations, which focus on rather ephemeral phenomena, through a comparative research design. By also probing into the case of the development of Taiwan High Speed Rail (hereafter, THSR), where territory-wide opposition was conspicuously absent, we hope to decipher the puzzle through a comparative lens.

Liujia Village (六家庄) was a Hakka indigenous village in Hsinchu, Taiwan. In the mid-1990s, the coming of THSR was clearly going to change the fortunes of the people of Liujia as the proposed railway would cut through the village from north to south. A total of 309 hectares of farmland were also expropriated for the development of the THSR Hsinchu Station Designated Zone (高鐵新竹車站特定區) (Liu, 2010) (see Figure 2 for the location of Liujia Village). Not only were houses and farmlands demolished, but the social networks of the village were disrupted and its cultural heritage threatened. The Liujia community put forward a wide range of demands. Landlords demanded fairer compensation from the government, but some were also reluctant to move out of their homes, which were over 100 years old. Culture and history workers also came to assist some of the villagers in preserving the historic structures. In the midst of a disorganized and barely visible opposition from the community, the Bureau of High Speed Rail finally managed to begin the construction of the THSR Hsinchu Station with a minor concession to preserve some of the historic structures in the area.

Infrastructure developments, especially the so-called "Ten Major Construction Projects," were part and parcel of the so-called "Taiwan miracle." Meanwhile, it was not unusual to see confrontations and opposition to the appropriation of land for the development of infrastructure or polluting facilities in Taiwan, ranging from the Anti-DuPont Movement in 1986 to the recent case of the Kuokuang Petrochemical Project in 2011. Although not all of those resisting these development projects were successful in achieving their goals, they were at least able to arouse territory-wide attention to their pleas through large-scale mobilization. In the case of the THSR project, however, there was no conspicuous and organized opposition against

Figure 2 Map of Hsinchu County and the Location of Liujia Village

Source: Homepage of the Hsinchu County Government.

the project or the associated land appropriation. However, when we shift our radar to its Hong Kong counterpart, only the anti-XRL movement stands out in the history of Hong Kong. How can we account for the above contrast? Why did an anti-high-speed-rail movement gather steam in Hong Kong instead of Taiwan, where social movements opposing infrastructure projects are more commonplace?

The aim of this paper is to analyze the differences between the two cases and to unravel the above puzzles by adopting the political

opportunity structure approach. Before embarking on the analysis, we will first define the outcome of interest—contentious politics. We will then put forward the analytical framework and outline the methodological design of the present study. This will be followed by an analysis of the two case studies. We will conclude this paper with a discussion on the theoretical limitations of the analytical framework for the present study.

Defining Contentious Politics

Contentious politics is the explanandum of the present research. Tilly and Tarrow (2007:4) defined contentious politics as "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties." There are two ideal-typical forms of contentious politics (ibid:60), namely transgressive contention and contained contention. In this paper, we refer the former as an *extra-institutionalized* political action with *high intensity of mobilization*, and the latter as an *institutionalized* political action with *low intensity of mobilization* in the claim making process.

Previous studies of social movements have mostly been concerned with the question of the intensity of mobilization, and have focused squarely on the *extra-institutional* aspect of the interaction between state and society (for example, see Costain, 1992). With a focus only on successful mobilization (i.e., social movements with high mobilization intensity), this type of research has ignored a myriad of political actions involving the use of relatively more institutionalized means for movements to advance their claims, especially when the concerned social groups are situated at the boundary of the polity. More importantly, by "selecting on the dependent variable," analysts of social movements "inevitably focus on the exceptional cases in which existing groups produce movements, and elide the more numerous examples in which groups constrain action" (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2008:325). The result may have been a tendency to exaggerate the link between organization and action.

The scope of recent studies on social movements, however, has expanded to emphasize the distinction between "assimilative"

and "disruptive" movement strategies (Kitschelt, 1986:66) or "institutionalized" and "non-institutionalized" movement strategies (McAdam, 1999:57). The former strategy emphasizes the activists' acceptance of the established, or "proper," channels for resolving conflicts. It includes all collective action in which those involved engage in institutional politics. The latter strategy is consistent with the traditional image of social movements, in that it emphasizes the rejection of established institutional mechanisms, at least at the symbolic level, for seeking redress of group grievances. To avoid the problem of "selecting on the dependent variable," we propose, following the second strand in the study of social movements, to probe into not only the case of extra-institutional political action, but also the case of contentions in which more institutionalized strategies were actually employed.

Apart from the above distinction between the two forms of movement strategy, we also aim to delve deeper into the factors that determine the intensity of mobilization. Organizational strength is always said to be one such crucial factor. Tilly's mobilization model, for instance, emphasizes the role of organization in enhancing mobilization potential for extra-institutional politics. Tilly identified two dimensions of organization—*categories* and *networks* (1978:62–63). The levels of *cat*ness and *net*ness determine the inclusiveness of a social group. Mobilization potential will be higher for a social group with a high degree of group inclusiveness. In a similar vein, McAdam (1982) emphasized the role of indigenous organizational strength and cognitive liberation in movement mobilization. According to McAdam, only organized groups can take advantage of existing political opportunities. An organized group should also engage in a collective redefinition of its own unjust situation for mobilization to occur. In short, if we are to unravel the process of mobilization and explicate its intensity in contentious politics, we must delve deeper into the dynamics and mechanisms of how an organizational base for mobilization is formed.

Figure 3 provides the conceptual scheme for identifying four ideal-typical forms of political action along two distinct dimensions of contentious politics, namely, the location of interaction between state and society, and the intensity of mobilization.

Figure 3 Ideal Types of Political Action

		Party politics	Transgressive contention
Intensity of mobilization	High		
	Low	Contained contention	Unorganized collective action
		Institutional	Extra-institutional

Location of interaction

The location of interaction between state and society depicts the terrain in which political actions take place. While an extra-institutionalized form of political action takes place outside the state's prescribed and tolerated terrain, an institutionalized form of political action take place within it. The intensity of mobilization refers to the size and diversity of social groups that are mobilized to engage in a political action. The quadrant of high intensity of mobilization combined with a highly institutionalized form of political action is the realm of party politics in which institutionalized political groups engage in routinized interaction with the state. The quadrant of low intensity of mobilization combined with an extra-institutional form of political action involves sporadic collective actions carried out by unorganized or loosely organized individuals.

In this paper, our main interest lies with the other two quadrants of the above conceptual scheme, namely, the realm of *transgressive contention* and the realm of *contained contention*. While the former involves *extra-institutionalized* forms of political action, which violate standard arrangements or adopt previously unknown forms of claim making, with *high intensity of mobilization*, the later involves *institutionalized* forms of political action in the claim making process, which are deemed to be acceptable from the perspective of the state, with *low intensity of mobilization* (see Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:60). In the next section, we review existing approaches to explaining the trajectories and forms of contentious politics, and then postulate an analytical framework for the comparative case studies based on this review.

Explaining Contentious Politics

Grievances

The school of collective behavior basically expounds on the emergence of social movements by scrutinizing the causes of the "grievances" that drive the participants of a movement onto the streets (Kornhauser, 1959; Smelser, 1962; Gurr, 1970). The assumption is that disturbed social-psychological states are the result of structural strain and also the proximate preconditions for the emergence of a movement. However, the proposed causal relationships among structural strain, disturbed psychological states, and social movements have been subjected to a great deal of criticism (see McCarthy and Zald, 1977; McAdam, 1982). On the whole, the social-psychological explanation exaggerates the role of grievances on the one hand, and ignores the organizational dimensions and the political orientations of social movements altogether on the other hand. It also fails to conceptualize both extra-institutionalized and institutionalized forms of political action as viable means by which the "aggrieved" population might seek to advance their interests. It sets apart extra-institutional strategies (i.e., social movements) from ordinary political action; thus, only extra-institutional collective (irrational) action is explained in the model.

Despite the conspicuous weaknesses of the social-psychological explanation, the basic ideas of this model have already influenced the language used in the mass media when commenting on the emergence of movements as a whole. During the anti-XRL campaign in Hong Kong, for instance, the mass media generally characterized the participants in the movement, mostly youths born after 1980, as "the lost youths" who were frustrated by the obstacles to their upward mobility (see for example, *Ming Pao Daily News*, 1 November 2009). However, such a claim was revealed to be untenable from a telephone survey conducted in Hong Kong in 2010 (Public Policy Research Centre, 2010). This study shows that although young people are more critical than others of the government and the political establishment, they are in general positive in evaluating their own situation. They have negative sentiments too, but these do not originate from internal psychological disturbance but are influenced by different political

events, such as the XRL project and the debates over constitutional reform. The weakness of the social-psychological explanation is thus also revealed when it is applied to the Hong Kong case.

Value Shift

New Social Movement (hereafter, NSM) theories are the second major approach used to explain the emergence of contentious politics.[1] Inglehart (1977, 1981) attributed the rise of NSMs to the shift in values from materialism to postmaterialism. He first noted that people in Western industrialized nations are now relatively assured that their basic needs for sustenance and survival will be met; they thus feel more secure than before, both economically and politically. He then asserted, based on Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of needs, that this sense of security has become the soil for the growth of postmaterialistic values. Postmaterialistic values refer to a "new" concern with self-actualization and quality of life rather than with economic growth and material well-being among the younger generations. Over time, the values of the younger generations will replace those of the older generations in a society, leading to a gradual shift towards postmaterialism.

The "standard" criticism of the "value-shift" explanation, or the NSM approach, is to query the "newness" of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., see Gamson, 1992). Although we agree with the criticism concerning the empirical "newness" of NSMs, we still tend to see the "newness" in NSM theories as referring more to the attributes of postindustrial society than to the quality of movements as such. For example, Wong and Wan's study (2009) on postmaterialism in Hong Kong revealed that the postmaterialistic value set is actually a significant independent variable in explaining Hong Kong people's attitudes towards, as well as participation in, the "new politics" (including the environmental movement, women's movement, and labor movement). Thus, the role of postmaterialism in explaining recent political activism cannot be so hastily discarded.

However, by focusing on the "why" of the emergence of movements, NSM theories, have relatively little to say about the "how" of ongoing processes in these movements. It also has not been particularly helpful in understanding the "when" or "where" of the

formation of intermittent social movements across structurally similar societies (Tarrow, 1994:83). In other words, similar to the "grievances" explanation, the "value-shift" explanation is also unable to explicate when, as well as why, institutional political action rather than extra-institutional political action is employed in social movements during some periods of history but not others.

Organizational Strength

The most succinctly argued thesis on the importance of organizational resources in spurring social movements is the one put forward by McCarthy and Zald (1977). In their theory of resource mobilization, they emphasize the interaction among resource availability, the preexisting organization of preference structures, and entrepreneurial attempts to meet preference demand (1977:1236). Their main argument is that powerless and resource-poor groups are not able to organize themselves effectively *without* an inflow of resources and help from professional social movement organizations (hereafter, SMOs).

Resource mobilization theory has been challenged in subsequent empirical research (Piven and Cloward, 1979; McAdam, 1982). McAdam (1982) criticized this theory for failing to recognize the latent power of excluded groups. In his study of the civil rights movement in the United States, McAdam showed that the indigenous organizations of the black community, which provided a pre-existing network for "bloc recruitment,"[2] were actually one of the primary factors in generating insurgency. External resources did flow into the black insurgency, but only after the movement had gained momentum and achieved a few victories. McAdam further noted that the availability of external resources did not have entirely beneficial effects. It tended in some circumstances to inhibit the movement by leading to the "channeling of potentially disruptive protest into institutionalized channels" (1982:28).

In their study, Jenkins and Eckert (1986) attempted to further evaluate the impact of external resources, elite patronage, and professional SMOs in particular, on black insurgency during 1960s through a time-series analysis of the contents of newspapers. Their analysis generally supports McAdam's assertion that indigenous

resources played a primary and active role in the emergence of the movement, while professional SMOs played only a reactive and secondary role. However, they also revealed that external resources are not inevitably counterproductive. External resources have frequently played an effective role by following up the victories of the indigenous movement. Moreover, contrary to the criticisms of resource mobilization theory, the injection of external resources also does not snuff out the potential for radical dissent nor does it transform the goals of the movement; it only channels the means of the movement (the professionalization of SMOs), not the goals.

By this point, studies testing the resource mobilization approach have only assured us that external resources and indigenous resources are both important to the development of social movements and the viability of SMOs. Moreover, the influx of external resources and organizational support do sometimes steer SMOs into pursuing more institutional strategies, generally without defusing the disruptive power of the movements nor displacing their goals (see also Staggenborg, 1988; Cress and Snow, 1996). The effects of external resources on mobilization outcomes and movement strategies are in fact more subtle and less direct in most of the empirical cases. In sum, the explanation that focuses on organizational resources appears to shed little light on the major explanandum of the present study—the *location of interaction between state and society*. Nevertheless, as organizational strength is still part and parcel of the *mobilization process* in contentious politics, we will not completely refrain from delving into the organizational dynamics of social movements in the subsequent analysis.

Political Opportunity

In general, political opportunity denotes the consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment or of changes in the environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting expectations for success or failure (Tarrow, 2011:32–33). Studies of movements across nations usually highlight the similarities and differences in the stable aspects of political opportunity structures (for example, Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1992), while studies of movements in a single country mostly

examine the dynamic processes of interactions between political opportunities and social movements (for example, McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1989; Costain, 1992).

While the first explicit use of the term "political opportunity structure" can be traced back to the study by Eisinger (1973), the foundation stone of the political process approach was laid by Tilly (1978) in his major work, *From Mobilization to Revolution.* Tilly (1978) applied Eisinger's finding to national governments, emphasizing the continuity between extra-institutional and institutional political action, and the state's role in channeling dissent. Like Eisinger, Tilly asserted that there is a curvilinear relationship between the frequency of protests and the openness of the political opportunity structure. When governments offer a given contender routine and meaningful avenues for access, few among that group would protest because less costly and more direct routes to influence are available. At the other end of the opportunity curve, governments can repress various contenders so that they are unable to develop the requisite capacity to advance their claims.

Studies by both Eisinger and Tilly outlined a promising theoretical template for subsequent studies, although some of those studies paid only selective attention to the original model. For instance, McAdam (1982), in his study of black insurgency in the United States, sought to show that favourable shifts in the structure of political opportunities increase the likelihood of successful insurgencies. By emphasizing *"expanding opportunity"* as the crucial determinant for mobilization, he in effect paid attention to only half of the political opportunity curve. Kriesi and his colleagues (Kriesi et al., 1995) attempted to probe into the complexity of "new" social movements through longitudinal studies conducted across four European states (France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland). Their model of political opportunity structures includes the nature of political cleavages, institutional structures, alliance structures (the openness and political position of the organized left), and the prevailing strategies of social movements. Their study captures more nuances of the cases at hand than other comparative studies, but their explanations are also much harder to apply to other cases.

On the whole, the political process approach facilitates efforts

to discern the structural conditions that determine the forms of contention as well as the intensity of mobilization. However, both the longitudinal approach and the cross-national comparison approach reviewed above have their own weaknesses and blind spots. Therefore, we need to search for a model that can reconcile the tensions between parsimonious conceptualization and appropriate empirical application, which will still allow us to discern the effects from both the stable and dynamic aspects of the political opportunity structure. To achieve this goal, we argue that we should first bring the initial postulation of the political opportunity curve back into the picture so as to scrutinize the effects not only of "*expanding opportunity*" but also of "*constricting opportunity*" (see Meyer, 2004). Moreover, we will also pay systematic attention to the specifications of the model of the political opportunity structure, to prevent the concept of the political opportunity structure from becoming "a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment" (Gamson and Meyer, 1996:275).

Elaborating on the Concept of Political Opportunity Structure

Curvilinear Conception of Political Opportunity

In order to reconcile the tensions between parsimony and complexity, we argue that such an objective can be achieved by revisiting the initial curvilinear conception of the political opportunity curve. In the simplest sense, the likelihood of social movements employing an extra-institutional strategy varies with the openness of the political opportunities in a curvilinear fashion, with protests or riots being most common in regimes with a mixture of open and closed institutions (Eisinger, 1973; Tilly, 1978). At the two ends of the curve, social movements will be less likely to employ an extra-institutional strategy either because their dissent is co-opted through institutional means or repressed when threats from the state are overwhelming.

A more dynamic account of the trajectories of a changing political opportunity structure is laid out in Figure 4. There are four possible trajectories in a changing political opportunity structure. Paths A and B in Figure 4 both denote an outcome of transgressive

Figure 4 Political Opportunity Curve
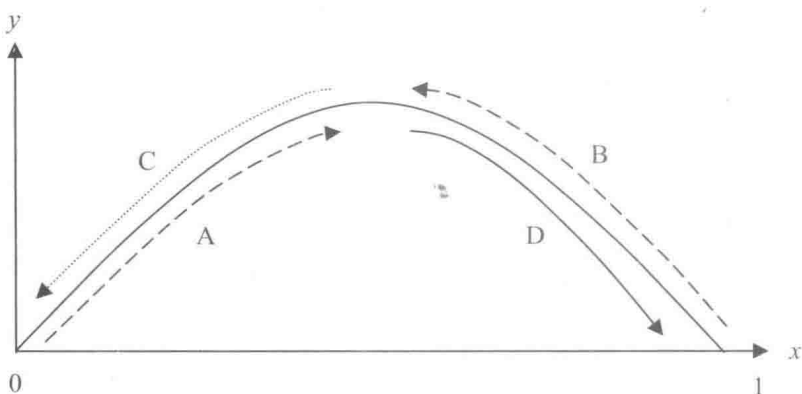
x: Openness of the political opportunity structure (1: fully open; 0: fully closed).

y: Likelihood that social movement will employ an extra-institutional strategy.

contention between state and society, yet with different trajectories. Path A depicts the traditional trajectory of *"expanding opportunity,"* which results in extra-institutional politics. Path B depicts another possibility for extra-institutional politics, but one occurring in the context of *"constricting opportunity."* Following through path B, *"further constricting opportunity"* will not always give rise to extra-institutional politics once the apex of the curve is reached. Path C traces the trajectory when the constriction of political opportunity is so overwhelming that both the institutional strategy and the extra-institutional strategy become less and less acceptable from the state's perspective. Path D indicates the situation when *"further expanding opportunity"* opens up more and more prescribed institutional terrain for activists to influence the decision-making process, making the institutionalized form of political action preferable to activists. This is contained contention.[3]

For instance, in his study McAdam (1982) traced the rise and decline of black insurgency primarily along path A and then path C from 1930 to 1970. In this paper, it was found that Hong Kong between 1982 and 2009 first developed along path A and then along path D, but finally retracted back through path B after 1997, while Taiwan between 1987 and 2000 followed path A and then path D.