

RESISTANCE, REPRESSION, RESPONSIVENESS:

WORKERS AND THE STATE IN CHINA

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This dissertation examines the impact of labor unrest under authoritarianism. It uses evidence from China to explore the possibility that autocracies, especially state socialist and post-socialist ones, are uniquely vulnerable to worker resistance and therefore react to it in a dual manner, at once repressive and responsive. Drawing on an original dataset of strikes, protests, and riots by Chinese workers, I find that increases in unrest are correlated with both increases in public security spending (repression) and pro-labor rulings in formally adjudicated employment disputes (responsiveness). Using a “most similar” case comparison informed by field theory, I then show how in Jiangsu’s portion of the Yangtze River Delta, moderate industrial contention is paired with governance that can be characterized as *preemption*, *caution*, and *nudging*, while in Guangdong’s portion of the Pearl River Delta, high contention is paired with *reaction*, *experimentation*, and *crackdowns*. Thus, consistent with the dissertation’s quantitative analysis, repression and responsiveness are stronger where resistance is more widespread, but governance is also qualitatively different. I argue that, at the level of local governments and local officials, there is a logic to this divergence between the cases: militant workers make a liability of the state’s commitment to stability, thereby threatening the careers of officials, who must, as a consequence, demonstrate grit and creativity. Two issues remain: the role of regional political elites and diffusion between regions. I find that the ideologies of particular local politicians do not alter the protest-policy relationship. However, even as protest tactics diffuse outward from the country’s hotspots of contention, official counter-measures against protests also spread. Worker resistance thus profoundly influences authoritarian rule, but not in a linear manner.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Manfred Elfstrom has a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College and a master's degree from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. Before beginning his doctoral studies at Cornell University, he worked for several years in the non-profit world, supporting workers' rights in China as a Campaigns Coordinator for China Labor Watch and a Program Officer for the International Labor Rights Forum. Mr. Elfstrom has also studied Chinese village elections with the Carter Center's China Program and taught in rural Shanxi Province, China. Beginning in August 2016, he will be a China Public Policy Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation.

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1. Introduction

When workers mobilize to improve their lives, the political ramifications can be profound. Labor movements are credited with hastening the adoption of universal suffrage (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Thompson 1966), shaping the priorities of Europe's welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990), contributing to the collapse of state socialism in the former Soviet Union (Crowley 1997), and spurring different elite attempts at co-optation—traditional, populist, radical—in Latin American politics at “critical junctures” (R. B. Collier and Collier 1991).

Today, workers are on the defensive in most democratic countries. Even as wage growth has stagnated and inequality has risen, strike rates have fallen to historic lows in Europe and North America (International Labour Organization 2015; The Economist 2014). Despite repeated attempts at union renewal, the percentage of employees in the United States carrying union cards has decreased from a high of 28.3 percent in 1954 to 11.1 percent in 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016b; Mayer 2004). South Korea's famously militant unions have seen their membership reduced from 18.6 percent of the workforce in 1989 to 10.1 percent in 2012 (OECD n.d.). In contrast, although reliable statistics on strikes and unionization are less easily available from non-democracies, anecdotal evidence suggests that workplace activism has held steady or risen in many countries where citizens lack free and fair elections—and where workers are either outright denied organizations of their own or their organizations are under violent attack. Waves of strikes have rocked Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Egypt, Iran, Russia, Tunisia, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe over the past decade (International Trade Union Confederation 2015). With the exception of Egypt and Tunisia, though, labor has not helped bring about regime change in any of these places. This dissertation uses the case of China to examine what kind of change workers can nonetheless bring about in such settings.

The Case of China

China offers a particularly useful vantage point on these dynamics. The country is frequently highlighted as a prime example of “authoritarian resilience” (e.g., Nathan 2003). Its ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has held power since 1949, through periods of socialist construction, famine (the Great Leap Forward), mass mobilization and internal disorder verging on state breakdown (the Cultural Revolution), and marketization (Reform and Opening). China is also home to the world’s largest working class. In 2014, according to official statistics, the country had a total of 772.5 million employed persons, with 231 million working in manufacturing and 313.6 million in the tertiary sector (All China Data Center 2015). The same year, an astounding 274 million citizens were “migrant workers,” also called “peasant workers” (*nongmin gong*) or “new urbanites” (*xin shimin*), i.e., people who travel from China’s rural areas to work in its cities, where they are excluded from many basic social benefits because of the country’s restrictive household registration (*hukou*) system.¹ As of the end of 2012, approximately 64.6 million individuals were employed by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and vulnerable to layoffs due to restructuring (in the late 1990s and early 2000s, an estimated 25-40 million SOE workers were temporarily or permanently laid off, see K. Lin 2016). Most importantly for our analysis, China’s workers are extremely active, striking, protesting, and rioting on a scale that likely outstrips anywhere else on the globe in absolute terms. The country thus combines a high-capacity nondemocratic state with deep social contradictions and a very mobilized working class. Although it by no means represents the experience of workers in all other authoritarian settings, it illustrates with particular clarity dynamics of industrial conflict in the absence of democracy.

¹ According to official statistics, see China Labour Bulletin 2015. The actual number may be even higher.

Rising Labor Unrest in China

China has been called an “emerging epicenter of world labor unrest” (Silver and Zhang 2009). Annual formally mediated, arbitrated, and litigated labor disputes have risen from 48,121 in 1996 to 665,760 in 2013 (China Labor Statistical Yearbook 2014). For a period, Beijing provided semi-regular updates on the country’s number of “mass incidents,” a euphemism for strikes, protests, and riots. Such incidents increased from 9,000 in 1994 to 87,000 in 2005, the last year these figures were publicly reported (a leak put the number at 127,000 in 2008) (Tanner 2004; Wedeman 2009). Scholars have estimated that roughly a quarter to a third of these are workplace disputes (C.-J. J. Chen 2009; Yu Jianrong cited in China Labour Bulletin 2012; Qin He 2014, 2; Wedeman 2009). In 2014, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences stated that over the past 14 years, employment-related conflicts accounted for the largest single category of protest involving more than 1,000 individuals (environmental disputes dominated incidents with more than 10,000 people, see The Beijing News 2014). Particularly high-profile showdowns in recent years have included a taxi strike in Chongqing in 2008 that spread to over a dozen cities across the country; violent protests that blocked the privatization of a steel mill in Jilin province in 2009 and inspired an equally successful anti-privatization effort at a mill in Henan; and a work stoppage at a Honda auto parts plant in Guangdong in 2010 that shut down the company’s entire Chinese supply chain and sparked similar actions at other Honda, Hyundai, and Toyota plants. Tactics employed by demonstrators have ranged from playful street theater to seizing or sabotaging equipment to, in a handful of instances, online coordination across multiple worksites.² We cannot yet speak of a full-fledged labor movement in the sense of “a sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on

² An example of such online coordination was a work stoppage organized by thousands of Pepsi bottling plant employees spread across five cities in November 2011 (China Labour Bulletin 2011).

organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 111). However, we can speak of a powerful “proto-movement”: the scattered actions of today will not *necessarily* evolve into something more in the future but the seeds of a movement are in place—stop-and-start claim-making, weak networks, occasional flashes of solidarity—whatever their future form.

Labor activism is not new to China. Weavers, miners, and railway employees mobilized in the early twentieth century with the help of native place associations, guilds, organized crime networks, and Communist Party cadres (Perry 1993, 2012). After the 1949 revolution, workers forced the CCP to speed up its nationalization of private businesses (Frazier 2002), launched a series of strikes during the Hundred Flowers Movement (Perry 1994; Pringle 2011, 62–65; Sheehan 1998, chap. 2), and occupied factories and raised what were disapprovingly dubbed “economistic demands” during the Cultural Revolution (Perry and Li 1997; Sheehan 1998, chap. 4). The right to strike was removed from China’s Constitution in 1982.³ In 1989, the Beijing Workers’ Autonomous Federation played a significant role in the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, although the organization was frequently marginalized by students (Perry 2002, chap. 10; Sheehan 1998, chap. 7; Walder and Gong 1993; Liang Zhang, Nathan, and Link 2001, 236–37). Then, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, laid-off SOE employees protested in the thousands in factory towns and oil fields, playing the *Internationale* on stereos, carrying portraits of Mao, reading aloud poems in the memory of the famous model worker Iron Man Wang Jinxi, and denouncing corruption (see, for example, Au and Bai 2010; Cai 2002; Feng Chen 2000; Hurst 2009; Hurst and O’Brien 2002; Lee 2007; Weston 2004). Scattered industrial actions by

³ This does not mean that strikes are necessarily illegal (Taylor, Chang, and Li 2003, 33). Some argue that a provision (Article 27) of the 2001 Trade Union Law legitimizes strikes (Feng 2011). However, China also has rules prohibiting things like “gathering a crowd to disturb public order” (see Articles 290–292 of the 1997 Criminal Law).

migrant workers occurred then, too, in the booming export zones of the south (A. Chan 2001, chap. 8). In 2004, for instance, workers at two Taiwanese-owned shoe plants in Dongguan, Guangdong, protested and smashed machinery over low wages, long working hours, and poor quality food, resulting in a high-profile trial of the alleged leaders of the incidents (China Labour Bulletin 2007). In sum, industrial strife has been a near-constant feature of modern Chinese life.

Nonetheless, the current wave of workplace protest is unprecedented in its scale. As Qin He (2014, 3) writes, “If in the future an unstable situation occurs in China, the main factors leading to this situation are likely to be the accumulation of labor relations problems and the intensification of contradictions in... labor relations.” The government is clearly taking this threat seriously. For example, in a much-discussed article, a scholar at a government-backed think tank, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, recently described China’s external security environment as benign but warned the public about the grave internal challenge posed by angry “disadvantaged groups” (*ruoshi qunti*) (Yuan 2012; for analysis, see Barmé 2012). Meanwhile, in a research report, the Politics and Law Committee of Guangdong Province accused grassroots labor lawyers of, among other things, exacerbating “contradictions and disputes,” “disturbing public order management,” and endangering “state security” (China Labor News Translations 2010). The state-controlled All China Federation of Trade Union’s Vice Secretary Li Yufu warned in a February 2015 interview, “The situation facing the sphere of labor relations is tangled and complex; contradictions in labor relations have already entered a period in which they are prominent and common.... Foreign enemy forces are infiltrating and exacerbating [the situation], vainly trying to use labor relations as a breach....” (Outlook Weekly 2015). In April of the same year, the CCP Central Committee and State Council took the unusual step of jointly releasing a set of opinions on “building harmonious labor relations,”

which were published on the front page of the official *People's Daily* and described the stakes of maintaining industrial peace as including not only “healthy economic development” but also the preservation of the Party’s “governing status” (People’s Daily 2015). The Communist Party clearly no longer perceives workplace contention to be simply one among the many social challenges it faces but rather a potential existential threat. In this dissertation, I examine how, exactly, Beijing is reacting to labor activism.

China’s Dual Transformation from Below

The dissertation uses evidence from China to explore the possibility that authoritarian governments, especially state socialist or post-socialist authoritarian governments, are uniquely vulnerable to worker unrest, and—particularly when unrest falls short of constituting a full-fledged movement—simultaneously adopt repressive and responsive approaches to containing its short- and long-term effects. I show that China’s rising unrest is, on average, pushing the state in two directions at once: toward an increased investment in public security, on the one hand, and toward a more pro-worker stance in employment disputes, on the other. To determine whether this dynamic holds at a local level and what additional, local relationships might undergird the relationships observed in the country as a whole, I compare two “most similar” cases, Jiangsu’s portion of the Yangtze River Delta and Guangdong’s portion of the Pearl River Delta. In Jiangsu, moderate workplace contention is paired with governance that can be characterized as *preemption, caution, and nudging*; in Guangdong, high contention, with *reaction, experimentation, and crackdowns*. I posit that various structural factors, such as Jiangsu’s booming high-tech sector and Guangdong’s concentration of light manufacturers, may spur or dampen unrest, but it is ultimately the pressure that workers place on officials that is key. Whereas officials in quiescent areas like Jiangsu have an incentive to “maintain the peace” in

order to be promoted, officials in turbulent areas like Guangdong must show grit and creativity if they are to be upwardly mobile leaders. The same pattern of resistance, repression, and responsiveness is seen at a local level, in other words, but more is at work than simply pressure and reaction. I note that two factors threaten to complicate this analysis. The presence or absence of particular regional leaders could conceivably spur or dampen unrest *and* shape policy responses, leading to an overestimation of the protest-policy relationship, while the diffusion of protests and counter-measures against protests outward from hotspots of unrest could make different regions seem more similar than they truly are, leading to an *underestimation* of the same relationship. Based on the case of Chongqing, an up and coming industrial hub that has attracted distinctive leaders in recent years, I find that the presence of a left-populist or liberal-reformist politician does not fundamentally alter the pattern already observed. However, drawing on evidence from around China, I show that workers indeed diffuse strike tactics from centers of contention to other parts of the country and that officials in low-unrest areas are learning from the experiences of their counterparts in restive areas and taking preemptive measures. The political impact of labor unrest is thus even larger than it first appears. The Chinese state is being transformed from below, but not with a bang. Instead, change has come via moves, countermoves, internal variation, learning, and integration. These findings have important implications for our understanding of the relationship between workers and authoritarian regimes more generally.

Implications for Workers and Authoritarian Regimes

My dissertation holds several lessons regarding the impact of labor activism in non-democratic settings. First, analysis may benefit less from binaries like “reform” versus “repression” and more from attention to the complementarities and contradictions between the actions of what

Bourdieu (2008) calls the welfare-enhancing “left hand” and the punitive “right hand” of the state—and their interaction with public expectations and frustrations. In the course of responding to unrest, authorities strengthen their ability to coerce—and may even regress with regard to various indicators of political openness—while at the same time, intentionally or not, saddling themselves with new social commitments. Second, average trends can be understood as the products of complex dynamics involving an extensive array of actors operating in regional clusters of activity, i.e., in local or regional authoritarian regimes nested within bigger, national authoritarian regimes. Third, the strengths of governments and parties, such as their ability to guarantee “stability,” are also vulnerabilities that can be exploited by challengers. Fourth, elite politics matter, but they are secondary to grassroots pressure, particularly at a local level: labor protests provide openings for innovation in workplace governance by creative leaders who, in the absence of unrest, would focus on other areas of governance. Fifth and finally, knowledge diffuses on all sides of contentious politics. As a result, protesters hone their skills, and the state simultaneously reconstitutes itself, but (to paraphrase Marx) not under self-selected circumstances.⁴ Change is therefore constant but rarely linear.

In the remainder of this chapter, I address the central debates in the literature that situate this thesis. I then conclude the chapter with an explanation of my methodology and an outline of the organization of the dissertation.

⁴ As Marx (1978, 437) wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”

Existing Analyses

In exploring the impact of China's labor unrest on government policy, my dissertation is informed by diverse literatures: in comparative politics, the work on social movements and their outcomes, state-society relations under authoritarianism, and regime change, and in the particular field of Chinese studies, analyses of contentious politics in China and the political economy of labor-state relations in China. These bodies of research overlap substantially, generating important insights regarding the dynamics of protest emergence, the trade-offs experienced by autocrats choosing between various policy options, the distinctions between different forms of regime crisis, and the changes now occurring in China's workplace organization. Nonetheless, each literature contains significant gaps. Much of the scholarship on social movements targets democratic regimes and privileges questions about movement origins, while slighting issues of policy impact. Research on state-society relations under authoritarianism, particularly in the rational choice tradition, has tended to rely on simplistic binaries—for example, regime policy as either violence or cooptation and regimes as either failing or enduring. What is missing is recognition that states have many choices; they can combine policies that on the face of it seem to be opposed; and they can gradually evolve. Scholars of Chinese contentious politics have generally not connected local protests to system-level alterations in Communist Party rule. Finally, echoing the social movement literature more broadly, studies of labor issues in China, whether they come to optimistic or pessimistic conclusions regarding labor's fate, have tended to concentrate on the determinants of worker activism, leaving its effects underexplored.

Social Movement Outcomes

Social movements have traditionally been treated as products of a range of factors. Early analyses adopted starkly structural or psychological perspectives, explaining protest as a direct outgrowth of economic systems or “more spontaneous forms of expression” (Tarrow 2011, chap. 1). Today, the dominant approach to understanding movements focuses on three pillars of organizing: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and different framings of issues that allow for or foreclose alliances with other groups (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2011). An alternative approach places strategy, agency, and, especially, culture front and center (Goodwin and Jasper 2004). Rigorous studies of the *effects* of protest are still few and far between—a gap that has been described as “astonishing,” given that “the ultimate end of movements is to bring about change” (Giugni 1998, 373). In response, Slater (2010) has called for movements to also be approached as an “independent variable” in their own right.

There are substantial analytical barriers to privileging the outcomes over the causes of activism. These include disentangling the impact of a given movement from “political changes of a more conventional type” and the fact that “most serious challenges to the polity emerge as parts of cycles of contention, in which elites are responding less to any single challenger than to generalized threats to their power” (Tarrow 2012, 147–48). Whether protest increases repression and how to control for the effect of preemptive repression (and protesters’ anticipation of repression and of preemptive repression!) are similarly thorny issues (Ritter and Conrad 2016). Moreover, defining “success” and “failure” for movements is surprisingly difficult. By combining two measures, “new advantages” and “acceptance,” Gamson (2009, 414–15) comes up with four possible outcomes: full response, preemption, co-optation, and collapse—but even

these, he admits, are incomplete. In a similar vein, Amenta et al. (2002) add that scholars must distinguish between success in the sense of movements winning advantages for their own participants and the people they represent versus yielding “collective goods” that benefit society at large. Finally, Gamson (2009, 415-416) notes that it is rarely easy to establish an end point for a given campaign (i.e., when its results are appropriately judged).

Despite these challenges, some research has been conducted on social movement results in the context of liberal democracies (e.g., Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999; Meyer 2009; for a review of the literature, see Amenta et al. 2010). Of particular note, Giugni (2007) employs time series analyses of the American environmental, anti-nuclear, and peace movements to test “direct-effect,” “indirect-effect,” and “joint-effect” models for explaining movement impact, finding support for only the last of these models, i.e., the interactive influence of activism, public opinion, and political allies. Giugni and Yamasaki (2009) use qualitative comparative analysis to reach more or less the same verdict. Amenta (2006) examines the influence of adherents of the Townsend Plan on the development of Social Security in the United States; through the case of the Works Progress Administration, Amenta and Halfmann (2000) similarly examine how institutions mediate popular pressures for expanded welfare programs. With regard to repression, a topic central to this dissertation, Della Porta and Reiter (1998) argue that political coalitions and public opinion combine with police institutions and police culture to shape “police knowledge” and, thereby, protest policing. In general, the conclusion reached by scholars is that movement outcomes are contingent on various non-movement variables.

This small body of results-oriented research has rarely been extended to authoritarian regimes (for a discussion of this gap with special attention to the case of China, see Tarrow 2008).

Exceptions can be found in Cold War era literature on state socialist governments. These include

Johnson's (1970a) edited volume on change in communist systems and Bunce's (1980) scholarship on the influence of pent-up popular demands during executive handovers in the Soviet Union. Similarly, writing immediately after the Cold War's end, Ekiert (1996) usefully distinguishes between "crises within socialism" and "crises of socialism," examining ways in which demobilization strategies deployed by states in the aftermath of popular challenges can double back to reshape states. But little is written in this vein today. In fact, Amenta et al. (2010, 295) find that out of 54 articles on movement outcomes in the top four sociology journals and *Mobilization* over the previous decade, "31 involved U.S. labor, African American civil rights, feminism, nativism, and environmentalism, five of the six most-covered movement families in the twentieth century." The vibrant struggles now occurring in places like China, where movements tend to be diffuse—if they qualify as full "movements" at all—and where there are few formal channels for input into government decision-making, remain underexplored.

State-Society Relations under Authoritarianism

Authoritarian governments are typically assumed to face stark choices. This tendency is especially—but not exclusively—strong in rational choice oriented scholarship, which also tends to approach regimes as unitary actors. For example, Acemoglu and Robinson (2005) argue that dictators must decide between democratization, repression, and policy change. For Wintrobe (1998, 2001), the options amount to buying off groups of citizens or repressing them; for Gandhi and Przeworski (2006), policy concessions or rent-sharing (though they posit that both are necessary when the threat of rebellion is high enough). Ritter and Conrad (2016) limit the choices to, again, repressions or concessions, but distinguish between "preventive" and "responsive" repression. In the Chinese context, Lorentzen (2013) argues that authorities have three alternatives, namely making pre-emptive transfers to angry citizens, sitting back and

waiting, and indicating that they will “respond favorably to sufficiently costly loyalist protest” (Lorentzen makes a nuanced argument for Beijing choosing the third of these). Outside of the rationalist tradition, Tilly (1978), describing states in general, not just non-democracies, also identifies three responses: facilitation, toleration, and repression. He leaves open the possibility that these might occur simultaneously but does not develop the idea. There are some exceptions to this reductionist tendency in scholarship. Heydemann and Leenders (2013), for example, describe Syria and Iran as practicing “recombinant authoritarianism” by simultaneously reordering and reconfiguring a variety of institutions in seemingly clashing ways to meet popular challenges. The focus, though, is narrowly on economic institutions, and overall, such research is surprisingly rare.⁵ Although simplifying assumptions serve to focus analysis in a useful manner, they come at a considerable cost to our ability to capture both the day-to-day experience of authoritarian governance and its evolution over time. Non-democratic states have multiple arms and can pursue multiple policies at once, setting up complex long-term political dynamics.

Regime Change

Research on regime change (or the lack thereof)—the most analyzed topic in the study of authoritarianism—has veered between extremes. For a period, spurred on by excitement around the “Third Wave” of political liberalization, a “transitology” paradigm dominated (see Art 2012). This treated dictatorships as only a way station on the road to democracy, with research therefore focused on the terms of their destruction, such as “pacted” handovers of power versus revolutions (e.g., O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). The most controversial work along these lines

⁵ Several other scholars usefully emphasize the trade-offs between different policies, implying a continuum of sorts from repression to concession. For example, according to de Mesquita and Downs (2005), “To remain secure, autocrats must raise the costs of political coordination among the opposition without also raising the costs of economic coordination too dramatically—since this could stymie economic growth and threaten the stability of the regime itself.” In Olson’s (1993) analysis, the trick is for a leader to extract just the right amount of rent from his or her citizens, but not so much as to, again, hurt development.

was, of course, Fukuyama's (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, which posited capitalist democracy as the natural endpoint for all states. There were at least two problems, however, with this paradigm. One was that many new democracies, such as Russia and Hungary, began to move in a more authoritarian direction. The other was the staying power of non-democratic governments, including among many successor states of the former Soviet Union. The latter issue has given rise to a new and equally narrow alternative to "transitology," namely "authoritarian resilience," which assumes that many, if not most, autocrats operate in optimal ways to reproduce themselves ("resilience" being a step above mere "persistence," see Heydemann and Leenders 2013, 5). This focus has led in turn to a proliferation of fine-grained typologies of authoritarianism (D. Collier and Levitsky 1997; Diamond 2002; Geddes 2003) and studies of regimes' mechanisms for maintaining control (e.g., Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Magaloni 2006). Where dictators were once thought to be hopelessly outmoded, they are now thought to be experts of manipulation, largely in control of their destinies.

Mirroring these general trends, popular and academic writing on China has tended to either foretell certain doom for the Communist Party or portray the Party as nearly infallible in its political calculations. The work of G. G. Chang (2002) and Pei (2006) are emblematic of the former tendency: economic data and anecdotes of corruption are mined for signs of collapse and stagnation. However, the pendulum has, on the whole, swung in the other direction. In an early, influential article, Nathan (2003) identified several reasons for why CCP control is "increasingly stable": norm-bound succession politics, meritocracy, institutional differentiation, and more input mechanisms (he has since modified this stance, see Nathan 2013). Today, with a few exceptions like Fewsmith (2013), most research takes this tack. Wright (2010), for example, portrays the Chinese state as expertly buying off different social groups with selective benefits

and privileges. Wallace (2014) finds an answer to the longevity of Party rule in the government's household registration system and fiscal transfers to rural areas. Lee and Y. Zhang's (2013) ethnography shows "protest bargaining, legal-bureaucratic absorption, and patron-clientelism" at work pre-empting unrest. Lorentzen (2013) argues that protests actually serve a crucial information-gathering purpose for authorities; Dimitrov (2015) posits that petitions made via China's Letters and Visits offices do the same (although he notes a worrying trend of falling petitions). Stern and Hassid (2012) and O'Brien and Stern (2012) find a potent control mechanism in the state's strategic ambiguity on what is permissible and what is not. Stockmann and Gallagher (2011) point to effective propaganda by state media; MacKinnon (2012), King, Pan and Roberts (2013), and others, to targeted Internet censorship. These analyses are revealing, but they paint an overly static picture that misses the gradual changes occurring under the shell of regime continuity. Such changes, I later argue, have mixed effects insofar as the future of the regime is concerned.

Contentious Politics in China

Despite the limitations noted above, research on Chinese contentious politics has made important advances. Scholars have examined the ways in which protesters in rural China deploy the state's own language to divide elites (K. J. O'Brien and Li 2006) and how petitioners engage in "troublemaking" tactics that pressure officials but stay within acceptable bounds (Xi Chen 2012), extending patterns of dissent established under Mao and earlier, in imperial times (Perry 2002, 2008). Similarly, researchers have shown how journalists, lawyers, religious groups and others "play edge ball" and take advantage of "safe enough" spaces (K. J. O'Brien and Stern 2008; Stern and O'Brien 2012). The promise (and limits) of the Chinese Internet as a forum for anti-government voices has come in for particular scrutiny (e.g., Hassid and Repnikova 2015; King,

Pan, and Roberts 2013; MacKinnon 2012; G. Yang 2009), as have nationalist protests encouraged by the regime (e.g., Gries 2004; Z. Wang 2012; Weiss 2014). Case studies have shown how activists—homeowners, workers, farmers—can alter the government's cost-benefit calculations in disputes by drawing on wide social networks (Cai 2010) and by framing issues in ways that appeal to elite allies, including “policy entrepreneurs” from within the Party's ranks (Mertha 2008, 2009). However, although scholars have used these studies to explore the changing room for interest advocacy in China (Ibid.), aside from a few works, such as Bernstein and Lü's (2003) study of unrest in the countryside and tax reform, the focus has largely been on local campaign “successes” and “failures,” with the larger system held constant. Methodologically, this means that national averages and evidence of regional diversity are rarely examined together.

Labor in China

Prognoses concerning the fate of the Chinese working class have changed over the past two decades. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the situation of workers was painted as dismal. After enjoying job security and respect under the planned economy, labor had, in Solinger's (2004) words, gone from “master to mendicant” in a generation. Workers were described as being divided by the patterns of competition generated by the country's extraordinary reliance on foreign direct investment (Gallagher 2002, 2005; but see Robertson and Teitelbaum 2011), by their acceptance or rejection of the legitimacy of the state and new market economy (Blecher 2002), by the different forms of social reproduction defining the lives of—and different values held by—new migrants from the countryside versus people still employed in the old “work unit” (*danwei*) system (Lee 2007), and, among migrants, by gendered “native place” chains of mutual aid, patronage, and control (Lee 1998; Sargeson 1999). More importantly, labor was seen to be

fighting essentially defensive battles: for the maintenance of a tattered “socialist social contract” and the bare necessities of subsistence in crumbling SOEs (Feng Chen 2000; Hurst and O’Brien 2002; Lee 2007; Yu 2010, chap. 2) and for the state’s enforcement of the minimal workplace protections provided by law in China’s export-oriented, private sweatshops (A. Chan 2001; E. Friedman and Lee 2010; Lee 2007; Yu 2010, chap. 2).

As strikes have risen in recent years, though, a more upbeat narrative has emerged. Migrants are now increasingly seen as possessing, or, at least in the process of developing a fresh, original class consciousness (C.K.-C. Chan and Pun 2009; Wang 2012), and migrants and SOE employees alike are viewed as making offensive demands: for higher wages, irrespective of legal minimums, for attention to the “details” of working conditions, and for simple respect (Elfstrom and Kuruvilla 2014; see also Clarke and Pringle 2009).⁶ Workers are judged to be increasingly willing to act collectively (K. Chang and Brown 2013) and to engage in what Hobsbawm (1952) called “bargaining by riot” (C. K.-C. Chan and Hui 2013). These changes are attributed to a variety of factors. Some observers point to new laws and the leverage provided workers by a strengthened economy (Elfstrom and Kuruvilla 2014). Others highlight generational changes, including in workers’ education (Gallagher 2010). Yet others attribute militancy to new systems of human resource management that anger workers enough to send them into the streets even as the systems also divide them (Lu Zhang 2015). Researchers have drawn attention to signs of tactical innovation, such as “disguised collective action,” whereby activists coach aggrieved employees to turn collective disputes into individual claims (Fu 2016). Scholarship has focused on the emergence of a core set of strike leaders who move from plant to plant, advising protesters (Leung 2015), as well as on the information shared via the “weak ties” workers have been able to

⁶ For a contrasting perspective, see Lee 2016.

make with knowledgeable people outside their immediate social circles (Becker 2014), even as a general lack of social capital has been found to hold down the incomes of migrant workers, especially (Y. Lu, Ruan, and Lai 2013).

Regardless of whether research on labor in China has come to pessimistic or optimistic conclusions, like the literature on social movements more generally, it has mostly approached worker unrest as a “dependent variable” to be explained. There are some exceptions. For example, Pringle (2011, 7) argues that “class struggles between workers and employers are the principle catalyst for trade union reform in China,” a claim echoed by Friedman (2014b), although Friedman finds the resulting reforms woefully insufficient. Lu Zhang (2015, chap. 7) posits that China’s 2008 Labor Contract Law would not have been passed if it were not for the country’s high levels of unrest, while Chung (2014) links the successful implementation portions of the law (at least partially) to pressure from workers and labor lawyers. Finally, Solinger’s (2009) cross-national comparative study makes a strong case for a link between protest and welfare provision in China in the 1990s. But each of these works focuses on a very specific aspect of labor policy, and most scholarship has tended to focus on the ways in which labor has been channeled, obstructed, and spurred on by structural factors and state policy. Missing are the important questions of whether, and, if so how, the actions of workers are reshaping their own social and political opportunities and constraints on a large scale.

Mixed Methods

This dissertation strives to fill the gaps noted above by adopting an approach to understanding labor under authoritarianism that is oriented toward the outcomes, not just determinants, of activism; focuses on change in the here and now, not questions of potential regime collapse

versus resilience; is attentive to the myriad ways in which states can react to challenges at once; combines micro and macro analysis of contention; and assumes workers have real agency. Doing so requires a multi-method approach. I first use cross-sectional time series regressions to test my argument that labor resistance under authoritarian regimes yields both repression and responsiveness: cross-sectional because this breaks the single case of China into “multiple observations” to reveal average relationships; time series because this additionally provides me with a window into variation across the years, rather than only a single snapshot of such a rapidly evolving country. To examine whether my statistical findings hold up on more fine-grained inspection (i.e., whether they have measurement validity) and to provide a more nuanced explanation for them, I conduct “most similar” regional case studies. The cases are nested in the statistical trends observed and informed by “field theory.” Field theory takes its inspiration from the study of electromagnetism: a given field charges the objects within it in different ways depending on their location, thereby affecting their relations with each other; without the objects, though, the field itself would only be “a potential” (Martin 2003). Thus, the objects do not encounter and “affect” each other completely independently. Moreover, the properties of the field and its objects are mutually constitutive. Using interviews with a range of stakeholders and close analysis of local government yearbooks, I observe how workers, businesses, and state authorities interact in their different manifestations in different parts of the country, generating self-reinforcing patterns that push their “fields” toward stability or crisis, and I attempt to reveal the local - and individual-level dynamics that underpin broad, national developments. The dissertation thus bridges distinct analytical traditions in the service of providing a more complete picture of the power of workers in China and in non-democracies more generally.

Organization of the Dissertation

My analysis proceeds in stages. I begin Chapter 2 by laying out a theory for why authoritarian, especially state socialist and post-socialist regimes, might react in a dual manner—repressive and responsive—to worker activism. Specifically, I argue that owing to their vulnerability to cascades of public dissent, their lack of effective institutions for channeling conflict, and, in the case of state socialist and post-socialist governments, their unity of economic and political power and hollow trade unions combined with pro-worker founding ideologies, non-democracies are under considerable pressure to contain labor unrest and therefore try out all of the demobilization techniques at their disposal. Autocrats calculate that if one approach fails, another can act as a sort of insurance policy. If workplace resistance does not yet constitute a fully formed movement with a clear set of demands, this only reinforces the state’s tendency toward an “all of the above” reaction. The chapter then explores whether this argument applies to the case of China by using cross-sectional time series analysis of a decade’s worth of provincial-level data drawn both from a unique crowd-sourced and geo-referenced dataset of strikes, protests, and riots I have collected and from official sources. I show that, controlling for a wide range of potential confounding factors, there is a positive correlation between increases in labor unrest, on the one hand, and pro-worker outcomes in formally adjudicated employment disputes and spending on public security, on the other. One anomaly emerges, however, in the statistical analysis: the positive relationship between protests and police budgets reverses in 2012 and 2013. I suggest different potential explanations for this anomaly, including that it may be the result of the concurrent handover of power in Beijing and the ousting of the country’s powerful public security czar, Zhou Yongkang.

In Chapter 3, I argue that in-depth case studies are necessary to check the validity of the statistical measures I used in Chapter 2, to try to capture the full interplay of social forces in China's workplaces, and to trace the mechanisms linking protest and policy. Based on the principles of "most similar" cases and "nested analysis," I posit that Jiangsu's portion of the Yangtze River Delta and Guangdong's portion of the Pearl River Delta are especially well suited to this task. Both regions are prosperous, well integrated in the global economy, and destinations for migrant workers. However, they vary with regard to their levels of strikes, protests, and riots and their scores on the two policy indicators from my statistical analysis (dispute outcomes and police spending): Jiangsu is average; Guangdong, extreme. Finally, in this chapter I provide more background on field theory and introduce the ideas of a "field of Chinese labor politics" and of "regional fields" within it, explaining how these concepts can be used to analyze the ways in which the principle forces within the deltas—capital, labor, and the state—interact with each other and with the dominant norms of their "fields."

Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to in-depth studies of the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta in turn. Based on interviews with a variety of actors and a close reading of local yearbooks, I reveal that Yangtze River Delta authorities, who face only moderate industrial conflict, govern their workplaces with a mixture of preemption, caution, and nudging. With strikes growing in frequency and size, the Pearl River Delta has adopted a contrasting set of approaches: reaction, experimentation, and crackdowns. Rather than attempt to head off each and every dispute, Guangdong officials are testing out ambitious (if still thin) legal reforms and an overhaul of their branches of the state-controlled trade union, even as they harass labor NGOs and ordinary strikers. I argue that an extended economic boom has empowered the Pearl River Delta's large population of migrant workers. Through repeated confrontations with employers,

these migrants have gained the “social skills” necessary to challenge the local state. Dynamics in both fields are self-reinforcing—approaches to activism and governance feed off of each other—but where Jiangsu’s worker-state interactions have arrived at a relatively harmonious equilibrium, Guangdong’s now point toward crisis. The cases thus both support and extend my statistical analysis: as would be expected, in the turbulent PRD, there is indeed greater repression and responsiveness than in the relatively quiescent YRD, but much more is involved than can be revealed by correlational analysis. Drawing on brief examples from other parts of China, I provide preliminary indications of the generalizability of the two regions’ experiences.

If Chapter 2 introduced a broad, regime-level theory for China’s dual reaction to labor unrest, Chapter 6 introduces a theory at the level of local governments and local officials. I posit that protesting workers affect regional policy by turning the state’s abiding concern with social stability into a liability. Drawing on government yearbooks from the Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta, I show that authorities in both regions evince an equal concern with reducing unrest. Then, utilizing an automated content analysis of the public security sections of 180 of the yearbooks over the past decade, I demonstrate that as workplaces in the Pearl River Delta have gradually become more contentious than those in the Yangtze River Delta, police in the former have shown increased concern with labor issues relative to their peers in the latter. Finally, I argue that the most concrete mechanism connecting this anxiety with policy is China’s cadre promotion system. How officials respond to conflict affects their career opportunities. In relatively calm areas, the incentive is to not do anything that would rock the boat; in relatively chaotic areas, it is to show grit and creativity in the face of challenges from labor. Change thus comes about through a combination of popular protest and the mundane life plans of government employees. I provide evidence for this argument from interviews and secondary literature.

Two issues remain for discussion in Chapter 7: the role of elites in labor politics and diffusion between fields. In Chapter 2, I noted that the anomalous flipping of the relationship between protest and police spending, from a positive to a negative correlation, occurred during the first two years of Xi Jinping's rule, concurrent with the purge of the country's public security czar. This raised the issue of the part played by powerful, national-level politicians in worker-state interactions. It is conceivable that individual, lower-level officials could similarly be responsible for much of the regional variation observed, both in terms of protests and policy. If so, this could lead me to overestimate the impact of the former on the latter. I therefore begin the chapter by using the case of the emerging southwestern economic hub of Chongqing and its two powerful leaders between 2005 and 2012, Wang Yang and Bo Xilai, to show that even elites with an ideological interest in fundamentally changing Chinese governance respond for the most part to dynamics on the ground when choosing the areas of governance on which to make their mark. Protests, not political agendas, in other words, are the primary driver of change. In the preceding chapters, whether using quantitative or qualitative methods, I treated provinces and regions as essentially independent observations. It is possible, however, that protests and counter-measures against protests diffuse outward from hotspots of contention, making regions appear more similar than they really are. If so, the protest-policy relationship may be *stronger* than it first appears. To explore this possibility, I next draw on interviews conducted with workers, activists, and officials across China—in Chongqing, Sichuan, Tianjin, and Beijing, as well as Guangdong and Jiangsu. These interviews provide preliminary evidence that workers are bringing their strike experiences inland from the coast, and that authorities elsewhere are carefully studying the trials of Guangdong in a bid to avoid its fate. Thus, the impact of protest

is even bigger than is immediately apparent, with centers of conflict creating ripples nationally, but the effect of unrest is not to push the whole country inexorably in one direction.

Finally, in the dissertation's concluding Chapter 8, I review my findings and examine their implications for our understanding of social movement outcomes and state capacity. I argue that my research shows powerful—if mixed—results for even proto-movements. Drawing on the work of Almond and Powell (1966), I suggest that the Chinese government's dual reaction to unrest can be understood, from a long-term perspective, as strengthening the state's "regulative" and "responsive" capacities, i.e., the government's ability to both control its population and to respond to the inputs of a wide range of groups. This development need not be contradictory. Increased regulative and responsive capacity compensate for each other's shortcomings. However, in the absence of raised "distributive" capacity—sharing the gains of economic growth—a combination of arrests and beatings and wins in court can only increase disillusionment with the system. Unrest will therefore not be reduced. I finish the dissertation by reiterating the importance of scholars focusing on the changes occurring daily *within* authoritarianism, not just sharp breaks like revolutions.

Summary

The substantial obstacles arrayed against labor mobilization in today's democracies, from job losses because of global trade to social program cutbacks because of fiscal austerity, can also be observed in authoritarian and hybrid regimes. Indeed, as Harvey (2005, 3) writes, "Almost all states, from those newly minted after the collapse of the Soviet Union to old-style social democracies and welfare states such as New Zealand and Sweden, have embraced, sometimes voluntarily and in other instances in response to coercive pressures, some version of neoliberal

theory and adjusted at least some policies and practices accordingly.” Yet, workers appear to be most active in those countries where they have the fewest institutional channels for affecting their governments’ decisions. My dissertation uses China to examine the logic behind this. Autocracies, I argue, are more vulnerable to labor unrest. Workers pay a heavy price for mobilization in the absence of democracy but are offered the possibility of significant gains. As authoritarian systems simultaneously coerce and cajole workers, they transform themselves in important ways, despite not necessarily altering their systems of governance.

2. Resistance, Repression, and Responsiveness

In scholarly and journalistic analyses alike, it is widely assumed that the strikes, protests, and riots rocking the China's factories, docks, and schools are having *some* effect on policy (e.g., E. Wong 2010; Lu Zhang 2015, chap. 7). Yet, as already noted, establishing the precise impact of any social movement—or, in the case of Chinese workers, proto-movement—is difficult. In this chapter, I posit that, while labor unrest places pressure on all governments, irrespective of regime type, it has a uniquely intense effect on autocracies. This is because non-democracies are vulnerable to cascades of public dissent, lack effective institutions for channeling conflict, and, especially in the case of state socialist and post-socialist authoritarian regimes, must navigate an awkward combination of hollow trade unions and pro-worker founding ideologies, along with a particularly transparent fusion of economic and political power at the elite level. To deal with both the present and future challenges presented by unrest, autocracies will therefore proceed in two, seemingly contradictory directions at once. The first is to increase repression of worker-activists, and the second is to demonstrate responsiveness to labor's plight. In other words, there is no "decision tree" that forces a choice among alternative policies. If only a diffuse, proto-movement exists, this merely serves to deepen the dynamic: without a clear set of demands to which they can reply, governments will try "all of the above."

There are several ways to assess whether this hypothesized dual reaction to workplace contention is occurring in China. One approach, which I pursue here, is to evaluate general trends in the country as a whole by carrying out a cross-sectional time series analysis of the relationship between protests, budgetary allocations, and judicial actions. As I will show, increases in worker resistance are positively correlated with investment in public security (a rough indicator of

repression), on the one hand, and pro-labor decisions in mediation, arbitration, and court (responsiveness), on the other, controlling for a variety of potential confounding variables. Interestingly, though, the link between protests and police spending, in particular, breaks down for the last two years of my data. I suggest different explanations for this anomaly, including concurrent power struggles in Beijing. Another approach, which I pursue in subsequent chapters, is to unpack these “average” developments by comparing particular regions of China using field theory. This allows me to engage the many forces at work in Chinese labor politics in an interactive manner—different types of workers, different forms of capital, different parts of the state—and helps me to identify the precise mechanisms connecting protest and policy.

Pressure Exerted by Worker Resistance

Worker resistance puts pressure on regimes of all types. First, it directly threatens the economic base of a state. Brecher (1972, viii) writes of “ordinary people” that “if they refuse to work, the country stops... if they take control of their own activity, their own work, they thereby take control of society.” Second, industrial conflict can drive a wedge between labor and authorities. As V. I. Lenin said in 1899: “The workers begin to understand that laws are made in the interests of the rich alone; that government officials protect those interests; that the working people are gagged and not allowed to make known their needs... Every strike strengthens and develops in the workers the understanding that the government is their enemy and that the working class must prepare itself to struggle against the government for the people’s rights” (Lenin 1964). Third, workplace disputes can also “spill over” into other spheres (on spillover, see Meyer and Whittier 1994). Finally, labor unrest has the potential to strain bonds between officials and the managerial class, as employers become frustrated by the mounting chaos in their establishments

or decry as undue interference any state efforts to address shop floor abuses highlighted by protesters. Governments of various stripes therefore take labor activism seriously.

Democracies

Worker resistance can clearly place tremendous pressure on democracies, understood in the minimal, liberal sense of “formal democracies”: states that for the most part guarantee civil liberties and “in which parties lose elections,” whatever shortcomings such countries may evince with regard to things like an equal voice in economic matters (Przeworski 1991, 10). This pressure can be seen in democracies’ forceful reactions to strikes. For example, in the United States, workers downing their tools have been met with the full weight of their country’s coercive capacity, formal and informal: the military, National Guard, local police, and Pinkertons. But protesters have also won concessions, some of which have extended their civil rights in ways that have brought social, not just civil and political, benefits (Marshall 2009). Thus, the Depression-era activism of the unemployed and of Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) affiliated unionists yielded the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, with its protections for labor’s right to organize and bargain—and to strike—for higher wages (see, for example, Piven and Cloward 1977). Periods of industrial peace, conversely, have generally been correlated with policy stasis: the number of strikes involving more than a 1,000 persons in the U.S. reached its height in 1952, and no significant union legislation has been passed in the country since the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, although an upsurge in unrest in the 1970s came close to yielding new laws, including an ambitious full employment policy (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016a; Cowie 2011, chap. 1,6).

Autocracies

The transformative effect of worker resistance is likely double for autocracies, crudely understood as the inverse of democracies: no protections of rights and no free and fair elections. Non-democratic governments vary in their tolerance of dissent, and theories have been advanced to explain why autocrats might sometimes find protests to be useful sources of information about public opinion, including in China (e.g., Lorentzen 2013). But in general, it is safe to say that, outside of their early, mass mobilization periods, authoritarian states are leery of popular collective action. This is because it can lead to a cascade of citizens revealing their true preferences regarding the government, emboldening dissidents (Kuran 1991). By putting forward political alternatives, protesters can also *change* people's preferences (on changes in preferences, see Landwehr 2009). Such dynamics might seem to be a problem for both democracies and authoritarian states, but preferences that are actively censored are more explosive when revealed, and preferences that are reliably monochrome are more dangerous when broadened. More importantly, in autocracies, critiques of society cannot be safely channeled through election campaigns, as in democracies (Robertson and Teitelbaum 2011; Teitelbaum 2010; a possible exception being “competitive authoritarian” or “hybrid” regimes, see Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002)—or through other ostensibly “neutral” institutions like judiciaries or labor relations boards. Put differently, dictators are unable to pass the buck. Tensions in society are absorbed directly into the body of the state.

State Socialist and Post-Socialist Authoritarian Regimes

Worker resistance packs a yet more powerful punch for state socialist and post-socialist authoritarian regimes, defined as governments in which a self-described “socialist” party leads or

once led in the name of the working class and in which production decisions are made or were once made in large part through “bureaucratic coordination”⁷—and in which, again, the prerequisites of democracy are absent. The transparent fusing of state power and economic power in such governments makes them particularly vulnerable to industrial unrest.⁸ As Burawoy and Lukács (1992, 20–22) note, when enterprise bosses appropriate surpluses from producers by virtue of being planners responsible for the “collective interest” (rather than simply by virtue of owning the means of production), ideological justifications for appropriation are more easily exposed as just that. Moreover, every protest against a firm becomes a protest against the government. Even after state socialism has been replaced by post-socialism in its different forms, protests still frequently occur in firms that are directly owned by the state or that were once owned by the state and are now owned by officials-turned-businesspeople. Worker mobilization in the aftermath of socialism further highlights a disconnect between the regimes’ founding ideals (the “radiant past”) and current policies (Burawoy and Lukács 1992). Non-democratic governments vary widely in their treatment of trade unions, from the blatantly exclusionary approaches of right-wing dictatorships to the more inclusionary corporatist ones of their left-populist counterparts (for a review, see Caraway, Crowley, and Cook 2015). However, in state socialist and post-socialist authoritarian regimes especially, autocrats prefer to establish industrial “preemptive organizations” (Johnson 1970b).⁹ Along with distributing welfare

⁷ Bureaucratic coordination can be contrasted with market coordination or coordination through institutions like family ties (see Kornai 1992). These other forms of coordination might feature on the edges of a state socialist economy; they can dominate post-socialist economies.

⁸ Of course, economic and political power are fused in capitalist democracies and capitalist authoritarian regimes, too—through campaign donations, lobbying, corporate representatives on advisory councils, businesspeople turned politicians, etc.—but rarely as transparently.

⁹ An intriguing exception was the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under Tito and his successors (for a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Yugoslav experiment, as well as its post-socialist legacies, see Grdešić 2015). But with the market mediating many firm interactions and workers exercising their voices through shop floor councils, it is debatable whether socialist Yugoslavia fully meets my definition of a state socialist authoritarian regime.

benefits, these preemptive organizations can be effective at “serving the regime’s mobilization goals and... inhibiting the formation of private loyalties” (Ibid., 19). The catch is that they are largely ineffective at redirecting workplace conflict once it breaks out (Friedman [2014b] terms this the “insurgency trap”). Finally, given their turbulent origins, state socialist and post-socialist governments are also acutely aware of the costs of contention for regime survival.

A Dual Reaction

For all these reasons, I posit that autocracies, especially state socialist and post-socialist ones, tend to throw themselves even more fully into the project of demobilizing worker resistance than is the case for democracies, using all the tools at their disposal at once. Democracies alternately crack down on strikes and union organizing campaigns or make concessions—think of America’s 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia versus its New Deal innovations of the 1930s—depending on the balance of political forces. But dictators, at least those that are vigilant and that have the fiscal and organizational capacity to respond forcefully (both of which, incidentally, are more likely when the regime is state socialist and post-socialist, given the traditional administrative competence of Leninist parties), feel compelled to meet activism with a paradoxical mixture of repression *and* responsiveness (see Figure 1).¹⁰ In the process, they transform themselves in a dual manner, strengthening their coercive capacity but saddling themselves with new social commitments, either in the form of concrete commitments like fresh laws or government programs or more vague but equally binding commitments to being partial

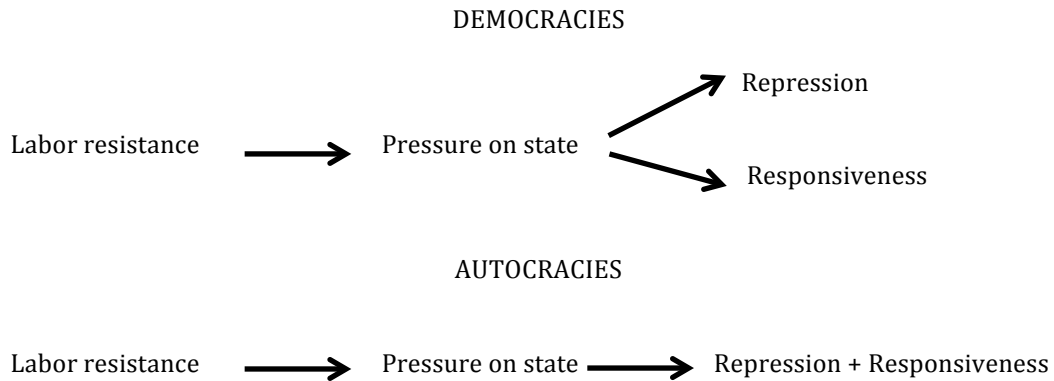
¹⁰ A further caveat might be added: dictatorships that do not rule in the name of their complete populations are more likely to employ repression and less likely to employ responsiveness when dealing with groups they exclude from full citizenship, either out of animus or out of a realization that there is little the government can do to win over these people short of a fundamental reorganization of governance. Examples include apartheid era South Africa, relations between the Burmese junta and ethnic minorities, and interactions between indigenous peoples and certain states in South and Central America (e.g., early twentieth century Bolivia).

to disadvantaged groups in conflicts. I explore the long-term implications of this development in the dissertation's conclusion.

Proto-Movements

Based on their exploration of four pivotal American “poor people’s movements,” Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that social movements achieve the most when they are the most spontaneous and disruptive and least when they are most institutionalized. The dissertation will not take a position on this proposition, but at the very least, labor activism that has not gelled into a full-fledged “labor movement” would seem most likely to deepen governments’ *dual reaction* to unrest. Even relatively cohesive campaigns contain considerable diversity in terms of participants’ aspirations (see, for example, Beissinger’s [2013] analysis of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution). But in proto-movements, there is little continuity between struggles and few if any organizations or individuals that can claim to speak for the whole. Governments facing such contention cannot be sure “what will work” in terms of restoring order and are more liable to try everything at once and see what sticks. Again, this dynamic should be most apparent in autocracies. In such systems, authorities already have difficulty assessing popular opinion because of the strictures they have placed on public discussion (Wintrobe 1998; see also Dimitrov 2015). To the extent that non-democracies have actively prevented more formalized labor movements from coming into existence—a phenomenon already discussed in the context of state socialist and post-socialist authoritarian states and “preemptive organizations”—such regimes are responsible for their own dilemma. In the next sections, I expand on the logic of responsiveness and repression in turn, as well as the different forms each reaction can take, providing examples from contemporary Chinese politics.

Figure 1: Reactions to Labor Unrest



Responsiveness

Autocracies typically believe they need to demonstrate their responsiveness to public concerns through at least some concessions. Unalloyed repression can alienate ordinary citizens and members of the ruling circle alike, leading to conflict escalation. For state socialist and post-socialist authoritarian governments, in particular, suppression of “the people” carries a special cost (think of the opprobrium heaped on People’s Liberation Army troops by ordinary Beijingers as the troops entered Beijing in 1989).¹¹ The Chinese state thus frequently appears unusually conciliatory in the face of popular pressures.¹² For instance, courts have commuted the death sentences of sympathetic convicted killers to life and the life sentences of gangsters to death to assuage public anger (Liebman 2011, 840–42). Similarly, brief mobilizations by middle class urbanites concerned about pollution and industrial accidents have forced multi-million dollar

¹¹ The PLA, of course, ultimately suppressed the 1989 democracy movement, but the government is widely thought to have paid a steep price in legitimacy. Authorities moved in subsequent years to resolve some of the smaller issues (e.g., job assignments for college students) raised by protesters..

¹² This, in turn, reveals to the public the government’s insecurity—a downside, if an unavoidable one, of responsiveness. It should be emphasized, though, that when certain political lines are perceived to have been crossed, the state can adopt a more purely hard approach, as it has with Falun Gong activists and with “national minorities” like Tibetans and Uighurs.

chemical plants and oil refineries to shut down or relocate (see, for example, *The China Story* 2013). And books printed by state publishers have been withdrawn following protests. For example, in 1989, Chinese Muslims mobilized against a book, *Sexual Customs*, deemed offensive to Islam; the book was quickly banned in Gansu, and Beijing's Vice Mayor called for a broader ban and the confiscation of all copies of the volume (Vecchio 1989).

Autocratic shows of responsiveness to labor activism, specifically—again a particular source of pressure for state socialist and post-socialist authoritarian regimes—can take a number of forms. In China, some of these forms would not be out of place in a democracy. In 2007, for instance, after a wide-ranging debate and in the face of considerable opposition from the business community (see, for example, K. Chang 2009, chap. 5; Gallagher and Dong 2011; *Global Labor Strategies* 2007), the National People's Congress passed a new Labor Contract Law that reinforced with stiffer penalties a number of existing rules and added new provisions, especially about hiring and firing (Cooney et al. 2007). In 2003, the Party-controlled All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) decided to admit migrant workers as members. Before Spring Festival every year, there are government campaigns to help workers collect unpaid wages. But concessions can also be quite personalistic. For example, in 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao was approached by a woman named Xiong Deming, whose migrant worker husband was owed over 2,000 RMB in wage arrears from a construction project; the Premier ensured that the man was paid (Becker 2014, 67–68). More routinely, the government can signal concern for workers' needs by ruling more in their favor in disputes and highlighting worker legal success stories (Stockmann and Gallagher 2011). When strikes spike, we should also see spikes in all such demonstrations of concern.

Repression

However, while concessions may buy peace in the here and now, what about the long run?

Authorities cannot simply cede space again and again and still stay in power. Placating a group can lead it to ratchet up its activism. The government must therefore signal that there is an outer bound to what they will tolerate and have an insurance policy in place in case the situation worsens.¹³ To do this, non-democracies need powerful instruments of repression—soldiers, police, informers, etc.¹⁴ With these in hand, Skocpol (1979) argues, states ride out even strong perceptions of illegitimacy and feelings of relative deprivation among their populations.¹⁵ For several years in a row, Chinese domestic security spending has exceeded the country’s national defense budget, although the details of how specific budget items are categorized, especially funding for the paramilitary People’s Armed Police, are unclear (Blasko 2012; MacLeod 2013). A vast system of “stability maintenance” offices stretches from the central government down to the village level (Xi Chen 2013; Lee and Zhang 2013). Even in remote Kailu County, Inner Mongolia, there is reportedly one informant for every 25 residents (Qinglian He 2012). Tens of thousands of people nationally are paid to track online discussions (King, Pan, and Roberts 2013, 330), while local governments hire legions of thugs to intercept petitioners (Human Rights Watch 2005). Meanwhile, since the mid-1990s, Chinese public security officials have enjoyed enhanced bureaucratic status and perks (Y. Wang 2014b; Y. Wang and Minzner 2013).

¹³ In practice, different parts of the state may be responsible for (and advocate for) responsiveness versus repression. What we observe is only the final result of internal divisions of labor and internal debates.

¹⁴ Like Davenport (2007), I adopt a wide definition of “repression” that is not limited to physical violence.

¹⁵ Skocpol’s argument has been applied to a variety of contexts. Bellin (2004), for example, posits that the resilience of authoritarianism in the Middle East is founded to a large degree on the “exceptional will and capacity to crush democratic initiatives” of the region’s security services. Conversely, Linz (2000, 30) says that Soviet and Eastern European leaders’ unwillingness to use their “intact and large coercive apparatus in a crisis situation” led to the downfall of state socialism.

Repressing labor unrest, in particular, can take a number of forms. In China, it can mean installing police posts and surveillance cameras in factory zones and monitoring the discussions on online forums frequented by workers. Klein (2008) reports, “Over the next three years, Chinese security executives predict they will install as many as 2 million CCTVs in Shenzhen, which would make it the most watched city in the world.” Shenzhen happens to be a major manufacturing center. More naked displays of strength include massing large numbers of anti-riot forces at the sites of strikes and protests. When unpaid miners in Heilongjiang Province recently protested, for example, hundreds of police with shields and batons were deployed, beating workers (and censors erased the topic from the social media platform Weibo) (Huang 2016). As with shows of state responsiveness to worker concerns, spikes in workplace activism should be accompanied by spikes in these different types of repression. Responsiveness and repression are both aimed at the demobilization of populations (on demobilization, see Ekiert 1996). We should see resistance, receptiveness, and repression rising and falling together.

The Average State Response over Time

Data constraints make it exceedingly difficult to test the full implications of my argument, i.e., systematically compare democratic and authoritarian reactions to worker resistance. Therefore, I restrict myself to exploring the argument’s *plausibility* through an intensive study of one autocracy, China. Even so, considerable simplification is required. Clearly, China’s patterns of labor unrest and state response are more complex than the model proposed above (resistance → repression + responsiveness) suggests. There are numerous regional differences to consider. For example, Lee (2007) contrasts the activism of SOE workers in the northeastern “rustbelt” with that of migrant workers in the southeastern “sunbelt.” Blecher (2010), building off of Lee (2007), distinguishes between a “highly globalized” southeastern “sunbelt,” a “barely

globalized” northeastern “rustbelt,” and a “broadly ‘reformed’ but only partially globalized and still largely domestically-oriented” class of areas like the city of Tianjin. Hurst (2009), restricting his analysis to the late 1990s struggles of laid off SOE workers, describes four regional political economies, each with a different capacity for responding to labor’s needs: the Northeast, North-Central, Central Coast, and Upper Changjiang (provincial capitals form a fifth category of sorts). Friedman (n.d.), finally, compares the “extra-legal precarity” of teachers in Beijing migrant schools with the “market discipline” of their Guangzhou counterparts, arguing that the two cities operate according to different logics with regard to outsiders in their labor markets.

There are, moreover, more actors involved than just stylized protesters and officials. As the regional differences sketched above imply, Chinese workers can be divided into SOE workers and migrants. We can further distinguish between domestic private, foreign, and state-owned industries. The state, in turn, has many arms. These include, among other things, its legislative arm, its mass organization arm, and its coercive arm. Each plays a different role. Such nuances must be engaged together, in a holistic manner, if we are to have a reasonably complete picture of how worker activism is (or is not) transforming governance.

Yet, before engaging these complexities, as I do in subsequent chapters, it is useful to first establish whether my hypothesis captures the overall trajectory of worker-state interactions or, put differently, the *average response over time* of authorities to increased unrest. This serves several purposes. Attention to long-term trends moves us beyond overly static pictures of Chinese governance, where elaborate configurations of forces are portrayed as interacting in a certain, set way across the reform era. It also highlights anomalies in need of special attention; that is, places that are ahead of or behind or far off the general curve. Such places, as well as

“typical” ones, help us in turn to select case studies that can help us test the limits of general trends, as well as tease out the mechanisms involved in linking repression and cooptation.

Disaggregating China

Identifying the average state response to unrest over time requires disaggregating the single case of China into multiple observations and taking full advantage of the state’s tremendous subnational variation, as suggested by King, Keohane, and Verba (1994), Snyder (2001), and with specific reference to the Chinese context, Hurst (2010)—albeit without digging into all the mechanisms behind that variation. Here, I focus my analysis at the provincial level. China’s 31 provinces (and directly administered cities and autonomous regions, hereinafter all referred to as “provinces”) are the most suitable level of analysis for understanding policy outcomes of protest, as they are the point in China’s administrative hierarchy—besides the leadership compound in Beijing—where decision-making power has increasingly become concentrated in recent decades (Landry 2008; Mertha 2005). This is not to say that they are always the ones that make the most important decisions. Standards for doling out social assistance are often set by cities (see Solinger 2015, 994), and even with regard to political disturbances, cities can sometimes improvise responses without first consulting their superiors, as examples in subsequent chapters will show. But if consistent clusters patterns of activity are to be observed, it is provinces that are likely to represent those clusters. Provinces also roughly capture the regional dimension of Chinese labor politics—Northeast versus Southeast, Central versus Coastal—identified in numerous existing studies, including those noted above.

Observable Implications

If labor protest *on average* draws both greater repression and greater responsiveness from the state, then all else equal, more protest in a given province should be correlated with more spending on the police¹⁶ and more employment disputes decided in workers' favor (or at least decided in a split manner).¹⁷ These are not all the observable implications of my theory. Other forms of responsiveness should also increase with unrest, such as trade union reforms or official expressions of sympathy for workers' plight. And other forms of repression should rise, too, such as informal "relational repression" via family ties (Deng and O'Brien 2013). However, many of these state reactions to unrest are not easily quantifiable. They will therefore be addressed in the qualitative case studies in subsequent chapters. In the next section, I explain how I measure my dependent variables (capturing repression and responsiveness) and my independent variable (resistance), along with a range of control variables, for my statistical analysis. I then detail my method for establishing their relationships to each other: estimating cross-sectional, time series models.

Dependent Variables: Public Security Spending and Judicial Rulings

The dependent variables in my analysis are annual spending on public security per province (*Public Security*), to measure repression, and the outcomes of formally adjudicated employment disputes (*Pro-Worker*, *Pro-Business*, and *Split*), also at the provincial level, to measure responsiveness. Security spending figures (in 100 million RMB) are drawn from the China

¹⁶ China's "stability maintenance" system has been described as both a cash cow and a financial burden for authorities below the national level (for contrasting perspectives, see He 2012; Lee and Zhang 2013). However, it is clear that patterns of unrest are evaluated by both local and central authorities and funds are drawn from multiple sources.

¹⁷ Practically speaking, split judgments could mean paying laid-off workers who sue their employers a portion—but not all—of the severance packages they are legally due or awarding injured employees part of the medical bills / lost wages they are owed. In other words, the compromise may come entirely at the plaintiff's expense.

Statistical Yearbook and cover the years 2004 to 2013. They include a broad swath of the budget—“expenditure for public security agency, procuratorial agency and court of justice” (through 2006) and more vaguely “expenditure for public security” (2007 onwards). Even if “security” costs accounted for all of this line item in all of the years available, this would not necessarily mean that all the money was devoted to actual police work. Scoggins and O’Brien (2015, 239) write that “efforts to lift funding rarely translate into more money in police pockets or more officers on the ground.” Moreover, Chinese policing can take many forms. In recent decades, there has been a push within the Ministry of Public Security for a more scientific approach, focused on crime prevention over politics (Trevaskes 2010; K. C. Wong 2012). Nonetheless, amidst new talk of “efficiency” and “creativity” (e.g., Z. Zhang 2007), police textbooks I have examined still make frequent mention of hostile forces, dissidents, and “thought work” (e.g., Zhikun Cui and Cui 2000; Public Security Bureau Political Propaganda Division 2000). It is safe to assume that, all else equal, more spending on public security in a given place means more *capacity*, at the very least, for repression—even if that capacity is watered down by diverted funds. And given the current, still-politicized atmosphere in the public security system, if more unrest is correlated with more security spending, it seems reasonable to believe that at least a portion of the increase in spending will go to confronting protesters. Investment in the elite anti-riot People’s Armed Police (PAP) would arguably make for a more direct measure of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, beginning in 2007, the government stopped publishing separate provincial-level PAP spending figures. Nonetheless, according to one estimate, 77 percent of the general “public security” budget goes to the PAP (Péneau 2012). Subsequent chapters will provide a measurement validity check on this variable in the form of qualitative information on police responses to worker protests and labor NGOs.

For outcomes of mediation, arbitration, and court decisions, I rely on China Labor Statistical Yearbook data from the same years (2004 to 2013). The government categorizes employment rulings by the winning party (or as split if both sides win something), and I treat the percentage of total cases decided in each manner as a separate dependent variable. There is likely to be variation across regions and across time with regard to the abuses suffered by workers. This variation might in turn affect variation in both the quality of the cases adjudicated and the level of unrest in different places. Relative abusiveness and case quality are impossible to document systematically, but we can document changes in the *types* of cases adjudicated. Appendix 1 shows the percentages of disputes accepted between 2004 and 2013 involving three of the most common types of employment issues discussed in the literature: remuneration, social insurance, and lay-offs. Overall, the kinds of cases being adjudicated in different provinces closely track each other over time. Including a control for the percentage of cases involving remuneration, the issue with the most regional variation, does not change my findings.

It is worth emphasizing again that all of my dependent variables—Public Security, Pro-Worker, Pro-Business, and Split—as well as some of the controls detailed below are drawn from government statistics. China’s various statistical yearbooks are compiled either via horizontal (*kuai*) sharing of information, in the case of key economic data—functional bureaucracies sharing their figures with the statistics bureau at their relevant level of government, which in turn sends the data up to the center—or in the case of more specialist information, vertically (*tiao*) within bureaucracies and mass organizations (Interview 117). The quality of Chinese statistics vary widely, and they frequently show the influence of political incentives (see, for example, J. L. Wallace 2015). But there are not obvious reasons for governments to fake labor dispute

outcomes or police spending in a *systematically* biased manner. Therefore, variation in these figures across provinces and years should be roughly in line with reality.

Independent Variable: Labor Unrest

For my measure of labor unrest (*Strikes*)—not formally adjudicated disputes, as measured in my dependent variable—I rely on a collection of 1,662 strikes, protests, and riots by Chinese workers occurring between 2004 and 2013. All such activism occurs in a legal grey zone, neither protected nor specifically prohibited (Feng 2011; Taylor, Chang, and Li 2003, 33), and unlike many other governments, Beijing does not publish strike statistics. I collected the first nine years of this data using a publically accessible website I established in 2010, *China Strikes*. The site, built on the Ushahidi crowd-mapping platform, geo-referenced incidents found in foreign and domestic news reports, dissident blogs (such as *Boxun*), online bulletin boards (auto enthusiast discussions were reliable repositories of information on taxi strikes), and reports by advocacy groups; it also allowed site visitors to report incidents that I had missed (about half a dozen incidents were added in this manner). For the years 2011 to 2012, I checked the site's data against a similar project by China Labour Bulletin (CLB) that was launched in mid-2011, adding any conflicts that CLB captured that I had not. I drew solely on CLB's data for the year 2013, dropping seven incidents the group recorded that did not meet my criteria: being collective (involving more than three people), being contentious (i.e., going beyond litigation and quiet petitioning), being motivated by only employment-related issues (not ethnic tensions between workers, etc.), occurring in mainland China (not Hong Kong or Macau), and including clear information on location (city- or county-level or below). I also broke into three incidents one CLB-recorded conflict that occurred in several locations at once. The combined dataset, although to my knowledge the most complete such set available, should be treated as only a

small sample of China's total labor conflict during the period covered. It could, moreover, conceivably be skewed somewhat toward coastal areas that have more liberal media and livelier online communities. But it nonetheless has broad coverage: 64 percent of the incidents it captures occurred outside of Guangdong, today's center for worker insurgency. Regardless, as I will explain below, I employ provincial fixed effects to control for any bias.

Controls

I also include in my analysis several variables to control for factors that might at once spur or dampen unrest *and* directly affect policy, i.e. constitute “backdoors” between the dependent and independent variables (Morgan and Winship 2007). My first control is *GDP Per Capita*.

Wealth can both spur unrest, as strikes have been shown to be pro-cyclical in other national contexts (e.g., Ashenfelter and Johnson 1969; Tracy 1987), and it can give authorities greater leeway to accommodate worker grievances (Hurst 2009). Here, I use the calculator provided by the All China Data Center. Figure 2 maps strikes and economic activity. My second control is *Migrant Workers*, operationalized as the percentage of the residents of a given province who lack “permanent household registration” where they reside, drawing on the China Statistical Yearbook.¹⁸ Migrants may protest at different rates from other workers (C. K. Chan 2010), and the government may simultaneously respond to their claims differently (see L. Liu, Yong, and Shu 2011; Paik 2014). Figure 3 maps strikes and migrant populations. My third control is *SOE Employment*. Again, like migrants, state sector employees could exhibit distinct patterns of

¹⁸ Specifically, I calculate the percentage of the province's total population left over when the number of people “residing in... townships, towns and street communities with permanent household registration there” are subtracted. The variable thus includes both intra- and inter-provincial migrants. In recent years, the national breakdown of migrants has been roughly 60 percent inter- versus 40 percent intra-provincial (National Bureau of Statistics 2015). For a review of migration trends in the early reform era, see Solinger (1999).

protest and draw distinct reactions from authorities.¹⁹ This variable is measured as the percentage of a province's employed persons who are in the state sector, using data from the China Statistical Yearbook. My fourth control is the percentage of provincial GDP generated by the *Tertiary Sector*, relying once more on the China Statistical Yearbook for data. The tertiary sector accounts for many of China's informally employed "missing workers," as well as people in sub-contracted employment relationships, who like migrants and SOE workers, may protest differently and receive different (less attentive) state treatment (Park and Cai 2011; Swider 2015; Lu Zhang 2015). My fifth control is *Labor NGOs*. As will be explored in subsequent chapters, NGOs could both spur unrest and, by their presence, spark a more heavy-handed police response to protests. I operationalize this variable as the number of NGOs per province per year, using a 2013 list of 86 organizations and their addresses and founding dates provided to me by CLB.²⁰ My sixth control, *Union Activity*, is measured as the number of enterprises per province with "wage only" collective contracts,²¹ as reported in the China Trade Union Yearbook and the China Trade Union Statistical Yearbook. China's unions might shape the actions of workers and governments alike through "quadrupartite bargaining" (Feng Chen 2010). Because many of these variables could simply reflect in different ways China's growing population and urbanization, I also include the controls *Population* and *Urban*, which measure, respectively, raw provincial population and the percentage of a province's population who are "employed persons in urban units at year-end." Both are drawn from China Statistical Yearbook data (though I rely on the

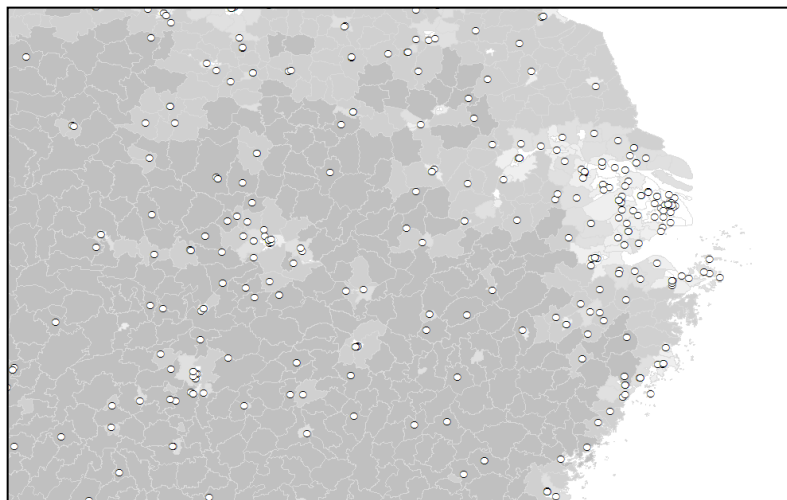
¹⁹ Of particular relevance to my dissertation, Y. Wang (2014a) has shown that security spending has risen in places where SOE employment has fallen (i.e., where SOE workers have been laid off).

²⁰ I assume that once an NGO is founded, it continues to exist for the whole period of the dataset. Of course, in practice, many are shut down. However, they tend to reestablish themselves under new names, and the CLB dataset does not double-count the groups, i.e., it codes their most recent incarnation as being founded in the year of their very first incarnation.

²¹ Collective contracts in China often simply restate the two parties' normal obligations under the law. "Wage only" collective contracts presumably deal with the more concrete issue of earnings.

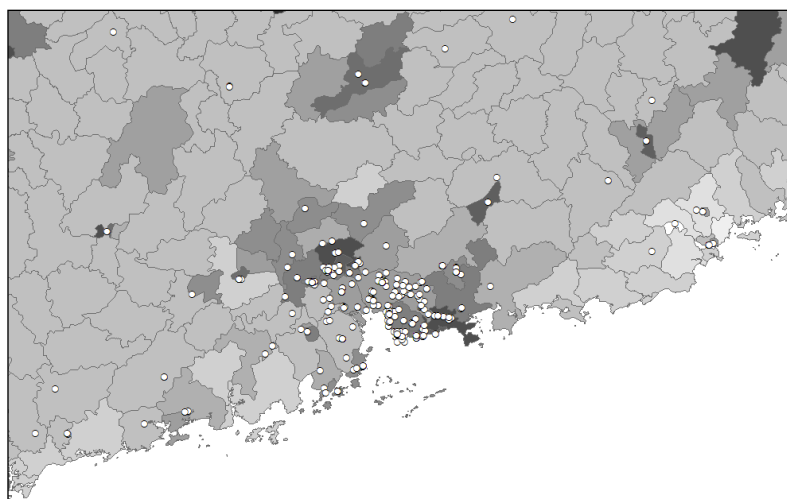
All China Data Center to measure Urban in the year 2004). Finally, I employ provincial fixed effects throughout to control for possible regional differences in strike reporting, e.g., more reports from coastal areas with a larger number of Internet users and greater access to foreign media. This has the effect of placing our focus on within-province variation over time.

Figure 2: Strikes and Economic Activity in China



White dots indicate strikes. Lighter shaded counties have experienced more economic activity as measured by night light readings.

Figure 3: Strikes and Migrant Populations



Darker shaded counties have a higher proportion of migrant workers.

A Control Not Included: Rural Unrest

China is the site of many forms of contention: anti-Japanese nationalist demonstrations in major cities, national self-determination struggles in Tibet and Xinjiang, and environmental protests all over the country. For the most part, these mobilizations are either too few in number to undermine my analysis (e.g., nationalist protests) or are geographically separated from labor unrest and therefore work *against* my finding significant correlations between worker activism and state policy (e.g., the struggles in Tibet and Xinjiang). However, one form of protest is both common and overlaps geographically with workplace conflict. This is rural unrest. Driven first by excessive taxation (Bernstein and Lü 2003) and more recently by land expropriation (K. J. O'Brien and Li 2006, 52–54), farmers have frequently confronted authorities in protracted, violent conflicts. These incidents rival industrial strikes, protests, and riots in number (see C.-J. J. Chen 2009). Some of the provinces that are hotspots of worker activism, like Guangdong, are also centers for rural insurgency. As cities expand outward and farmland is expropriated for industry, the two struggles sometimes occur in the exact same areas. In my interviews for the case studies that are the focus of subsequent chapters, I found evidence of this in places like Zhenjiang, Jiangsu (Interview 1). Rural unrest could also indirectly contribute to worker unrest, inasmuch as many workers (migrants) double as residents of the countryside, while directly contributing to police spending (though not judicial outcomes). For all these reasons, it is reasonable to believe that the turmoil in China's countryside might constitute a confounder.

Yet, all of the people I interviewed for the case studies in Chapters 3-7—academics, activists, and officials—were of the opinion that the Chinese state responds very differently to disputes by farmers versus workers. In particular, interviewees argued that policing the countryside is cheaper. For example, one Nanjing academic said, “In rural areas, the government is more direct

in how it resolves disputes. It's easier there to reduce the size of conflicts.... It's hard to say about costs... but more is probably spent in cities on disputes than in the countryside. When workers, say, block a road, they cause all kinds of costs" (Interview 43). An instructor at the Central Party School who leads trainings for officials on handling mass incidents commented:

"In the cities, there's a saying that if you make big trouble, you get a big resolution; small trouble, a small resolution.... people push for more money.... It's different in the countryside. The issue is not just money. For example, in Wukan [a village in Guangdong], it came down to organizing new [village] elections" (Interview 115).

Finally, an activist I spoke with who has personally been involved in both worker and farmer organizing, when asked about police responses to rural protests, explained: "In general, they'll always employ some violence to resolve things. The difference is that in the countryside, at the *beginning*, the police won't use as much violence. Relationships in the countryside are 'personal relationships' (*shurende guanxi*). So, police will at first try to use these relationships to deal with issues" (Interview 73). If, as he suggested, what Deng and O'Brien (2013) dub "relational repression" is the norm in rural areas, this, too, suggests security outlays should be lower. But the activist gave a different reason for higher cost of policing cities: "There is definitely more 'stability maintenance' spending in urban areas! Wherever there are more young people, there is more 'stability maintenance' spending" (Ibid.). Whatever the cause, there seems to be a consensus that police investment operates in a different manner for workers versus farmers. Appearances aside, rural unrest is unlikely to be an issue for my analysis. Given the difficulties of documenting protest outside of cities, I therefore do not attempt to operationalize this variable. Table 1 provides summary statistics of all the variables used.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Strikes (Number)	5.36	17.75	0	245
Public Security (100 Million RMB)	121.67	98.66	6.50	650.31
Pro-Worker (%)	50.19	14.54	7.18	91.15
Pro-Business (%)	12.27	6.78	0.27	50
Split (%)	37.54	13.53	5.70	76.84
GDP Per Capita (Nominal)	28685.03	19162.73	4317	100105.4
Migrant Workers (%)	14.98	11.77	.31	65.12
SOE Employment (%)	5.64	1.79	3.26	13.36
Tertiary Sector (%)	41.70	8.62	28.30	80.46
Labor NGOs (Number)	1.83	4.88	0	35
Union Activity (Number of Contracts)	43449.87	59699.75	0	360034
Urban (%)	47.77	16.11	12.26	89.6
Population (10,000 Persons)	4255.34	2696.82	276.35	10644

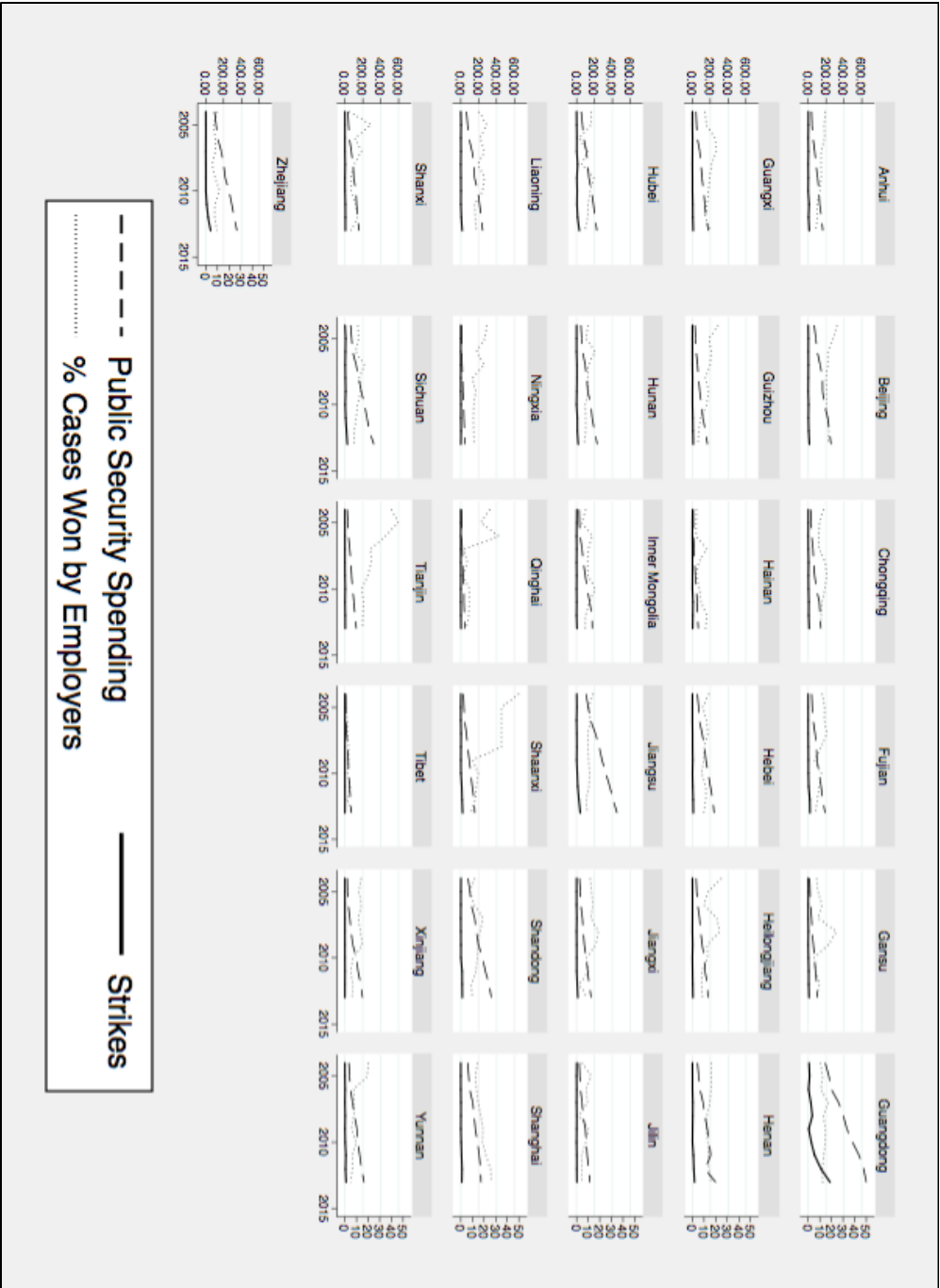
Model and Results

Figure 4 plots the number of strikes, amount of public security spending, and percentage of disputes decided in a pro-employer manner in each of China's 31 provinces, directly administered cities, and autonomous regions from 2004 to 2013. There is clearly considerable variance from region to region, especially with regard to unrest (the majority of provinces see very little change in protests). But both unrest and police spending are rising in most places. Pro-employer outcomes, meanwhile, seem to generally be declining as a percentage of all decisions, albeit not in a linear manner. To test whether these relationships are significant when the potential confounders listed above are controlled for, I estimate a series of cross-sectional time series models with Strikes as the principal independent variable and Public Security, and Split, Pro-Worker and Pro-Business judicial decisions as the dependent variables. Fisher-type unit root tests find evidence of non-stationarity in the Strikes, Public Security, Split, and Pro-

Worker series. I therefore use the first difference of these series in my analysis (strikes, public security spending or the percentage of disputes ruled a certain way at time t minus the spending / percentage ruled that way at time $t-1$).²² The most general, autoregressive distributed lag (ADL) model, which includes lags of the independent *and* dependent variables, is employed throughout, as it involves the fewest assumptions (e.g., of only instantaneous effects). I use a lag of one year, on the assumption that, to the extent that budgets and court practices are determined based on past experience, they draw on the previous year's experience, and I employ robust standard errors, as well as provincial fixed effects (again, to control for provincial biases in reporting).

²² Strikes still show evidence of non-stationarity using a Dickey-Fuller test but not a Phillips-Perron test.

Figure 4: Strikes, Public Security Spending, and Pro-Employer Judicial Decisions



As Table 2 shows, during the years 2004 to 2011, Strikes are positively correlated with public security spending—significantly so for the immediate relationship, insignificantly so for the lagged relationship. The long-run impact of each additional incident can be calculated using the multiplier $\frac{\beta_0 + \beta_1}{1 - \alpha_1}$ where β_0 is the coefficient of Strikes at year t ; β_1 is the coefficient of Strikes at year $t-1$; and α_1 is the coefficient of Public Security at year $t-1$ (De Boef and Keele 2008).²³

With this formula, I find that, in the long run, with full controls, each additional strike, protest, or riot in my dataset is correlated with an average increase in public security spending of 33.62 million RMB (5.16 million USD at today's exchange rate). Recall, though, that my dataset should be treated as a sample of a much larger number of conflicts, each of which likely has a much smaller impact on spending than does my Strikes variable.

The other variables that have a significant relationship with Public Security are GDP Per Capita, Migrant Workers, and Tertiary Sector. Employing the same multiplier as I have with Strikes, GDP Per Capita unexpectedly has a somewhat negative long-term impact on police investment, controlling for population, urbanization, and other factors. Each additional percentage point in the proportion of a province's population that lacks local household registration is correlated with a long-run increase in Public Security of 13.32 million RMB (or 2.05 million USD), while each additional percentage point of provincial GDP generated by the service economy is correlated with a decrease of 34 million RMB (5.22 million USD).

Regarding judicial decisions from 2004 to 2011, as also seen in Table 2, with full controls, Strikes are correlated with a significant *decrease* in the proportion of decisions adjudicated in a split manner but an *increase* in the number decided in a fully pro-worker manner (both at a 10

²³ Y. Wang (2014a) uses the same multiplier in his analysis of SOE employment and police budgets, while Zarate Tenorio (2014) uses it in her analysis of strikes and welfare spending in Latin America.

percent level of significance at time t). Strikes have a negative but insignificant relationship with pro-business rulings. Again, the immediate, not lagged correlations are the significant ones. The long-run impact of an increase of one workplace conflict in my dataset per year in a given province is a 0.12 percentage point shift in that province's judicial rulings toward workers. An increase of 50 incidents is thus correlated with a 6.03 percentage point shift.

The other significant variables with regard to judicial decisions are SOE employment, which is similarly negatively correlated with split rulings and positively correlated with fully pro-worker rulings in the long-run, and Union Activity, which is the opposite: positively but weakly correlated with a long-run shift toward more split rulings and negatively correlated with pro-worker rulings. Specifically, an increase of one enterprise with a "wage only collective contract" is correlated with a miniscule 0.000085 percentage point increase in the proportion of split rulings in a given province (it thus takes 100,000 enterprises with such contracts to shift the proportion 8.5 percentage points). Again, the rulings in question here relate to formally mediated, arbitrated, and litigated disputes, not strikes (though some conflicts may manifest themselves in both street action and judicial advocacy, see Su and He 2010).

Interestingly, as seen in Table 3, if the years 2012 and 2013 are added to the model, the relationship between Strikes and Pro-Worker rulings remains the same (and becomes more significant), but without controls, the immediate and lagged correlations with Public Security pull in opposite directions from each other (the immediate, positive; the lagged, negative), for a net negative long-term impact. With controls, both the immediate and lagged relationships turn negative, albeit insignificantly so. In other words, unrest becomes associated with *less* spending on the police over time (to be more precise, Strikes and Public Security remain positively

correlated but at a lower level of significance if 2012 data is included and switch to a negative but insignificant correlation with the inclusion of 2013 data).

There are different possible explanations for this anomaly. One is that my complete reliance on data from CLB's strike map for the year 2013 skews the results. However, the years 2011 and 2012 of my dataset are checked against CLB's data, while figures from earlier years are very much indebted to the organization's annual reports. Regardless, both CLB and I draw on many of the same mainland blogs and newspapers. Another, more likely explanation is that a spike in strikes, protests, and riots in 2012 and 2013 caught local public security bureaus off-guard. This would have disturbed the protest-policing relationship, but only temporarily. Finally, it is worth noting that those two years marked the transition between the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping administrations. In 2012, as Xi consolidated his power as new General Secretary of the CCP, he launched an investigation of rival Zhou Yongkang, the head of China's Politics and Law Commission and its associated domestic security apparatus. Zhou had personally overseen the massive expansion in police spending that occurred over the previous decade. In 2013, Zhou's son was arrested on corruption charges, and in late 2014, Zhou himself was arrested and expelled from the Party (for a timeline, see BBC 2014). These moves were accompanied by a general downgrading of domestic security: police chiefs were discouraged from joining local Politics and Law Committees and Zhou's replacement was not given a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee (BBC 2012). Cuts in police budgets (or, more likely, the shifting of police funds to other, similar institutions) would have been the most dramatic in wealthy urban centers that also happened to be hotspots of contention, thereby yielding a spurious negative correlation between contention and coercive capacity. We would then expect to see the protest-policing settle back into its old pattern in the future, as the storm in Beijing passes.

Table 2: Strikes and Policy Outcomes 2004-2011

	Judicial Decisions				Judicial Decisions			
	Public Security Spending	Split Decisions	Pro-Worker Decisions	Pro-Business Decisions	Public Security Spending	Split Decisions	Pro-Worker Decisions	Pro-Business Decisions
Δ Public Security (L1)	-0.109* (0.0610)				-0.291*** (0.0771)			
Δ Split (L1)		-0.387*** (0.0742)				-0.417*** (0.0916)		
Δ Pro-Worker (L1)			-0.421*** (0.0841)				-0.446*** (0.110)	
Pro-Business (L1)				0.254** (0.0967)				0.190** (0.0798)
Δ Strikes	0.483*** (0.0908)	-0.0809 (0.0826)	0.105 (0.0775)	-0.0565 (0.0505)	0.314*** (0.0864)	-0.200* (0.106)	0.196* (0.108)	-0.0371 (0.0526)
Δ Strikes (L1)	0.00270 (0.0704)	0.0465 (0.0581)	-0.0122 (0.0525)	-0.0279 (0.0198)	0.120 (0.0855)	0.0376 (0.0786)	-0.0215 (0.0640)	-0.0244 (0.0406)
GDP Per Capita					0.00177*** (0.000433)	0.000281 (0.000532)	-0.000418 (0.000447)	-0.000141 (0.000244)
GDP Per Capita (L1)					-0.00219*** (0.000517)	-0.000378 (0.000551)	0.000444 (0.000457)	-0.0000352 (0.000284)
Migrant Workers					0.480** (0.196)	-0.0649 (0.219)	0.111 (0.218)	0.0499 (0.0790)
Migrant Workers (L1)					-0.308* (0.166)	0.211 (0.175)	-0.279 (0.182)	0.0544 (0.0675)
SOE Employment					2.253 (4.644)	-11.20* (5.589)	14.05** (5.590)	-0.955 (2.531)
SOE Employment (L1)					0.143 (4.568)	9.283 (5.664)	-10.19* (5.814)	0.763 (2.589)
Tertiary Sector					1.631*** (0.466)	-0.0286 (0.512)	-0.0243 (0.571)	0.0297 (0.241)
Tertiary Sector (L1)					-2.070*** (0.360)	-0.429 (0.478)	0.489 (0.438)	-0.124 (0.232)
Labor NGOs					1.102 (1.330)	0.140 (0.878)	0.0396 (0.659)	-0.319 (0.686)
Labor NGOs (L1)					-0.993 (1.431)	-0.602 (1.091)	0.644 (0.802)	-0.133 (0.718)
Union Activity					-0.00000407 (0.0000477)	-0.0000131 (0.0000609)	0.0000333 (0.0000572)	0.00000164 (0.0000187)
Union Activity (L1)					0.0000126 (0.0000549)	0.000134** (0.0000640)	-0.000143** (0.0000696)	0.0000338 (0.0000255)
Population					0.0168 (0.0128)	0.00317 (0.0176)	-0.00107 (0.0177)	0.00281 (0.00628)
Population (L1)					0.00404 (0.0129)	0.00729 (0.0177)	-0.0111 (0.0202)	0.00889 (0.00695)
Urban					-0.681 (1.364)	1.534 (1.032)	-2.077** (0.986)	-0.113 (0.658)
Urban (L1)					0.215 (1.124)	-1.264 (1.098)	2.120* (1.137)	-0.416 (0.778)
Constant	20.19*** (0.981)	2.376*** (0.143)	-1.487*** (0.103)	9.056*** (1.252)	-38.19 (60.80)	-30.96 (70.98)	15.07 (61.92)	-6.709 (27.32)
N	186	186	186	186	179	179	179	179

Robust standard errors in parentheses. $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3: Strikes and Policy Outcomes 2004-2013

	Judicial Decisions				Judicial Decisions			
	Public Security Spending	Split Decisions	Pro-Worker Decisions	Pro-Business Decisions	Public Security Spending	Split Decisions	Pro-Worker Decisions	Pro-Business Decisions
Δ Public Security (L1)	-0.397 (0.246)				-0.550** (0.214)			
Δ Split (L1)		-0.314*** (0.0614)				-0.320*** (0.0662)		
Δ Pro-Worker (L1)			-0.358*** (0.0620)				-0.373*** (0.0701)	
Pro-Business (L1)				0.383*** (0.0892)				0.264*** (0.0816)
Δ Strikes	0.184*** (0.0494)	-0.0924*** (0.0250)	0.106*** (0.0365)	-0.0383 (0.0361)	-0.0401 (0.0454)	-0.163*** (0.0492)	0.152** (0.0585)	-0.0169 (0.0255)
Δ Strikes (L1)	-0.248*** (0.0681)	0.0572 (0.0423)	-0.0542 (0.0407)	-0.00346 (0.0272)	-0.252** (0.0953)	0.0937 (0.0616)	-0.110** (0.0523)	-0.00526 (0.0377)
GDP Per Capita					(0.000625)	(0.000509)	(0.000432)	(0.000187)
GDP Per Capita (L1)					-0.00209*** (0.000596)	-0.000878* (0.000446)	0.000847** (0.000393)	0.0000714 (0.000168)
Migrant Workers					0.198 (0.151)	-0.0226 (0.183)	0.0839 (0.169)	0.0519 (0.0734)
Migrant Workers (L1)					-0.294*** (0.104)	-0.0167 (0.127)	-0.0157 (0.122)	0.0712 (0.0603)
SOE Employment					4.243* (2.278)	-2.189 (2.711)	2.901 (2.776)	-0.276 (0.857)
SOE Employment (L1)					-0.413 (3.195)	3.996 (2.427)	-3.502 (2.687)	-0.0847 (0.905)
Tertiary Sector					1.382** (0.522)	0.548 (0.428)	-0.536 (0.457)	0.125 (0.175)
Tertiary Sector (L1)					-1.629*** (0.435)	-0.547 (0.337)	0.528* (0.290)	-0.0906 (0.170)
Labor NGOs					1.627 (1.771)	0.272 (0.887)	-0.0408 (0.615)	-0.306 (0.628)
Labor NGOs (L1)					-1.738 (1.858)	-0.509 (0.831)	0.529 (0.669)	0.0149 (0.617)
Union Activity					-0.0000298 (0.0000547)	-0.0000179 (0.0000266)	0.0000272 (0.0000241)	-0.0000011: (0.0000135)
Union Activity (L1)					0.0000397 (0.0000708)	0.0000111 (0.0000218)	-0.0000112 (0.0000252)	0.0000120 (0.0000132)
Population					0.0131 (0.0161)	0.0115 (0.0179)	-0.0153 (0.0184)	0.00225 (0.00519)
Population (L1)					0.0111 (0.0252)	0.00177 (0.0144)	0.000897 (0.0158)	0.00467 (0.00523)
Urban					-1.549 (1.489)	1.344 (0.934)	-1.839* (0.968)	-0.0873 (0.530)
Urban (L1)					1.689 (1.220)	-1.275 (0.990)	1.899* (1.008)	-0.381 (0.576)
Constant	25.95*** (4.252)	2.279*** (0.114)	-1.562*** (0.0921)	7.068*** (1.096)	-97.12 (69.47)	-69.99 (42.61)	64.58 (46.05)	4.987 (20.17)
N	248	248	248	248	241	241	241	241

Robust standard errors in parentheses. $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Robustness Checks

A few checks are in order. First, the more standard way of drawing causal inferences from observational panel data like mine is to run an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with unit (i.e., province) *and* period (i.e., year) fixed effects and without elaborate lags. This involves an assumption of only an immediate effect of protest on policy and precludes measuring the long-run impact of unrest as I have done. But it deals with certain year-to-year biases, such as possible changes over time in the censorship of strike news. I estimate such a model while leaving the previously differenced variables still differenced (see Appendices 2a and 2b). Strikes remain significantly and positively correlated with Public Security for the years 2004-2011 and negatively (but insignificantly) correlated with Public Security for the years 2004-2013, while Strikes and Pro-Worker rulings remain positively and significantly correlated regardless of the years used. In other words, the results stand.

Second, given that my dependent variable Public Security measures not only police expenditures but also (to a likely limited degree) judicial costs, and given that numbers of formally mediated, arbitrated, and litigated disputes potentially closely track fluctuations in my independent variable, Strikes, it is conceivable that my finding regarding a correlation between Strikes and police investments really represents something more mundane than a coercive response to unrest, namely the increased costs borne by courts with a higher caseload. To test for this, I re-run the first ADL regression in Tables 2 and 3, this time with formally adjudicated employment cases as the independent variable (Disputes) in the place of strikes, protests, and riots. The outcome is a negative correlation between disputes and Public Security, irrespective of whether the data is from before or after the year 2012 (see Appendix 3). This suggests that workers protesting have a different impact from workers bringing cases to court. Perhaps, labor litigation drives down

police expenses by taking angry employees off the streets. Regardless, we can be confident that the correlations seen in Tables 2 and 3 are not merely the result of an overworked judiciary.

Third and finally, a very small sub-set of provinces / years with unusually high levels of unrest could be responsible for the correlations found in both Tables 2 and 3. I therefore drop all the observations with more than 50 strikes in my self-created dataset (N=4). My previous findings remain robust (see Appendices 3a and 3b). When I re-estimate the ADL models, strikes are still significantly positively correlated with public security and with pro-worker rulings at the 10 percent level (interestingly, though, the previous negative correlation with split rulings becomes insignificant). This exercise should not suggest that the dropped observations are irrelevant, however. The hotbeds of unrest they represent are actually in the vanguard of China's evolving industrial relations and their experiences may be indicative of what is in store for other parts of the country if present dynamics continue. By their very extremity, high-protest areas also reveal the relationship between contention and policy with particular clarity—a point that I will follow up on in more detail in the next chapter.

The Dual Reaction Broadly Confirmed

My hypothesis that authoritarian regimes, especially state socialist and post-socialist ones, react to workplace conflict with a combination of repression and responsiveness, is broadly confirmed in the case of China. For most of the past decade, all else equal, more strikes, protests, and riots in my dataset are correlated with more public security spending and more pro-worker decisions (and not even just split decisions). My ancillary findings are also of interest. Large migrant worker populations appear to be worrying for officials, who spend significantly more on public security when a higher proportion of their residents are outsiders. Consistent with the theory that

service work is stabilizing—or that protests by service workers are not seen as a threat by authorities—a larger tertiary sector is correlated with significantly lower public security spending. More SOE employment, meanwhile, means more pro-worker rulings. This could reflect a lingering official sympathy for the old socialist “master class” or simply the depth of state sector employees’ grievances. Labor NGOs are not a significant contributor to security spending or judicial decisions, perhaps because of their low numbers and concentration in only a few provinces (Guangdong and Beijing, especially). More enterprises with “wage-only” collective contracts mean fewer pro-worker and more down-the-middle rulings, reinforcing critiques of the All China Federation of Trade Unions as a cautious organization unwilling to side fully with employees (though my case study of Guangdong’s portion of the Pearl River Delta in Chapter 4 will describe a few notable instances of union reform). I will revisit worker demographics, enterprise ownership types, and the roles of NGOS and the ACFTU in greater detail in the following, qualitative chapters. The reversal of the relationship between unrest and public security spending in 2012 and 2013, finally, presents a small puzzle and suggests that national-level elite politics may also deserve consideration in analyses of contention and state policy. The addition of more recent data should reveal whether these two years amount to a blip or the beginning of a new trend. For the reasons noted above, a blip seems more likely. Elite politics at a different level—leading politicians of provinces and directly administered cities—will be explored in Chapter 7. First, however, I will set up two comparative case studies to check the validity of the measures I used, capture the full interplay of social forces at play in China’s workplaces, and trace the possible mechanisms linking protest and policy. This chapter articulated and tested a regime-level explanation regarding the impact of workers under authoritarianism; I will now seek to identify the regional dynamics that underpin it.

3. Cases and Fields

The previous chapter established the overall (average) trajectory of Chinese labor politics. Specifically, it found that unrest at the provincial level was positively correlated with spending on the police *and* with formally adjudicated employment disputes settled in workers' favor. This pattern was interpreted as support for my hypothesis that the state is responding to labor resistance in a dual manner: repressive *and* responsive. In this chapter, I begin by arguing that in-depth case studies are necessary to check the validity of the measures I used, to capture the full interplay of social forces in China's workplaces, and to trace the possible mechanisms linking protest and policy. Based on the principles of "most similar" cases and "nested analysis," I furthermore provide evidence that Jiangsu's portion of the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) and Guangdong's portion of the Pearl River Delta (PRD) are especially well suited to this task. Both regions are very wealthy, are thoroughly integrated into the global economy, and are magnets for migrant workers. However, they vary with regard to their levels of strikes, protests, and riots and their scores on the two policy indicators, police spending and dispute outcomes, from my statistical analysis. Specifically, the YRD is slightly above average on all counts—a little more resistance, a little more repression, and a little more responsiveness than most parts of China—while the PRD marks the furthest extreme, i.e., the absolute most resistance, most repression, and most responsiveness in the country. Finally, I provide a summary of field theory and introduce the idea of a "field of Chinese labor politics" and of "regional fields" within it, explaining how these concepts can be used to analyze the ways in which the various forces within the deltas interact with each other to produce such contrasting dynamics.

Limits of Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis in the previous chapter revealed broad patterns of labor protest and policy response across China. However, although it did so using the best quantitative measures available, questions of measurement validity inevitably remain (Adcock and Collier 2001). Does more investment in public security really represent more repression? After all, police officers can intimidate protesters (e.g., by videotaping them or violently assaulting them) but can also be deployed neutrally (e.g., to maintain the flow of traffic). Do more “pro-worker” or split judicial rulings really mean a growing state bias in workers’ favor (or, rather, a correction back from a previous bias toward capital)? In my analysis, as noted, dispute outcome data stands in for a wide range of government practices that are difficult to quantify. These activities range from the methods used by officials who are deployed to factories to diffuse conflicts onsite to slow-moving changes in the responsiveness of local labor bureaus and state-controlled trade unions. Moreover, in order to focus narrowly on the relationship between protest and policy, the statistical analysis controlled away important factors, such as enterprise ownership types, worker demographics, the role of NGOs and unions, etc. To the extent that these factors featured in the discussion of my findings, they did so in an isolated manner (e.g., the correlation between NGOs and police spending, all else equal). Without a more holistic view, one that takes into account the complex relationships existing between all of the different variables, it is difficult to identify the precise mechanisms that link unrest and political change—or be certain that the link exists.

Benefits of Case Studies

Case study analysis can compensate for the gaps in large-N analysis noted above. It can, first of all, provide a level of detail that helps us avoid “vague, amorphous conceptualizations” or what

Sartori (1970, 1034) calls “conceptual stretching”—as well as downright flawed operationalizations of key variables (Adcock and Collier 2001). Case studies also lend themselves to “process tracing” or documenting “the links between possible causes and observed outcomes” (Bennett and George 2005, 6). This tracing need not follow a straight line between X and Y. Cases can accommodate “complex causal relations, such as equifinality, complex interactions effects, and path dependency,” which are difficult to model statistically (Bennett and George 2005, 19–22). If we further relax our narrow focus on cause and effect, moreover, case analysis can help us understand sets of relationships as intricate wholes, with certain base conditions affecting key variables, even as the variables affect each other and the base conditions themselves. Field theory, which I discuss in the second half of this chapter, provides a framework for a broad analysis of this sort. First, I explain my case selection.

Case Selection

In choosing my cases, I adopt Lieberman’s (2005) strategy of “nested analysis.” According to Lieberman, if estimating a large-N, statistical model yields support for a hypothesis, the natural next step is to engage in “model-testing small-N analysis” using cases that fall roughly “on the line” of the relationships already documented. Such cases are what Gerring (2008, 649) calls “typical cases.” These might be average instances of some phenomenon; however, says Gerring, “Cases with untypical scores on a particular dimension (e.g., very high or very low) may still be typical examples of a causal relationship,” because “causal typicality involves the selection of a case that conforms to expectations about some general causal relationship... it performs as expected” (Ibid.). In other words, extreme cases qualify. If the details of such cases, not just their aggregate scores, fit a hypothesis, then we ought to have greater confidence in the hypothesis; if they do not fit, then it may be necessary to examine other cases, both “on” and “off

the line,” and engage in a round of “model-building small-N analysis” (Lieberman 2005). As my hypothesis outlined at the beginning of Chapter 2—of resistance yielding both repression and shows of responsiveness—was broadly confirmed by my statistical analysis, I use on the line, typical cases for my initial comparison.

To reduce omitted variable bias, I further ensure that my cases are “most similar” cases. As Przeworski and Teune (1970, 32) explain, in a “most similar” comparison, cases are chosen that differ so little on most measures that “if some important differences are found... then the number of factors attributable to these differences will be sufficiently small to warrant explanation in terms of those differences alone.” Obviously, these selection criteria should all be treated as ideals, not absolute rules. No case is entirely typical, even by Gerring’s broad definition, and any two cases will contain innumerable differences upon close inspection, no matter how superficially similar they appear. But aiming for a rough approximation of these ideals yields more focused analysis—even if that analysis veers away from a focus on strictly causal relationships to examine broad “fields” of interaction, as mine will in subsequent chapters.

Data Sources

The principal data sources for my case studies are 141 interviews I conducted between the fall of 2014 and summer of 2015, across three research trips to China (supplemented by 73 preliminary interviews conducted in 2011). Interviewees included workers, businesspeople, labor activists, labor academics, and public officials. All of the conversations were “unstructured” or “semi-structured,” meaning I came into them with an agenda, but a flexible one (Bernard 2006, chap. 9). Some of the interviews were with individuals; others, with groups. Appendix 4 lists each by number. Protesters were found through reading online write-ups of unrest. I reached officials

and labor activists through personal contacts or through cold-calling local governments and organizations (which in turn referred me to others). As such, my selection process amounted to “snowball sampling.” Most conversations lasted at least an hour or more, but many, such as my discussions with protesting workers, were very short interactions. With two exceptions, I did not record any of the interviews, opting to instead take handwritten notes and “jottings” and type up these notes as soon after the interviews as possible (Fretz, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). The quotations used are thus usually rough approximations of what was said. Because of security concerns, I do not use individuals’ names in any place in the dissertation and do not include dates. I add information from over 200 municipal and provincial yearbooks. News reports and secondary literature further complement these sources. However, I avoid including any public sources that could compromise my interviewees’ anonymity.

Two Deltas

My chosen case studies are Jiangsu’s portion of the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) on China’s central coast and Guangdong’s portion of the Pearl River Delta (PRD) on the southern coast. These regions fall roughly “on the line” of labor unrest, police spending, and judicial decisions, allowing for both model-testing small-N analysis and process tracing, consistent with the method of “nested analysis.” As the scatterplot in Figure 5 shows, Jiangsu province / year observations fall slightly above the average in terms of both strikes and investment in public security, while Guangdong province / year observations have the absolute highest values on both measures. Figure 6 reveals the same dynamic at work with regard to strikes and split judicial decisions, as the contrast between the regions is clearer with these than fully pro-worker decisions. Guangdong’s values are so extreme they distort the whole scatterplots, making the other observations appear clumped together, (i.e., if Jiangsu is a traditional “typical” case, Guangdong

nonetheless evinces what Gerring calls “causal typicality”—it follows the same pattern as other cases, just in a more extreme manner). Figures 7 and 8 contain scatterplots without Guangdong to show the province’s influence. The pattern is actually more obvious without the province.

Figure 5: Strikes and Public Security Spending

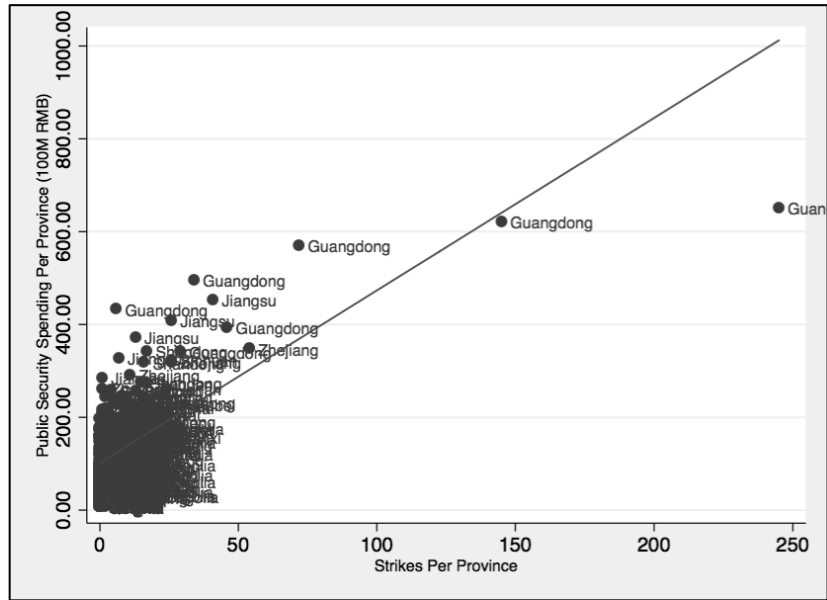
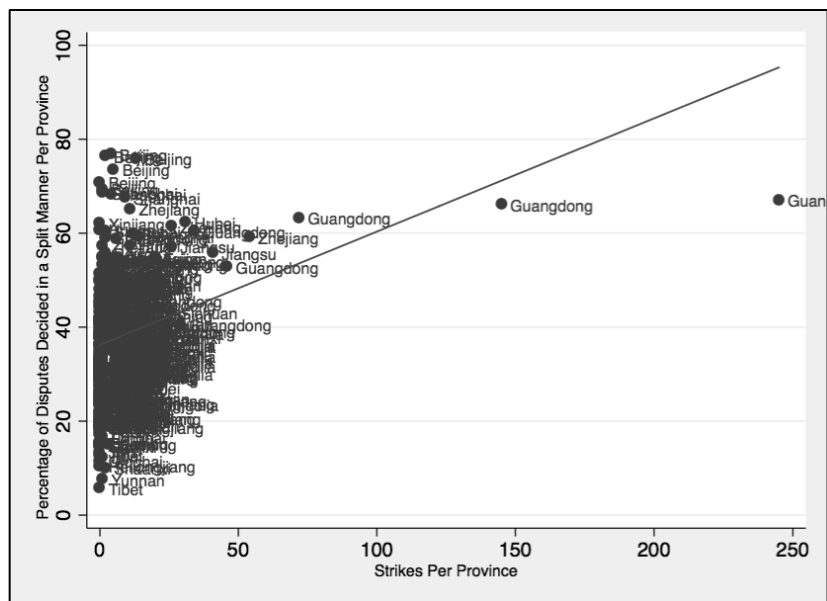
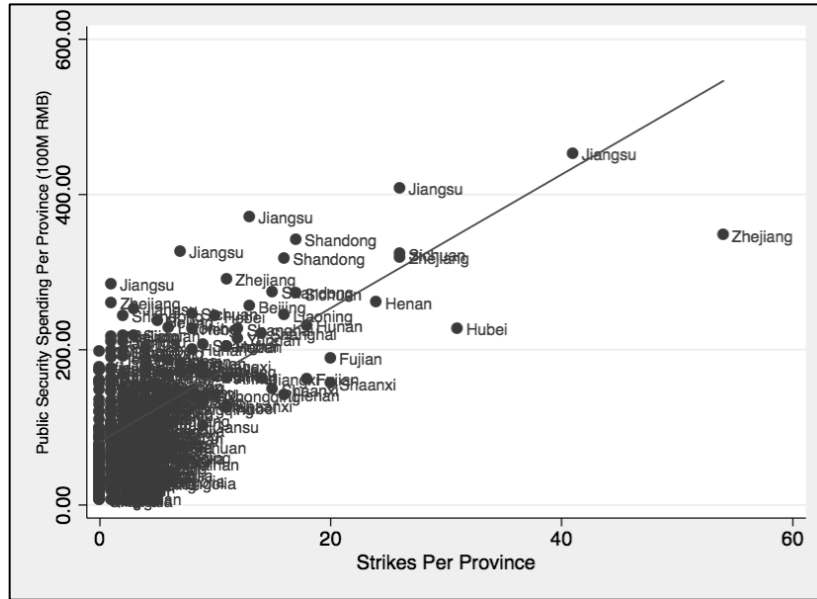


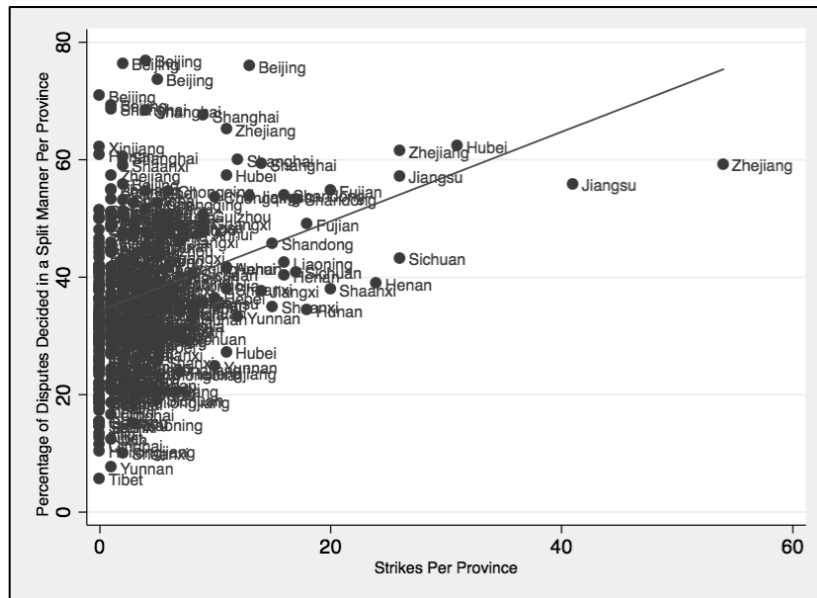
Figure 6: Strikes and Split Decisions



**Figure 7: Strikes and Public Security Spending
(Minus Guangdong)**



**Figure 8: Strikes and Split Decisions
(Minus Guangdong)**



Even as they offer contrasts in terms of their labor unrest and labor policy, the YRD and PRD are as alike as any two regions in China can be with regard to most important economic and political variables. Table 4 displays the 2013 rankings of Jiangsu and Guangdong in terms of provincial GDP, GDP per capita, exports, total investment by foreign enterprises, and number of migrant workers relative to all of China’s 31 provinces, directly administered cities, and autonomous regions (hereinafter all referred to as “provinces”). My cases are never more than three notches apart. On three of the five measures—GDP, exports, and foreign investment—they trade first and second place. With the exception of GDP per capita, the cases always rank in the top 15 percent of all provinces. This pattern, in keeping with the “most similar” case selection approach, allows us to focus on the principle drivers of their divergent patterns of protest and policy. Of course, there are more nuances than immediately meet the eye. In subsequent chapters, I provide details that amend some of the regions’ seeming similarities.

Table 4: Jiangsu and Guangdong Ranked

	Jiangsu	Guangdong	
GDP	2	1	Top 10%
GDP Per Capita	4	7	Top 15-25%
Exports	2	1	Top 10%
Total Investment by Foreign Firms	1	2	Top 10%
Number of Migrant Workers	4	1	Top 5-15%

Source: China Statistical Datasheet 2014.

The Field of Chinese Labor Politics

Once the cases are chosen, what is the best way to approach them? “Field theory” offers a means of understanding different regions of China as not only “observations” with different scores on different variables, but as clusters of activity in their own right—“fields”—that are

bounded and contained within yet broader clusters. It can point to common constraints and openings across such clusters of activity. By focusing not on simple cause and effect but more complex relationships, where actors shape each other's preferences and behaviors, furthermore it allows us to observe how clusters can reach equilibrium or descend into crisis. In particular, it can show the leverage actors can get from various "rules of the game" in their spheres of action—and how they might, ultimately change those rules. Finally and most basically, field theory provides a means of organizing our discussion of very complicated places, actor by actor, in order to yield clear comparisons.

Field Theory

As noted in Chapter 1, field theory takes its inspiration from the study of electromagnetism: a given field charges the objects within it in different ways depending on their location, thereby affecting their relations with each other; without the objects, though, the field itself would only be "a potential" (Martin 2003). Thus, the objects do not encounter and "affect" each other completely independently. Moreover, the properties of the field and its objects are mutually constitutive. The objects of a *social* field are groups struggling for dominance (or control of the relevant form of "capital" within their sphere, e.g., economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, see Bourdieu 1986). For example, in the juridical field, various types of legal professionals—judges, corporate lawyers, human rights advocates, legal scholars—compete to define the law, even as they are constrained by its precedents and procedures (Bourdieu 1984). Fligstein (2001) divides groups into challengers and incumbents. Incumbents strive to maintain the fields they dominate by, among other things, avoiding antagonizing other powerful groups (if there are any), while groups lower on the social hierarchy take advantage of what limited space is available to them to assert their interests on the incumbents' terms. At moments of crisis,

however, “current arrangements start to break down,” subordinate groups challenge incumbents, and a new field is formed (Ibid., 109). External events are the most common causes of crises, but crises can also “originate between groups in a particular field,” when groups have developed the “social skills” to organize coalitions for change (Ibid.).

Groups in Chinese Labor Politics

The “field” of “Chinese labor politics” can be said to constitute a specific manifestation of the field of Chinese politics more generally. It has its own actors, issues, and relationships.

Borrowing from traditional theories of “industrial relations systems” (e.g., Dunlop 1958), we can understand this field-within-a-field as containing three principle groups, namely capital (or in industrial relations parlance, “management”), labor, and the state. These groups are not equal in China. Capital may hold exceptional power at some times and in some settings, but the state always dominates. As Taylor, Chang, and Li (Taylor, Chang, and Li 2003, 46) write, “All other actors, and all industrial relations processes, act either with a relative autonomy permitted by or neglected by the state, and have as their primary relationship the state in some form or another.”

This is the root of descriptions of China’s economy as “crony capitalist,” “bureaucratic capitalist,” “market Leninist,” “market Stalinist,” “state capitalist,” and “capitalist with Chinese characteristics” (Au and Bai 2010, for example, essentially adopt a “bureaucratic capitalist” framework, repeatedly highlighting the financial benefits accruing to bureaucrats under the current system). Regardless of the precise terminology used, it is widely understood that Chinese officialdom collectively comprises the key player against which other players must position themselves. For a crisis to occur, the incumbent state need not be overthrown—a tall order in China or anywhere—but its day-to-day control over capital and labor must be significantly weakened.

The three principle groups in the field of Chinese labor politics can be broken down further. Capital then takes the form of *foreign direct investment*, *domestic private capital*, and the *resilient state sector* (if we understand SOEs as employers first and foremost). As my dissertation concerns the relationship between workers and the state, the different forms capital can take (and the different kinds of political capital they possess) will be of interest only inasmuch as they affect worker-state interactions. For instance, workers in SOEs are more likely to raise claims rooted in a “moral economy” or “socialist social contract” (Hurst and O’Brien 2002; Lee 2007), and as noted in the previous chapter, officials may feel especially responsible to this group (Cai 2010). Some forms of domestic private capital and foreign direct investment, because they are aimed at manufacturing for export, are especially vulnerable to international economic trends and can dry up during global downturns, resulting in job losses. The threat of unrest from laid off employees gives these forms of capital, too, a special claim on the state’s attention. Particularly exploitative firms may also be more likely to spur worker unrest, making them an object of official scrutiny.

Labor, meanwhile, can be divided into *local* and *migrant* workers. Migrant workers hail from rural areas and lack full rights within the cities where they are employed. I will further focus on another distinction within what Ray (1999) calls the “field of protest”: between the activism of *workers themselves* and of *labor NGOs*. Workers themselves strike and protest with only the barest forms of planning and leadership (Leung 2015). Labor NGOs, meanwhile, have existed in China since the late 1990s. They are few in number. Some are at the center of wide webs of activists, including cells on shop floors; others simply provide basic services to workers upon request. Their programming borrows elements from law firms, community groups, foreign trade unions, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and muckraking journalism. Organized crime

networks and native place associations also bring Chinese workers together (C. K. Chan 2010). But NGOs are the most institutionalized worker-side force in the country's labor politics. Their future development (more than their current role) should be of concern for authorities.

The state, finally, can be divided into its *legislation and implementation* component, on the one hand, and its *mass organization* component, on the other. Labor legislation is passed by People's Congresses at different levels (under Party guidance) and is implemented by, among others, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (also referred to as the labor bureau). The country's only mass organization for workers, the ACFTU, as noted in the previous chapter, has been explained as a semi-independent entity, engaged in "quadripartite bargaining" alongside capital, labor, and the state (Feng Chen 2010). It has also been portrayed as a corporatist peak organization in the making (A. Chan 1993). But despite occasional bids for greater autonomy, such as during the Hundred Flowers Movement and during the liberal 1980s (see China Labour Bulletin 2009b; Perry 1994; Pringle 2011), and despite promising reforms, some of which will be the subject of later chapters, the ACFTU has largely defined its principle task as carrying out CCP policy and ensuring industrial "harmony." It does so in part simply by monopolizing the space that truly worker-driven organizations might otherwise occupy (Gallagher 2015, 210).

Finally, we must consider the state's *coercive arm*. This includes first and foremost the work of policemen and policewomen and the paramilitary PAP. But it also includes the government's less overtly repressive, more informal means of exerting pressure—which are made possible by the *threat* of tougher tactics. Governments, even single-party authoritarian ones, are not monoliths. Again, they can pursue multiple approaches at once.

The Environment

All of these groups can be understood as engaged in struggle within a framework—in industrial relations systems theory, an “environment” (see again Dunlop 1958)—that is at once a product of their struggle and a limit on what they can do. This environment naturally includes China’s market conditions—growth and contraction, labor surpluses and shortages, and the like. But it also includes a tangle of (often contradictory) norms. These range from a lingering sympathy for egalitarian ideals rooted in the socialist era to an unshakeable belief in the necessity of rapid economic development that bridges the socialist and reform eras. Most important, though, is the norm of “social stability” (*shehui wending*). The fact that the realization of this norm benefits the state more than labor and even capital speaks to the state’s position as the dominant, agenda-setting actor in the field. Drawing on the work of A. Wallace (1961), Johnson (1970b) writes that we can distinguish between a regime’s “goal culture” and “transfer culture.” The former consists of its “image of the ultimate utopia,” whereas the later “specifies what steps the... leadership must take (or is invoked to justify the steps the leadership does take) to move toward the goal culture” (Ibid., 7). For the Chinese government, “stability maintenance” has come to be seen as absolutely necessary for the realization of a number of aspects of the country’s long-term “goal culture”—for instance, development (with these goals being a clear step down from the more ambitious goals of the socialist period). These themes can be found in multiple statements. For example, at a July 2012 meeting of the Politics and Law Committee in Tianjin, officials were bluntly instructed, “Place the maintenance of social stability in a position above all else” (Legal Daily 2012). And during a conference on strengthening judicial work, *Xinhua* reported, “Attendees... stressed the mission to maintain social stability, promote social equity and justice, and guarantee that people live and work in peace” (Xinhua 2016). Stability may also, of course,

justify abuses of authority. However, the state is constrained by its perceived need for harmony, too. Groups can win concessions from the government by threatening stability, as labor does with its strikes and protests, or by aligning their needs with stability, as capital does when it portrays factory bankruptcies as destabilizing. I return to this dynamic in Chapter 6, when I examine the precise mechanisms connecting protest and policy.

Multiple Fields

If these groups and their environment and norms seem abstract, this is because the real action may be best understood as occurring in a series of *regional* fields. The boundaries of these are defined both geographically and by the relative intensity of the interactions between different actors in them, whether via market exchange or political institutions. Some fields are relatively stable, approximating the well-oiled machines imagined by industrial relations systems theory (for a critique, see S. J. Wood et al. 1975), where each group has a clearly defined role and where rules for resolving disagreements are largely settled and unchanging. Others, for external or internal reasons, have clearly entered a period of crisis, with subordinate groups starting to challenge incumbents. In the following chapters, I approach the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta as two such regional fields, small authoritarianisms within the larger “decentralized authoritarianism” of China (Landry 2008). First, I address the Yangtze River Delta, then the Pearl River Delta, examining the characteristics of each actor in each field in turn. I describe the unique ways in which the actors—in their different forms and different arms—interact with each other and how they together maintain or reconfigure their environments. In the process, I both reaffirm and expand upon the findings of my statistical analysis regarding resistance, repression and reform, painting a more holistic picture of contention and state reactions to it.

4. Preemption, Caution, and Nudging in Jiangsu's Yangtze River Delta

In this chapter, I analyze the first of my regional fields in labor politics, the Yangtze River Delta. Consistent with its average or slightly above average ranking on the quantitative indicators of resistance, repression, and responsiveness used in Chapter 2, I find the YRD to be a field in relatively harmonious equilibrium, at least by Chinese standards. Capital tends toward the high-tech and offers better working conditions than further south. Workers, who include many migrants but also a substantial proportion of locals, not only engage in collective action at just a middling level, but also tend to prefer institutional channels for resolving grievances, while expressing trust in authorities. Labor NGOs, meanwhile, stick to politically safe programming. Repressive and responsive reactions to workplace conflict by the regional government meanwhile take a qualitatively different shape from the PRD. Authorities in Jiangsu try to preempt conflict as much as possible. They adopt a cautious, incremental approach to labor policymaking, whether in terms of local labor laws or the programming of their branches of the state-controlled trade union. Officials nudge capital and labor into line with incentives—such as a “harmonious enterprises” certification program for companies and partnership opportunities for labor NGOs interested in helping provide social services—and quiet punishments—such as bringing reputational pressures to bear on recalcitrant employers and isolating NGOs deemed potentially dangerous. These dynamics are obviously self-reinforcing. For example, a largely quiescent civil society allows the government to pursue a low-key strategy of co-optation and isolation, which in turn encourages more moderate nongovernmental initiatives. The YRD state enjoys a positive feedback loop. Unlike in the PRD, nothing has knocked the region's many interlocking relationships off course. Table 5 summarizes these dynamics.

Table 5: Characteristics of the YRD

GROUP	SUB-GROUP	CHARACTERISTICS
CAPITAL	Ownership	Foreign, especially from Taiwan and Korea
	Other characteristics	High-tech, high value-added, better working conditions & better labor law compliance
LABOR	Composition	Large number of migrants, but also locals
	Activism by workers themselves	Institutionally-oriented appeals, protests that feature high trust in government
	Activism by labor NGOs	Politically safe programming
STATE	General approach	Preemption
	Legislation	Incremental, filling in gaps in national legislation
	Mass organizations	Meeting old obligations, national targets
	Coercive arm	Surveillance, coaxing capital to follow law, concessions to protesting workers, co-opting or isolating labor NGOs

In the sections that follow, I first provide additional background on the region. Then, I examine each of the principal actors in its field of labor politics in turn, especially the state and its approach to workplace governance, before discussing the ways in which all of the actors interact. To give an indication of the generalizability of the YRD case to other “average” places in China, I finish with a brief sketch of dynamics in the northeastern city of Tianjin, which has experienced levels of unrest similar to those in Jiangsu—and similar patterns of governance.

A Political and Economic Powerhouse

Jiangsu’s Yangtze River Delta is situated midway up China’s coast. It plays an important role in China’s economy and politics—and has for centuries. Since the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the YRD has been a center for trade and the merchant class. Cities like Suzhou and Wuxi, with their winding waterways and carefully cultivated gardens, have long represented a luxurious,

sophisticated lifestyle. Nanjing was the first capital of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the stronghold of the rebel Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1850-1864), and the center of government for the Republic of China under the Nationalists from 1927 until the Japanese army overran the city in 1937 (and again, briefly, after the war and before the founding of the People’s Republic). During the Cultural Revolution, the city was rocked by factional conflict and brought under control relatively late (Dong and Walder 2011a, 2011b; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 240–41). However, Nanjing was also the site of early and enthusiastic opposition to the Gang of Four and of support for the perceived moderate Premier Zhou Enlai (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 420–22). Following market reforms, Jiangsu, like its neighbor Zhejiang, experienced a boom of “capitalism from below,” with private specialty suppliers, which were closed out of the credit available to the state sector, forming integrated industrial clusters and production chains marked by both competition and coordination (Nee and Opper 2012). The YRD was opened to foreign investment during China’s “second wave” of liberalization that started in 1984, five years after the establishment of Special Economic Zones of the PRD (Naughton 2007, 409). Since then, the region has grown rapidly. The YRD is frequently seen as on the verge of overtaking the PRD (e.g., Lau 2016).

Throughout my dissertation, I refer to Jiangsu Province and the Yangtze River Delta interchangeably. For example, in choosing the YRD as one of my case studies in Chapter 2, I relied on Jiangsu statistics. However, the YRD technically only cuts through the province’s south. The north and middle of the province, while also densely populated—the county Shuyang in the north is one of the largest in the country—are not as wealthy. Southern GDP per capita is

roughly 1.6 times that of the middle and 2.4 times that of the north (HKTDC 2014).²⁴ Moreover, the Yangtze River Delta is not fully contained by Jiangsu. Zhejiang Province and the directly administered city of Shanghai can also claim parts of the delta. I focus on Jiangsu's portion because these other places have very different political economies. While Zhejiang's economic growth has been driven to a unique degree by small and medium enterprises, Shanghai is the country's financial center. They constitute separate fields. Finally, even within the part of the Yangtze River Delta controlled by Jiangsu, there is considerable variation. Labor markets, in particular, differ sharply from city to city. At the time of my research, for example, the industrial zone Kunshan was experiencing a labor shortage while the capital of Nanjing was experiencing a *job* shortage (Interviews 14-15, 21). Foreign sources of investment also vary between YRD municipalities. For example, Kunshan, popularly dubbed "Little Taipei," attracts considerable Taiwanese investment, while Wuxi is slated to be the site of a China-South Korea Science and Technology Financial Service Cooperation Zone (Frank Chen 2014; China Daily 2015). These nuances, however, should not obscure what different parts of the region have in common: a central place in China's political economy. Below, I examine the YRD's capital, labor, and state policies (legislation, mass organization work, and enforcement) in turn.

Regional Capital

As noted, both the YRD and PRD attract considerable foreign direct investment. However, the YRD is pulling ahead in this regard. Although Guangdong started out with 33.1 percent of China's FDI in 1990, it decreased its share to 16.8 percent by 2004, while the YRD, which started out at 6.1 percent in 1990 increased its share to 42 percent (Zhao and Zhang 2007, 986).

²⁴ On a brief bus trip to Shuyang, I was struck by how the large, newly tiled rural homes outside of Nanjing gave way to smaller, worn, whitewashed structures as I traveled north.

As noted, Taiwanese investors, in particular, have made a mark in Kunshan. Some of my interviewees argued that SOEs were more important to the YRD's economy than the PRD's. But the emphasis was more on Shanghai than Jiangsu (see for example, Interview 18). The state sector employs roughly the same proportion of workers in Jiangsu (5.8 percent) as in Guangdong (6.6 percent). What may distinguish the YRD is the greater gross industrial output of its SOEs and collectives (17 percent more than the PRD in 2009, the last year for which this data is available, see All China Data Center 2016). More significantly, the YRD is a leader in high-tech, high value-added production. A 2008 report by Cambridge's Institute for Manufacturing, in explaining why the YRD's growth has not come at the expense of the PRD, notes that whereas the "PRD is a production base of downstream, light consumer goods... the YRD is a leading producer of raw materials and intermediate goods. For example, while the PRD produces 70 percent of China's toy exports and 90 percent of its watch exports, the YRD manufactures over 60 percent of the country's integrated circuit boards" (University of Cambridge Institute for Manufacturing 2008, 12). The YRD's Suzhou, Wuxi and Changzhou have "nine national-rank development zones, 16 provincial economic technical development zones and hundreds of suburban industrial districts among them" (J. Liu 2011, 66). Increasingly, the YRD is a model of efficiency. Whereas productivity in the two deltas was roughly the same in the mid-1990s, by 2005, the YRD (understood more broadly to include Shanghai and portions of Zhejiang) was 20 percent more productive than the PRD (OECD 2010, 119). If Guangdong, as I will explain in the next chapter, is trying to move up the value-added ladder, Jiangsu, despite entering the reform era later, is a rung or two ahead. Perhaps as a result, the YRD's employers tend to provide better working conditions. Based on a survey conducted in both deltas, Liu, Yong, and Shu (2011) find that YRD employees enjoy better wages, better work hours, better benefits, less

frequent wage arrears, and lower deductions from their wages for work rule infractions (the sole area where the PRD is better is work injury insurance). When Chinese leaders envision their ideal future economy, they likely have a Jiangsu model in mind.

Regional Labor

Migrants and Locals

As already established, the YRD draws a large number of migrant workers. Jiangsu ranks fourth nationally in its total number of residents with their household registration somewhere other than the townships where they live (China Statistical Datasheet 2014). Nonetheless, migrants make up a smaller percentage of Jiangsu's total workforce (18 percent) than they do of the Guangdong's workforce (34 percent) (Ibid.). In the words of a Lianshui apparel factory manager I interviewed, "A big difference between the YRD and PRD is that most of the workers in the YRD are local. They are simpler than in the PRD.... Workers are older. They go home in the evenings and have a family life. If you can see your family every day, things are more stable.... The factory.... is like a big family. Some employees' children have already begun working here" (Interview 19). Paternalistic language aside, it is likely that the larger proportion of locals in the YRD has the effect of "settling" workplace relations, as the manager suggested. Workers' lives and social reproduction are not divided between the countryside and the city, meaning that they need less in the way of remittances to send home and more in the way of predictable work lives and benefits. They can also draw on local power structures to a greater degree than migrants (Paik 2014). It has been argued that because they are fully reliant on wage labor for subsistence (with no rural fallback) and are surrounded by their own communities, non-migrants

ought to be *more* likely to confront management.²⁵ Yet, this does not seem to be the case in practice. At any rate, Jiangsu’s workforce is relatively “harmonious.”

Comparatively Few Workplace Incidents

Chapter 3 showed that, in quantitative terms, the YRD tends to rank at or somewhat above the national average of annual workplace conflicts. This would still make it an extremely contentious place in, say, the American context.²⁶ But not in China. For the year 2013, my combined *China Strikes* and CLB dataset shows 98 strikes occurring in Jiangsu, compared to 606 in Guangdong. Given that these figures are likely only a small sample of the total number of incidents occurring that year, adjusting them by local population yields exceedingly small figures. Still, the spread between the regions is dramatic: 0.001 strikes per 10,000 people in Jiangsu versus 0.007 in Guangdong, or a full 600 percent more in the latter.²⁷ On a per capita basis, Jiangsu also lags behind neighboring Zhejiang and Shanghai in unrest—and even places like the island of Hainan and northwestern Shaanxi. With regard to formally mediated, arbitrated, and litigated disputes, the gap between the YRD and PRD is narrower, highlighting the fact that what sets the PRD apart from elsewhere is its extra-institutional activism: in 2013, Guangdong had 1.71 workers involved in labor litigation per 10,000 people, compared with 1.33 in Jiangsu or only 28 percent more (dispute figures are from the China Labor Statistical Yearbook 2014; population, the China Statistical Datasheet 2014).

²⁵ This argument is made in different ways by Lee (2007) and by Pun and Smith (2007). The latter highlight the factory dormitory regime into which migrants are frequently placed as a particularly powerful tool of managerial control, isolating them in a way that is not true for locals.

²⁶ In all of the United States, there were only 12 work stoppages involving more than 1,000 workers in the whole year 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016a).

²⁷ Population figures are from the *China Statistical Datasheet 2014*.

Some of my interviewees in the YRD wondered whether their region might rank higher in conflict if provincial authorities did not keep such strict control over information. As one Nanjing-based academic said, “I’m increasingly realizing that there are a lot of things that happen here in the Yangtze River Delta that you just don’t hear about... in general, things are covered up” (Interview 71). A labor lawyer in Guangdong concurred: “It’s not like there aren’t strikes in the YRD. I have connections with officials. They tell me about things. It’s just that incidents are effectively concealed” (Interview 64). However, even if officials in the PRD wished to emulate the YRD’s propaganda apparatus and paper over disputes in their region, it is unlikely that they could successfully do so at this point. Conflict in Guangdong is just too pervasive. Contention in the YRD may indeed be higher than reported, in other words, but unlike the PRD, it is not so high that it has become impossible to hide.²⁸

Regardless of the precise dispute figures, the impression of most of the people I spoke with in the YRD was that the region is indeed relatively calm. For example, the head of a Nanjing state-owned enterprise’s trade union said, “In general, Jiangsu is quite stable. There aren’t as many disputes as elsewhere. Workers here are very reliable” (Interview 27). In the words of a provincial labor bureau official, “From a national perspective, we are pretty peaceful and quiet here” (Interview 113). A taxi driver and former factory employee in Kunshan concurred: “[There are] very few direct, open conflicts here, mostly just people saying bad things behind the boss’ back” (Interview 29). In the words of a young worker I spoke to at a noodle shop in Kunshan, “If conditions aren’t good somewhere, you either bear it or you leave” (Interview 17). A Nanjing-based NGO leader noted more of a willingness among workers to stand up for

²⁸ In addition to greater control over information, the lower numbers in the YRD might reflect more embarrassment about unrest than in Guangdong. If so, this reflects a very different regional culture—something that will be returned to in Chapter 5.

themselves than in the past but said, “Of course, it is still only a minority of workers who pursue rights protection” (Interview 50). There might be good incentives for all these people to downplay contention. But such statements were heard much less frequently during my interviews in Guangdong, even among state representatives.

Institutionally Oriented Activism

Workers in the YRD seem to be institutionally oriented in their activism. A construction worker on a train from Zhenjiang, when asked what he usually did when he experienced workplace abuses, said to me, “I first call the police station. If that doesn’t work, I go to court.... we usually use formal channels” (Interview 3). One person at a Nanjing migrant job center responded to the same question by saying, “People go to the labor bureau” (Interview 21); another at the center replied, “Most bosses are good. If not, you dial 110 [China’s equivalent of dialing 911].... You have them send a labor inspector” (Interview 22). These responses match what a researcher at a government think tank in Nanjing said of YRD workers: “They are aware when something is illegal. But here they won’t strike as much. They might not know exactly who they should contact—for example, they might dial 110 when they should really get in touch with the labor department—but they’ll ask the government for help” (Interview 37). Workers in Guangdong, too, make full use of state-sanctioned forums, as will be explained in the next chapter (and NGOs there help people get in touch with the correct parts of the local bureaucracy). But faith in officials to resolve problems appears to be a good deal stronger in the YRD than further south.

High Trust in Authorities

Protests, when they do occur in the Yangtze River Delta, feature claims that vary little from those raised in the Pearl River Delta. In the *China Strikes* dataset, percentages of demonstrations that feature offensive demands for higher wages and defensive demands for the payment of wage arrears are more or less the same in both deltas (work-related illness, injury, and death mobilizations are an exception: these make up a greater percentage of YRD activism). But a conversation I had with protesting workers in Zhangjiagang, a county-level city under the administration of Suzhou, suggests that even in the midst of contentious collective action, trust in authorities runs remarkably high in the YRD. The workers in question had recently blocked the road to their industrial park in an attempt to recover money owed them when their factory went bankrupt. Standing by the guardhouse of her now empty plant in the rain, one of the workers explained, “We haven’t been paid for four or five months.... Some of us have worked here for five or eight or nine years.” Despite these dismal circumstances, when I asked her if officials had been helpful, she replied, “Yes, they’ve been a big help. They are hunting for the owner who ran away” (Interview 39). When I later approached one of the factory’s remaining managers, he echoed this sentiment: “We’re all ordinary people here. The government is responsible for this problem and we hope it will fix it” (Ibid.). Whether these people really felt such trust in their hearts is, of course, impossible to know. As O’Brien and Li (2006) have shown, rural Chinese practicing “rightful resistance” express loyalty even as they challenge authorities; the same is likely true of labor. And, of course, expressions of trust may reflect fear of the consequences of not making such expressions. But whatever their reasons, it is worth noting that Guangdong workers I interviewed expressed much more open cynicism.

Politically Careful Labor NGOs

The Yangtze River Delta's community of labor NGOs, finally, is relatively small. The list of groups nationwide provided to me by CLB and used in the statistical analysis in the previous chapter listed only five organizations in Jiangsu as of the end of 2013, compared to 35 in Guangdong. YRD-based labor NGOs tend to focus on cultural programming for workers, education for migrant children, and legal advice. Usually, the emphasis is on the first two of these forms of service. In the words of a Suzhou-based activist, "For [our] organization, culture is the main focus but legal advice is given, too, albeit in an inconspicuous (*di diao*) way" (Interview 46). The director of an organization in Nanjing described her organizations' work as "Providing information on the street. Showing movies and accompanying them with information on work safety" (Interview 50). She added, "We have organized plays, where people act out difficulties from migrant workers' lives; [it is a] way for migrants to have a voice and for them to interact with and build bridges to other social groups. We take migrant children to university campuses" (it should be noted that her group also provided legal services and had an elaborate map of hot spots for different issues around the city—although this work was not emphasized as much) (Ibid.). Non-dispute work is not necessarily "easy," and it can be quite meaningful for the people it serves. For example, another Nanjing activist explained how her organization went to considerable effort to build connections between overworked migrant parents and their left at home children, some of whom exhibit serious psychological problems already at a young age (Interview 48). But these sorts of activities present much less of a challenge to authorities than involvement in court cases pressuring employers, let alone strikes and protests.

Preemptive Government

In the face of this moderate level of worker resistance, the Yangtze River Delta state has pursued an approach to industrial governance that is qualitatively distinct from its southern counterpart. Repression and responsiveness are still evident—but in a very different form. Authorities in the YRD leave little to chance. According to a researcher at a government think tank in Nanjing I interviewed, “The government... interferes much more in Jiangsu.... In Guangdong, it’s ‘big society, small government’; in Jiangsu it’s ‘big government, small society’” (Interview 37). A Nanjing-based law professor offered a similar analysis: “Government is more open in the Pearl River Delta, letting more be settled naturally between workers and government.... In the Yangtze River Delta, the government, in contrast, is constantly intervening” (Interview 9). According to an official in Jiangsu’s provincial labor bureau: “You have to take the initiative. Lots of workers won’t act on problems right away. Chinese people will put up with things for a while until they can’t stand it anymore. Then, they will make things really big” (Interview 113). According to an NGO leader in Suzhou, “It’s not that there aren’t disputes here. It’s just that the government tries to mediate everything quickly, so nothing gets taken to court. There’s a lot in people’s hearts here but it never gets to rise to the surface. In Guangdong things explode more” (Interview 76). The activist’s comments raise an intriguing question about Jiangsu’s approach: does micro-management prevent things from “getting really big” or does it drive problems deeper, only for them to “explode” later? Only time will answer. Regardless, if the YRD approach is cheaper than that of the PRD in terms of riot control equipment, it is still quite costly in time and energy.

Constant intervention entails constant monitoring of the region’s industrial zones. The trade union work section of Wuxi’s almanac, for example, reports the release of a “Wuxi Federation of

Trade Unions Emergency Work Plan on Handling Sudden Incidents” and the expansion its network of early warning organizations to 11,435 across the city (Wuxi Yearbook 2011, 103). Yangzhou claims to have established a “green channel” for reporting urgent information, in order to “mediate labor relations contradictions and mass incidents in a timely manner” (Yangzhou Yearbook 2011, 98-99). Suzhou’s union similarly trumpets a “labor relations early warning system and network to discover symptoms in a timely manner... and report to higher level Party committees and unions (Suzhou Yearbook 2010, 158-159). Several YRD yearbooks document special efforts to keep track of “floating populations” (Huai’an Yearbook 2011, Wuxi Yearbook 2011, Huai’an Yearbook 2011). Such activities are also reported in PRD yearbooks, but an academic in Nanjing said that the YRD stands out in its population registration work, in particular. When his research team visited Zhangjiagang, he said, “There were several people we met who were assigned to this and they made regular visits places and kept detailed records. They have organized a landlords’ association to keep track of workers” (Ibid.). The academic observed, “In the PRD, by contrast, no one has any idea of how many workers are there at any given time” (Ibid.). More accurately, in Guangdong, workers are more likely to be housed in dormitories and therefore tracked by companies, not the state (Pun and Smith 2007). But the point remains: the YRD government keeps a close tab on people.

Monitoring schemes like these are not limited to municipal unions or neighborhoods; they penetrate deep inside factories. The public security section of Wuxi’s yearbook highlights police efforts to “enter enterprises and serve the enterprises, help enterprises resolve difficulties” and elsewhere says it makes special guarantees of service (*zhongdian fuwu baozhang*) to enterprises that are large-scale, have a lot of outside employees, produce high profits, and use new technology, etc. (Wuxi Yearbook 2011, 113, 115). Nanjing’s yearbook writes of establishing

police service units (*jingwu fuwu dui*) for especially big construction projects and setting up a communications system for enterprises with difficulties (Nanjing Yearbook 2010, 399). The government think tank researcher cited above explained to me, “Some companies have an office specifically for [reporting conflicts] at the state’s urging.... there are people with this as a permanent job. But maybe they are sent over from the union or the human resources department” (Interview 53). Asked about her company’s response to labor disputes, a human resource manager in Wuxi said, “It depends on the situation. Usually, we will contact them [the government] and ask them how to handle things, will give them a heads-up if someone will be bringing a case to arbitration. They’ll notify us about things that concern our company, too. One person is specially designated by the factory to notify the government immediately about any incidents” (Interview 25). A manager of an apparel factory in Lianshui noted that his guards were trained by the local police and made a part of the district police force, though he hastened to add this was not intended to intimidate workers (Interview 19). Although similar arrangements may exist in the PRD, I never heard of them there. Again, the YRD’s approach is repressive in its own way—but the repression takes a quieter, less obvious form.

Policy Caution

State responsiveness to worker grievances is also less showy in the Yangtze River Delta than in the south. The YRD’s constant intervention paradoxically is accompanied by caution in terms of the labor laws it enacts and the programming of its trade unions. The region is not a center for policy experimentation—and it seems to like things that way. As the provincial labor official I interviewed said, “Our work style is to ‘first, look; second, move slow; and third, only later put something through’ (*yi kan, er man, san cai tongguo*). Governance, we believe, is like crossing a street” (Interview 113). “Looking” here can be understood as “looking both ways”: down

toward labor (and the potential of a given policy for sparking unrest) and up toward Beijing. The YRD tends to pass legislation that complements or fills in gaps in national regulations, with the aim of incrementally crafting a more “complete” array of rules (Interview 113). An example of typical lawmaking in the region is the 2013 Jiangsu Province Labor Contract Regulation, which includes restrictions on labor dispatch and the use of student interns. For instance, it requires that any work carried out by students be related to their majors and forbids schools from arranging work via intermediary organizations (Article 42). The Regulation also has new rules on open-ended contracts, work hours, and work-related illnesses (highlighted in Interview 113). For example, it requires that companies notify workers about their legal qualification for open-ended contracts a month in advance of their second fixed contracts expiring (Article 38). These kinds of measures can make a real difference in the lives of workers. In particular, subcontracting to human resources agencies and recruiting of young people from vocational schools to avoid legal obligations and cut costs have become serious issues over the past decade (Brown and deCant 2013; Zhou 2007). But such rules carry few political risks, as they offer few “political opportunities” for disruptive activism (Tarrow 2011). Workers may bring lawsuits based on new subcontracting or work hour limits, but they do not enjoy any new institutional empowerment to collectively challenge their employers under such rules as they do under legislation like Guangdong’s on strikes and representation in workplace negotiations (more on this in the next chapter).

Caution is not just evident in the YRD’s legislative activity but also in its trade union work. The most common topics featured in the union sections of Jiangsu yearbooks are charitable activities (“sending warmth”), jobs skills competitions, selecting “model workers” for praise, providing

legal aid, and signing collective contracts, especially contracts with Fortune 500 companies.²⁹ A union leader at a state-owned enterprise in Nanjing described her organization's work: "Because [the enterprise] does not have a lot of grievances, the union doesn't do much rights protection work. Instead, it focuses on creating entertainment and health facilities for workers. It has a cultural center with a gym. Workers with family difficulties, such as ones with a family member in the hospital, are helped financially by the union" (Interview 27).³⁰ In its yearbook, Yangzhou claims that 95 percent of "normal" manufacturing enterprises with pre-existing unions signed collective contracts before the close of 2010 (Yangzhou Yearbook 2011, 98). Wuxi reports that 34,468 enterprises had conducted "collective consultation" by the end of 2010, or 95.4 percent of enterprises with unions (Wuxi Yearbook 2011, 103). Changzhou notes that 40,000 enterprises or 80 percent had reached agreements by the end of 2012 (Changzhou Yearbook 2013, 79). As a local academic observed, "Reforms, such as the recent push for collective bargaining agreements, are implemented as orders from above; officials don't want to make mistakes, just want to 'do the job right'" (Interview 9). Jiangsu unions try to be responsive to worker concerns—after the financial crisis, yearbooks noted union efforts relating to layoffs, for instance—but they are not eager to push their work into uncharted territory.

Two exceptions that prove the rule in terms of cautious YRD union programming are the region's use of Staff and Workers Representative Congresses (SWRCs) and its limited trials with sectoral collective bargaining agreements. China introduced SWRCs already in the 1960s but backed them most actively in the 1980s as a vaguely Yugoslavian-style forum for worker input in factory decision-making and as a way to avoid the dreaded "Polish disease," i.e., independent

²⁹ Collective contracts, as noted in Chapter 2, often simply restate the parties' existing legal obligations. With regard to Fortune 500 companies, a campaign has been launched to expand their use in major foreign firms.

³⁰ Unionists at SOEs across China highlight similar efforts, of course—the state sector is not a leader in ACFTU innovation—but the YRD stands out relative to the PRD in its regional embrace of such programming.

trade unionism (Estlund 2013, 3–8; Pringle and Clarke 2011, chap. 2; Zhu and Chan 2005). Traditionally, SWRCs have been limited to the state sector (Estlund 2013; Interview 52). In the late 1990s, these bodies were sometimes effective in challenging corruption during SOE restructuring (Zhu and Chan 2005). There are glimmers of activity in SWRCs today, but they remain weak (Estlund 2013). In Jiangsu, yearbooks nonetheless make frequent mention of them (see, for example, Changzhou Yearbook 2013, 78; Nanjing Yearbook 2010, 375; Nantong Yearbook 2006, 150; Suzhou Yearbook 2010, 158; Wuxi Yearbook 2011, 103; Yangzhou Yearbook 2010, 98). In contrast, SWRCs did not appear in the PRD yearbooks I examined. Until these bodies begin to engage in real democratic oversight, the prevalence of SWRCs in Jiangsu should not be read as a sign of innovation but rather traditionalism.

Sectoral unions and collective bargaining agreements show more promise. As Friedman (2014a, 483) explains, in the Chinese context, sectoral unions “are organizations, typically established at the municipal level, that aim to organize all of the employers in a specific industry within their jurisdiction to either engage in collective negotiation or provide legal and other types of assistance to workers.” Most famous in Zhejiang, where they were used to raise (but also place a ceiling on) wages in the Wenling wool sector, these unions have been pushed by the ACFTU nationally as a means of resolving disputes (E. Friedman 2014a; Mingwei Liu 2010; Pringle 2011). Sectoral unions are clearly more common in Jiangsu than Guangdong (Mingwei Liu, Li, and Kim 2011). Their attraction for policymakers, however, lies in their ability to forge a consensus between employers and the state, not empower workers—in fact, employers’ associations have sometimes provided the initial impetus for their formation, not the ACFTU (Wen 2015). Compared to SWRCs and sectoral unions, Guangdong’s experiments with union elections described in the next chapter, although flawed, come across as quite daring.

Nudging Capital and Labor

I have described the general approach of YRD authorities to workplace disputes as preemptive and as supported by elaborate mechanisms for monitoring industrial zones. But how do authorities actually resolve disputes? What methods of coercion are at the state's disposal? In interviews, the impression repeatedly conveyed to me was one of a government constantly coordinating employers and employees with nudges. Companies are pressured to comply with the law by formal and informal means; striking workers are negotiated with or handed concessions by fiat; and labor advocates are quietly co-opted and / or isolated from conflicts. High-profile showdowns do sometimes occur. For example, in 2010, over 2,000 workers of United Win (China) Technology Ltd Co., a subsidiary of Taiwan's Wintek, clashed with police following the discovery that employees had been poisoned by overexposure to hexane gas (Qian 2010). But such incidents are rare and appear to spring from extreme desperation. More commonly, disputes are quietly settled before they can make a splash.

Pressuring and Incentivizing Companies

Recalcitrant Yangtze River Delta employers face pressures—formal and informal—from the local government. For example, in August 2014, an explosion occurred at an auto parts polishing shop run by the Taiwanese-invested Kunshan Zhongrong in August 2014, killing at least 75 (X. Lin 2014). Afterward, a manager said, “There has been more pressure on Taiwanese firms. The government is using the accident as an opportunity to put pressure on Taiwanese, forcing them to turn over more information on their operations” (Interview 24). One formal shape that such pressures can take is cutting off funding. The union leader of a state-owned enterprise in Nanjing noted, “Some industries... have more problems. For example, the

construction sector still has a lot wage arrears. But the government is doing something about this. If you as a construction firm don't pay your workers' wages, the government will cut off your investment [projects]" (Interview 27). The Jiangsu labor bureau official I interviewed said, "You can make companies who have a history of having wage arrears set aside a certain amount of money as insurance" (Interview 113). Such policies are not uncommon in China. In Shenzhen, for example, certain kinds of firms (such as, again, construction companies), are required to place wages in a special account to ensure payment (NewsGD.com 2006). What is more distinctive is Jiangsu's "harmonious enterprises" program, which is administered by a tripartite commission and certifies as "harmonious" those companies that apply for and pass a rigorous evaluation of their business practices. In the words of the same official:

"We grade each enterprise, focusing on several details: 1) whether they are employing people in a standard manner, including signing contracts, providing social security, etc.; 2) whether payments are made correctly, i.e. whether there are any wage arrears; 3) whether social insurance is paid fully and on time; 4) whether they have signed collective agreements and set up internal mediation systems and communications channels—they should have a special department inside the enterprise to resolve things inside the factory—and finally, 5) whether they are practicing corporate social responsibility in a number of very detailed ways. An enterprise has to score above 85 points on all these aspects combined to be considered a 'harmonious enterprise'" (Ibid.).

Companies can use their "harmonious" status to attract customers and to avoid frequent state inspections, but the designation can be revoked if a company has "experienced a lot of petitioning and a lot of labor disputes" (Ibid.). Other provinces have begun to study the program, as I will detail in Chapter 6. Chongqing, for example, has sent officials to Jiangsu to learn about it (Interview 107). In the PRD, the city of Nanhai reports that 4,814 enterprises were designated "model harmonious enterprises" in 2010, in an apparent direct borrowing from the YRD (Nanhai Yearbook 2011, 166). In Guangzhou, 1,528 enterprises were been declared "harmonious" in

2015 (Tencent 2015). There are many other examples. The program is a rare instance of Jiangsu leading the way on a labor policy—but it is a policy that very much fits with the YRD’s cautious approach. There is little risk that the certification of an enterprise as “harmonious” will itself be a spur to conflict, unlike the establishment, for instance, of new bargaining channels. The program works by quietly coaxing companies to behave.

Not all pressures on firms are so institutionalized. As a labor inspector in Yangzhou said to me, “You can’t rely on the law alone. You have to pay attention to local distinctions, have to rely on traditions, have to use personal connections to work things out” (Interview 54). Sometimes reputational pressures are brought to bear on employers in the YRD. The same inspector told me, “If people know you have wage arrears it will be very hard to develop and you might even go bankrupt” (Ibid.). In some circumstances, the government junks questions of legal responsibility altogether and itself steps in to make things right by employees. According to the Nanjing think tank researcher, “The government might even lend money to make sure things are paid” (Interview 37). The Yangzhou official concurred: “The government will pay companies to keep jobs. This isn’t the case in the PRD.... The YRD will intervene. This is better for the long term. Enterprises here feel a lot of pressure” (Interview 54; a similar statement was made in Interview 51). Contrary to his assertion, there are actually many reported instances of authorities paying off workers in the PRD, too, especially in the early days of the 2008 financial crisis. For example, when the Smart Union toy factory in Dongguan went bankrupt, the local government compensated employees with 24 million RMB in public money (Eimer 2008). But there was much more discussion of the practice in my YRD interviews. And it fits well with other Jiangsu policies. Paying off labor is a politically safer way of handling disputes, at least in the short-term, than allowing them to run their course via protests or litigation.

Negotiating Conflicts with Workers Themselves

If Yangtze River Delta enterprises are prodded and rewarded in an effort to get them to obey the law, striking workers are negotiated with in a pragmatic manner—or handed concessions by fiat. For example, I interviewed a number of residents in the area of a paper factory work stoppage on the outskirts of the city of Zhenjiang in the fall of 2014. Asked about the incident, one person said, “Yes, there was a strike. The government threw itself into it, though. They mediated the issue. In the end, wages were raised” (Interview 1). A taxi driver added, “I drove by there and saw it. There were lots of people.... The issue was that people were not being paid the same amount for the same work.... There were police there to maintain order.... No one was detained. But a few people who were leaders were picked out; these people could then explain their demands. There was about one leader for ten people” (Ibid.). When taxi drivers went on strike in Nanjing, the city government apparently simply handed down a decision on the drivers’ claims after a delay. In the words of a cabbie, “One official just said that they would come back with a response in three months, which they did” (Interview 87). Another said, “No, no negotiations. The government just studied the taxi situation in other places, pulled together different experiences and made a decision. You research labor relations. But the taxi companies don’t consider us to have a labor relationship with them, so there can’t be any talk of worker representatives” (Interview 88). Said yet another, “What would be the point of trying to negotiate? The government itself solved the issue” (Interview 90). The final result of the taxi strike was a cut in rental fees by several hundred RMB (Interviews 91, 92) and a bonus added for trips over 20 kilometers, such as to the airport (Interview 120). Such dispute resolution tactics are not unusual in China. Su and He (2010), for example, write of workers elsewhere using the “street as courtroom” to resolve issues, drawing in officials to mediate on the scene. And

reserving the prerogative to respond to demands on its own terms is common among local governments, especially in taxi strikes (the Chongqing taxi strike of 2008 being a prominent exception; more on this in Chapter 6). But as we will see in the next chapter, Guangdong officials, in contrast, are moving in an increasingly coercive direction, actively forcing strikers back to work and detaining organizers.

Co-opting and Isolating Labor NGOs

Labor NGOs in the Yangtze River Delta, finally, are co-opted or isolated. Increasingly, local authorities are buying the services of these organizations. One group in Nanjing shares its offices with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Interview 50); a Suzhou organization has used space provided by the municipal government to seven or eight other groups in the past (Interviews 46); the Zhangjiagang Ministry of Civil affairs provides space to NGOs, with “cubicles for each group” (Interview 71). In the words of the Nanjing organization’s leader, “Work for [my] organization is slowly getting better. People didn’t fully understand organizations like this at first. Now, the government is supportive” (Interview 50). According to another activist in Nanjing, “If there’s a gap in services, the government puts lots of money there and all the groups flock to that area. For example, there’s been a lot of money recently for helping old people and children” (Interview 48). Although this interviewee was critical of the herd mentality of fellow civil society organizations, she also took a positive lesson from this development: “The government is opening up more to NGOs, changing. In the past, it wouldn’t help an organization like mine” (Ibid.). Importantly, state funding comes with strings attached. Politically sensitive work is discouraged. A Suzhou-based activist / intellectual noted: “The government supports work that helps migrant workers’ children. It’s different with rights protection” (Interview 42). According to a Nanjing academic, engagement “gives the appearance of supporting civil society,

but it also keeps people under tight control” (Interview 71). For the most part, organizations do not stray too far from what is deemed acceptable.

When NGOs cannot be co-opted or the situation is deemed serious enough, YRD authorities shift to isolating civil society groups. A Beijing-based organization specializing in labor litigation that established a branch in Jiangsu found work in PRD especially “sensitive” (Interview 20). Others in the labor NGO world told me that this was an understatement, and that the Beijing organization had had a next to impossible time operating in the YRD, with its staff more or less confined to their offices. When large conflicts crop up, the Jiangsu government moves quickly to seal off activists from workers. This tendency was on full display during the 2014 Kunshan Zhongrong explosion. As authorities used DNA tests to identify the dead, relatives of missing workers protested outside of government offices (X. Lin 2014). Notably absent were NGOs. An academic in Yangzhou explained:

“Jiangsu moved quickly and controlled the situation. There were probably a lot of families who wanted to protect their rights and NGOs like maybe [the Beijing group with a Jiangsu branch] wanted to involve themselves. But the government in Kunshan had the resources to promptly pay the families a relatively reasonable compensation so that things didn’t escalate; this combined with their tight control of the situation kept things from getting more serious. If this happened in the PRD, there might not be the resources to intervene in this way, in part because there are so many incidents” (Interview 53).

A Suzhou-based labor activist echoed this description of the incident. He said he went to the site of the explosion in Kunshan and stood in the crowd. However, he could not get past security: the factory was being guarded too closely. “The victims were separated from any social groups and protected in the hospital,” he added (Interview 46). Such a quiet, surgical approach no longer seems to be possible in Guangdong.

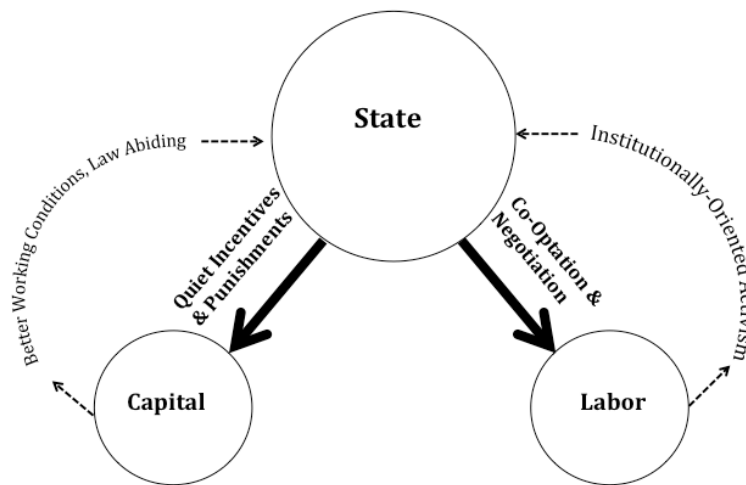
A Stable Field

As a regional field, the Yangtze River Delta is relatively stable. In the sections above, I have examined each of its principal actors in turn: capital, labor, and the state. Their characteristics and interactions provide insights into the dynamics that undergird the region's stability. On the whole, employers provide working conditions that are better than those of the PRD and cooperate more with state monitoring efforts. Workers generally content themselves with engaging in “everyday acts of resistance” (Scott 1985)—badmouthing employers behind their backs—or exercising their “exit” option (Hirschman 1970) by abandoning especially exploitative workplaces for better opportunities. When they do take action, they are more inclined toward institutional solutions (calls to labor inspectors and litigation) or, if they end up taking to the streets, they accompany their mobilization with statements of trust in authorities. Meanwhile, labor NGOs in the YRD limit advocacy to what is politically safe. The regional government, in turn, is moderate in its reactions to unrest. It is not that repression is absent from the YRD—setting up monitoring networks in workplaces and isolating the area's more daring NGOs *is* repressive—but the repression is quieter and qualitatively different from what can be observed in the south. Nor is the Jiangsu government unresponsive. It passes meaningful labor laws and its unions are attentive to workplace problems, if quite orthodox in their responses. But authorities in the YRD do not feel a need to make a splash or take risks with their efforts.

These different characteristics and interactions of the YRD's various actors are clearly complementary. The field is self-reinforcing. For example, the state's preemption of disputes through its eyes and ears in factory zones means that conflicts rarely “explode,” which means that there are fewer emergencies to which the government must respond, which means it is not overloaded and can adopt a preemptive stance to workplace issues. Companies are quietly

brought into better compliance with laws—again, they provide better working conditions than their PRD counterparts—which in turn likely reduces unrest, which reduces the incentive for more public moves against capital. With regard to NGOs, the government’s co-optation of civil society means that organizations are less likely to pursue politically risky programming, which means that harsher methods are not required to keep civil society within bounds. One interviewee observed of an NGO in Suzhou that had been the object of both state pressure and cooptation: “[the organization] used to run a lively library. Now it is quiet. They still do music, but it’s mostly just him [the organization’s leader] playing. Workers have cooled.... The organization goes out less, seems afraid of contacting workers. The group is focusing more on migrants’ children now” (Interview 24). Presumably, local authorities welcomed, if not encouraged the NGO’s transformation. Figure 9 illustrates these dynamics.

Figure 9: The YRD’s Stable Field



Other factors noted in the sections above may also contribute to the region’s stability. For example, the Taiwanese and Korean owners that dominate in parts of Jiangsu could have different relationships with authorities than the Hong Kong bosses that dominate in Guangdong.

Investors from further away may not be as integrated into local politics, making them less confident in resisting labor regulations. The higher number of local workers as a percentage of the workforce in the YRD than the PRD may also be stabilizing—and locals are likely easier monitor. Although not discussed previously here, certain aspects of regional culture were repeatedly raised as important in my interviews. For example, according to a labor inspector in Yangzhou: “Thinking may be more open in the PRD by several years, may have felt more influence from the West, but there is better management in the YRD.... We are behind the PRD economically, but culturally and in terms of our protection of labor, we are stronger” (Interview 54). Isolating any single cause of Jiangsu’s relative harmony is impossible. But this speaks to the fact that the different interlocking parts of the system function comparatively smoothly.

Average Jiangsu

If the YRD is an average case, this suggests that in much of the country, worker-state interactions—and the interactions of workers, the state, and capital—are in rough balance. Workers do not push the envelope with their activism and, while the state still reacts to unrest with repression and responsiveness, its reactions are muted. This is not to say that the YRD does not form a distinct regional field. Its interactions are clearly clustered together and its development trajectory is unique. But it does stand in for a broad “middle” swath of regional fields, each different but each at a stable equilibrium. My dissertation does not examine any other “average” regions in depth. However, brief visits I made to the northeastern city of Tianjin, which has experienced a similar or slightly lower number of strikes per capita over the past decade compared to the YRD, revealed many of the same patterns of governance as Jiangsu.

Tianjin: Another Site of Moderate Labor Conflict

Tianjin authorities, too, seem to prefer to resolve conflicts quietly, nudging the different actors in industrial relations into line. For example, a local labor official there was proud of how, after disputes occurred at a prominent Korean electronics firm, his government had organized meetings with representatives of all the Korean companies in the city, convincing them to improve conditions (Interview 49). After one particular strike got out of hand, an academic said that Tianjin cadres visited the families of each striker, individually pressuring the workers back to work (Interview 74). In a direct parallel to the YRD, the same official quoted above informed me, “Tianjin has a ‘harmonious enterprises’ program. The program started in 2009 and got national-level approval in 2011, as I recall... [We] focus on preventing disputes. But the moment a dispute occurs, we have a system for getting involved” (Group Discussion 49). Preemption and rapid response is the rule.

The union in Tianjin, especially, seems cautious in its activities. At another meeting, the labor bureau official quoted above said: “The union is a very important platform for conversations. It occupies a middle position between capital and management. It does work on the company to bring it over a bit to the workers’ position and it does work on the workers to bring them over to the company’s position. The union can’t be like foreign ones or the country will be finished” (Group Discussion 95). An enterprise-level union leader from a Tianjin joint venture auto manufacturer explained his work in a similar tone:

“Normally, wage consultation or bargaining is the result of struggle. But there is only one union in China. No others are allowed in enterprises. We also take the position of the enterprise and do not just struggle. This is completely different from foreign unions. We can’t only stand with the workers. For two months every year, we represent workers in consultations with management. During the

other ten months, we help the enterprise. This the only way that we can also help workers” (Ibid.).

Said another union head, this one belonging to a state-owned medicine firm:

“From a perspective of harmonious labor relations, we help in three ways. First, every year, we explain to workers the enterprise’s goals, conducting ‘education on new tasks’ and organizing related activities. Second, we practice democratic management. For example, we provide our contact information to everyone. We have a WeChat account and it is quite lively! Third, we ‘send warmth’ to workers, especially around holidays.

Our company needs to deal with those made redundant by market reforms, show sympathy. The union spends a lot of energy on this. We go to people’s homes and show sympathy, explain the company’s policies.

There are other things we do. We have an enterprise newsletter. We make dumplings, bring people together to eat. We recognize brilliant achievements in labor. We do things in a reciprocal manner. If workers make good suggestions to the factory, we give them awards. Workers are really interested in attending our activities!” (Ibid.).

This sort of programming closely mirrors the activities described to me by the Nanjing SOE union leader cited in previous sections. It should be noted that mentions were also made of more substantive programming in my Tianjin union discussions. For example, an interviewee from a train manufacturing firm in Tianjin emphasized how all his union’s cadres came up from the rank and file and described lively Staff and Workers’ Representative Congress meetings (Ibid.). Moreover, some of the cadres I spoke with showed a clear awareness that Chinese industrial relations were changing. For instance, asked where he thought union work was headed, the cadre from the joint venture auto plant cited above said:

“The general direction that the union will develop in is toward more of an emphasis on rights’ protection. Collective consultation, etc., is all about rights protection. Lots of government departments emphasize the importance of the union’s role, such as in protecting work safety. It all has to do with rights protection, protecting workers’ subsistence. The union will have an even bigger role in the future. It will continue its traditional tasks, like ‘sending warmth’ to

workers in need, which are important, but its focus will be more on rights protection” (Ibid.).

However, even if they anticipated change, my Tianjin interviewees were clearly not eager to throw off traditional ways of managing workplaces.

My interactions in Tianjin suggest that Jiangsu’s experience is generalizable to other parts of China. Although the specific characteristics of the actors in “average” regions may vary from place to place—high tech firms in Jiangsu versus heavy industry and shipping in Tianjin—interactions in such fields all serve to perpetuate a relative stability. Workplace contention still exists. And repression and responsiveness are still evident, too: Tianjin’s pressuring individual strikers back to work *is* repressive and even pro forma “collective consultations” show *some* responsiveness. But moderate unrest encourages moderate repression and moderate responsiveness, which may, in turn, encourage moderate unrest. A basic balance is maintained. In the next chapter, I examine the case of the PRD, where unrest is much more intense. In Guangdong, as I will explain, dynamics are also, to a degree, self-reinforcing—but they reinforce a descent into crisis, not equilibrium.

5. Reaction, Experimentation, and Crackdowns in the Pearl River Delta

The previous chapter characterized the Yangtze River Delta as a stable regional field in the broader field of Chinese labor politics. In this chapter, I argue that the Pearl River Delta, in contrast, is a field in the beginning stages of a crisis—not a crisis that promises to unseat the state but one that renders its day-to-day control of industrial relations more tenuous. This argument is not surprising, of course, given the region’s extreme scores on the quantitative indicators of resistance, repression, and responsiveness used in Chapter 2. However, my fieldwork again reveals important dynamics not captured by my previous, statistical analysis. Capital in the PRD tends to be concentrated in light manufacturing, and employers offer worse working conditions than those in the YRD. Guangdong labor, meanwhile, is composed of a higher proportion of migrant workers than its Jiangsu counterpart. Strikes, protests, and riots in the PRD are frequent, and anecdotal evidence suggests that incidents are also increasingly large scale and long lasting. Workers are moving beyond bare legal minimums in their demands and expressing cynicism regarding authorities. Labor NGOs in the region, meanwhile, focus on providing legal aid to workers—not the cultural and educational programming of the YRD—and are beginning to play an open role in strikes and protests. The state, in turn, not only reacts to challenges with *more* repression and responsiveness, but also evinces a qualitatively different approach to governance from that seen in the YRD. Guangdong authorities are reactive, letting conflicts run their course unless they threaten to spiral out of control. But the government is not disengaged. It has passed a number of pioneering labor laws regarding strikes and worker representation, and municipal trade unions in the region have experimented with things like direct elections of enterprise-level trade union chairs. Capital and labor are not quietly nudged

into line, as in the YRD. Instead, authorities are actively pushing out abusive employers, and after briefly trying to co-opt NGOs in the manner of the YRD, have directed a brutal crackdown against labor civil society. Several NGO leaders have been arrested. Ordinary strikers, too, are increasingly forced back to work or detained during especially high-profile showdowns. Table 6 summarizes these dynamics.

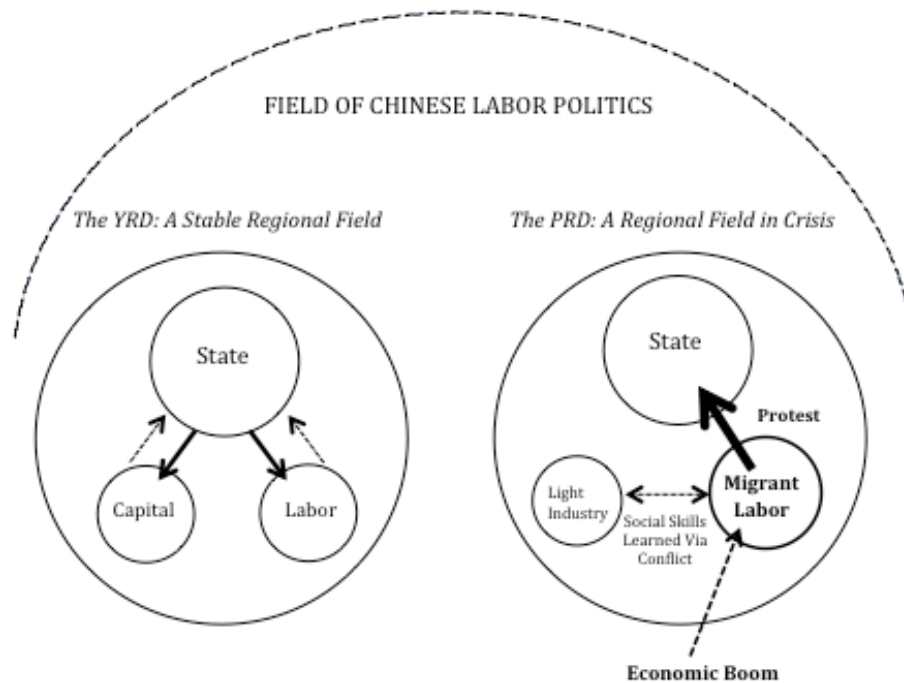
Table 6: Characteristics of the PRD

GROUP	SUB-GROUP	CHARACTERISTICS
CAPITAL	Composition	Foreign, especially from Hong Kong
	Other characteristics	Light manufacturing, mostly low value-added, worse working conditions & worse labor law compliance
LABOR	Composition	Extremely large number of migrants
	Activism by workers themselves	Demands going beyond the letter of the law, low trust in authorities
	Activism by labor NGOs	Politically risky programming
STATE	General approach	Reaction
	Legislation	Experimental, moving well ahead of national legislation
	Mass organizations	Reforming in novel ways, although reforms are still thin
	Coercive arm	Crackdowns – pushing out abusive employers, forcing striking workers back to work, clamping down hard on labor NGOs

Relationships between workers, capital, and the state in the PRD, as in the YRD, are clearly self-reinforcing to some degree. Yet, whereas the YRD’s various feedback loops serve to maintain a relatively harmonious equilibrium, the PRD’s push it toward crisis. A chain of interactions can be tentatively traced. First, Guangdong’s uniquely sustained economic boom is likely empowering for workers. For reasons already noted, migrants may be more likely to challenge their bosses and authorities. The labor-intensity and abusiveness of the region’s light

manufacturers may provide workers with extra leverage and increase their grievances, respectively. A culture of reformism could incline officials toward certain reactions to problems. Important as all these factors may be, however, I argue that the key links in the chain are the ways in which, through their struggles, workers and their NGO allies are gaining the “social skills” of organizing—and the increasingly powerful protests they then launch. The protests are what directly contribute to more forceful policies, whether of a conciliatory or coercive sort. Of course, alternately, more forceful policies could be the driver of changes in protests. Far-reaching pro-worker labor laws, for example, may signal to labor that there is more space for activism than it once believed. However, I note that in interview after interview, people explained things like trade union elections as a response to popular pressure, not the reverse. Therefore, as in my statistical analysis, I posit that unrest exercises an impact on governance above and beyond any impact of governance on unrest. Figure 10 illustrates this chain of interactions in simplified form, alongside the dynamics previously documented in the YRD. If the YRD case and observations from Tianjin demonstrate how, in much of China, more traditional approaches to ruling workplaces can be maintained when officials experience only average pressure, then the PRD case shows how intensifying pressure pushes authorities into uncharted terrain.

Figure 10: The PRD's Field in Crisis



The Workshop of the World

Like the Yangtze River Delta, Guangdong's Pearl River Delta has a long history as a center for trade. With the Nanling Mountains hindering the region's land access to northern China, the PRD was oriented toward the ocean already in Imperial times (Vogel 1971, 13). In the Qing Dynasty, all foreign commerce was initially restricted by law to Guangzhou (Canton), but following the first Opium War in 1842, the city was made one of several "treaty ports" where foreigners enjoyed extraterritoriality. Cantonese, meanwhile, made up half of all the Chinese who emigrated abroad (Ibid., 20). Many early reformers and revolutionaries were from Guangdong, including Sun Yatsen, Liang Qichao, and Kang Youwei. For two brief moments, from 1925 to 1927 and again for several months in 1949, Guangzhou was the capital of the

Nationalist government. Worker organizing in early twentieth century Guangzhou was extensive. In 1927, the Nationalists suppressed a Communist-organized uprising there—the “Canton Commune”—at a cost of thousands of lives. Cultural Revolution violence was intense in the PRD and, as in the YRD, it persisted late (Vogel 1971, chap. 8; Yan 2015). For much of Mao Zedong’s rule, Guangdong lapsed into underdevelopment, but with Deng Xiaoping’s Reform and Opening, the PRD became *the* center for the country’s market experiments, with labor protections loosened and investment flowing in from Hong Kong and further abroad (Howell 1993, chap. 6). J. Friedman (2005, 28) writes, “For a decade or two, the region was China’s Wild West, a case of ‘primitive accumulation.’” When economic policy briefly took a statist turn following the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, Deng traveled to the PRD city of Shenzhen on his famous “Southern Tour,” reviving reforms (a statue of Deng is now located in the city’s Lianhuashan Park). Shenzhen itself is almost wholly a product of the post-socialist era. Into the early 1980s, what is now the city was only a collection of farms and fishing villages; today, it is the residence of more than 15 million people. Visitors traveling through the PRD are treated to a seemingly endless sea of tiled factories, hastily assembled worker housing, and dusty roads, with ragged farms tucked into the small slices of remaining land. As with the “YRD” and “Jiangsu,” I use the words “Guangdong” and “the PRD” interchangeably. In fact, Guangdong Province also contains poorer, inland regions. And the PRD itself is economically divided, “both between the east and the west and between the inner and outer circles,” with the east and inner areas (demarcated by the Beijing-Kowloon Railway line) more developed (B. Yang and Jin 2011, 81–82). However, the PRD is, for all that, remarkably cohesive—indeed, the “most economically agglomerated region in China”—and it dominates Guangdong to an even greater degree than the YRD does Jiangsu. In 2013, a full 79.1 percent of Guangdong’s GDP

and 95.4 percent of its exports were from the PRD (HKTDC 2015). When observers refer to China as the “workshop of the world,” they usually have both the PRD and Guangdong in mind.

Regional Capital

The PRD is a center for foreign direct investment and exports. Early investment in Guangdong came from neighboring Hong Kong. The Federation of Hong Kong Industries, the Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce in China-Guangdong, and other, similar trade groups remain powerful forces in the region. There is no equally influential business lobby in the YRD.³¹ But the PRD is at the center of a more complex web of relationships. Its three initial special economic zones each targeted investment from a different part of the Chinese diaspora: Shenzhen targeted Hong Kong; Zhuhai targeted Macau; and Shantou targeted members of the Chaozhou ethnic minority residing in Southeast Asia (Naughton 2007, 27–28). Domestically, the PRD is linked with a broader “Pan-PRD” of nine provinces and two “autonomous regions” (J. Liu 2011). As noted in the previous chapter, the PRD’s strength has traditionally been in light manufacturing, including of toys, electronics, clothing, lighting, jewelry, and furniture. Yang and Jin (2011, 84) write of the region: “Most of the industries use the ‘three processing and one compensation’ model and are made up of small-scale enterprises concentrating on the processing phase that is dependent on imported resources. PRD enterprises are labor-intensive, have close links with other industries, and are defined by low-level technology and machinery.” Xianming Chen (2007, 193) notes that the region’s factories “rely on suppressed low wages and razor-thin profit margins but also lack local integration and innovation.” Beginning with foreign and domestic

³¹ There are various possible reasons for this. The stability of the YRD may make it less necessary for enterprises there to band together. Alternately, businesses in the north may enjoy more informal access to officials. The main reason that Guangdong has such a powerful lobby, though, is likely that many of the businesspeople are from “next door.”

sweatshop exposés in the 1990s, the PRD has been synonymous with poor working conditions—forced labor, corporal punishment of workers, factory fires, etc. (see A. Chan 2001). However, Guangdong has striven to upgrade its industries. Automobile production has picked up over the past decade, as has Internet commerce (HKTDC 2015). By connecting its companies with research and development conducted in Hong Kong and local universities, the PRD has tried to leapfrog in “strategic emerging industries” like LED manufacturing (Butollo 2015). Still, as noted in the previous chapter, even as it is ahead of the YRD in GDP terms, the PRD lags behind its northern competitor in value-added production.

Regional Labor

Migrant Worker-Dominated

Chapter 2 cited statistics showing migrants dominate the PRD to a greater degree than the YRD. But numbers alone cannot convey the degree to which Guangdong has become a microcosm of China’s diverse culture. In much of the delta, outside of the older neighborhoods of Guangzhou, the native dialect of Cantonese is rarely spoken and Cantonese restaurants can be hard to find. The region’s factory zones are dotted with “urban villages” (*chengzhongcun*), which are home to groupings of people from particular places—a Sichuan village here, a Hunan village there. Underground native place associations protect their members, with violence if necessary (C. K. Chan 2010, chap. 3). Factories recruit through hometown ties (C. K. Chan 2010; Lee 1998). Migrant workers are able to return to the countryside in hard times and, some argue, this fallback option undermines their willingness to fight for better conditions in their current workplaces (Lee 2007, chap. 6). But migrants’ flexibility cuts both ways. According to a manager with a Dongguan shoe factory that experienced a massive strike in 2014, “Guangdong has a high

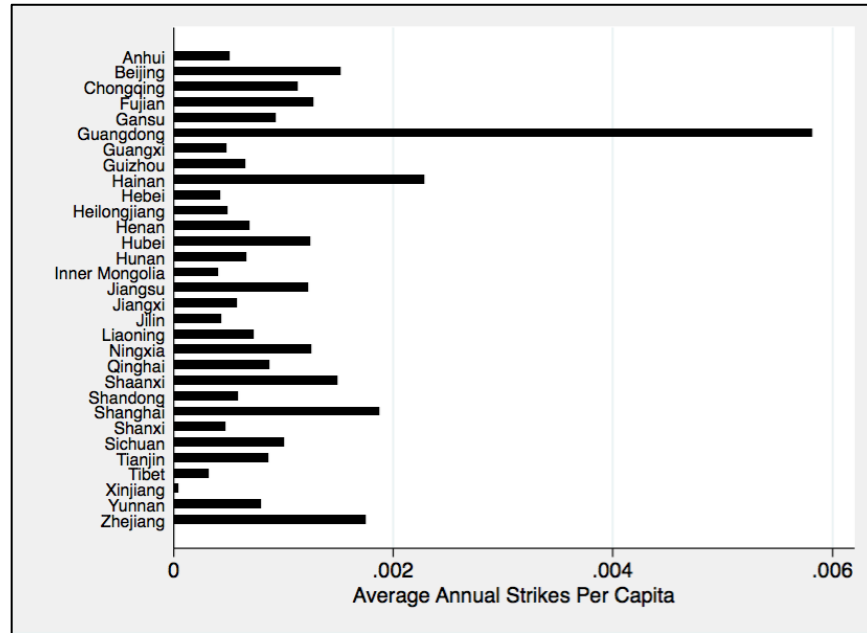
number of migrants. They have nothing to lose by creating havoc, asking for more.... Migrants group together” (Interview 36). This brings to mind Kerr and Siegel’s (1954) argument that isolation encourages militancy. Becker (2014) argues, though, that migrants are most effective in their activism when they reach outside their insular networks and take advantage of “weak ties.” Regardless, Guangdong is distinctly unharmonious.

Protests That Are Frequent, Large, and Long-Lasting

The PRD leads the country in strikes, protests, and riots. Figure 11 shows the average number of contentious incidents per province per year between 2004 and 2013, weighted by annual provincial population, as captured by the *China Strikes* dataset. Guangdong has nearly three times the number of incidents per capita as the next most contentious province (interestingly, Hainan). Not enough information is available for an accurate accounting of changes in the size and duration of workplace clashes over time. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the PRD’s conflicts are not only more frequent than in the past, but also larger scale and longer lasting. In an interview, one Shenzhen-based labor NGO staffer commented to me, “It used to be just small conflicts, but they have expanded to include big factories” (Interview 63). An example of the scaling up he described is the 2014 Dongguan shoe factory strike mentioned in the introduction, which involved upwards of 40,000 protesters, making it the largest work stoppage in the history of the People’s Republic (this strike will be explored in more depth at several points below). According to another activist in the PRD: “Strikes used to just last a couple days at most; now they will last a week or two” (Interview 78). I received no such reports in the YRD. In their study of strikes in France from the 1830s through the 1960s, Shorter and Tilly (1971) find that “small but long” strikes have given way to “short but large” strikes, a change they attribute to the growth of national union federations and the politicization of French

workers. In contrast, Guangdong labor activism is expanding along *all* dimensions—and without the support of unions, national or otherwise.

Figure 11: Strikes, Protests, and Riots Per Capita



Source: China Strikes, China Statistical Yearbooks.

Moving Beyond Legal Institutions and Legal Claims

Pearl River Delta workers advanced their claims beyond the confines of what they are legally due. In this regard, they are the leading edge of a national trend (Elfstrom and Kuruvilla 2014). As noted in the previous chapter, the percentages of protests featuring demands for “higher wages” versus demands for wage arrears are roughly the same in the PRD and YRD. But the atmosphere in the PRD is palpably different—especially compared to the region’s own past. Scholarship from the late-1990s and early 2000s portrayed the migrants flocking to Guangdong as cautiously rights-oriented in their demands (see especially Lee 2007). But during my

fieldwork, interviewee after interviewee attested to their claims having changed. As a junior cadre with the Shenzhen Federation of Trade Unions said to me in the spring of 2015, “Increasingly, workers’ demands are not limited to the law” (Interview 69). And in the words of one of the labor NGO leaders quoted above, “Workers know... that litigation is not enough.... Workers are acting collectively to get more than the law by itself provides” (Interview 78).

What, specifically, do workers now want? According to a Guangdong labor lawyer, “Workers are demanding a) higher wages (the cost of living is rising); b) more respect; and c) organizations” (Interview 64). The last of these demands—for organizations of workers’ own or more representative branches of the state union federation—was a key plea of the 2010 Nanhai Honda strike. Seven other PRD conflicts in the *China Strikes* dataset feature similar claims, including not only factories that were a part of the Nanhai Honda-inspired strike wave, but also a work stoppage by Uniden Electronics workers already in 2005, a strike by Yantian Port workers in 2007, one by TDI Power workers in 2011, by Ohm Electronics workers in 2012, and the 2014 Dongguan shoe factory strike. No such claims can be found from the YRD. In terms of Stearns’ (1974, 24) categorization of strike causes, the new claims being raised in the PRD belong to the most sophisticated level: “genuinely offensive wage strikes, the often related demands for reduction of hours, and on occasion union and solidarity issues.”³² Silver (2003, 106) describes such activism as “Marx-type unrest.” Given that dominant ideologies regarding management prerogatives often prevent workers around the world from articulating their true strike demands (Hyman 1989, chaps. 4–5), this breakthrough by Guangdong workers is no small feat.

³² Knowles (1952) introduces a similar typology but without as clear of a hierarchy. Tilly (1976) likewise contrasts “proactive” claims for higher wages with “reactive” and “competitive” claims (he originally presented these in teleological terms but later acknowledged that competitive and reactive protest do not disappear with the advance of proactive claims, see, for example, Tilly 1995).

Changing Again?

Of course, nothing is set in stone. With the economy beginning to slow, people could return to making defensive claims in the future. I observed some evidence of this already happening during my fieldwork. For example, people I interviewed outside of an electronics factory in Shenzhen who had recently been on strike said, “The strike was over overtime. We used to put in seven days a week at the factory and earned over 5,000 RMB, because of the double pay on weekends. But now the factory is giving everyone two days off per week, so, without overtime pay, we are just making 3,000 RMB. We could stand 4,000 RMB, but 3,000 is just too little. Many of the people at this factory are parents with kids. We are not afraid of working hard (*bu pa xinku*)” (Interview 106). At another Shenzhen electronics manufacturer where employees had blocked the entrance to their plant, the manager of a neighboring cafeteria said, “The protesters were cleaning workers, I believe. They were really deserving of pity: they hadn’t been paid for three or four months. And when they wanted more work, the boss kept saying to just come back another day. Some threatened to jump from a building” (Interview 105). An employee at a handbag factory in Zhongshan where workers had been on strike for almost a month complained, “The factory kept reducing the hours of the older workers, cutting their overtime, sometimes bringing them down to just 22 hours a week or so. These people used to earn about 3,500 RMB a month. Now, they are just bringing in 1,500 or 2,000-some RMB” (Interview 60). However, as the industrial actions in each of these instances demonstrate, labor is unlikely to adopt less aggressive tactics. Instead, Guangdong workers’ organizing skills, honed via repeated conflicts, will probably simply be put to the service of new demands.

Low Trust in Authorities

In my interviews with Pearl River Delta employees, I picked up little of the trust for the state I had felt from their counterparts in Jiangsu. For example, in Shenzhen and Dongguan, I held a series of group interviews with plaintiffs in industrial illness and injury lawsuits. During one of these interviews, a worker complained, “If local governments really practiced good oversight, there wouldn’t be illnesses like mine. But the officials just come around the factory near the end of the year, basically just to collect money from the company. You can ask any worker! Every factory is like this” (Group Interview 96). Another injured worker said of his experience with bringing a case to the local offices of the labor bureau, “The Labor Station stood with the company, not workers like me, despite their rhetoric. One wonders: are their parents actually devils? They just sent us elsewhere” (Group Interview 97). Said another: “Only if someone dies does the government do anything, start to pay attention” (Ibid.). And yet another: “They [officials] are just delaying, delaying. The main problem is the government is not doing its duty.” In the words of a Shenzhen activist, “Workers’ consciousness is changing. They used to trust in the government and they would put a lot of energy into legal cases. Now, that trust has been lost. I met a worker once who was crying—not because he hadn’t succeeded in getting what he wanted but because he was so disappointed in the government, in how it hadn’t matched up to his idea of it” (Interview 79). Thompson (1966) argues that the relationship between workers and capitalists is not always the most important source of identity formation, i.e., of the emergence of a “class for itself,” not just “in itself.” Political moments—clashes with the state—can be equally influential (see also Tarrow 2013, chap. 3).³³ The distrust toward authorities felt

³³ In the case of the English working class that Thompson analyzed, this clash centered on the state’s expansion of suffrage to the middle but not working class with the Reform Bill of 1832 and the government’s subsequent repression of the Chartist movement (Thompson 1966, 807-832).

workers in the PRD may thus be galvanizing in the long-term.

From workers' own descriptions of their interactions with officials, it seems that their cynicism is already translating into rougher encounters with officialdom. One of the injured workers I interviewed described his argument with a labor bureau representative: "I cursed out the local government. I said: 'If you always have to sue to get anything, what use are you for? There's no implementation of laws!' Of course, I didn't curse at the higher levels. If your attitude is good, I won't quarrel with you. But with that local official, the more we argued, the angrier we got" (Group Interview 98). Another from another plant said, "We blocked the entrance to our factory. Four government departments visited the factory. Not *one* told the factory they should compensate us ill workers. So, we blocked the local government office's entryway. *Then*, the Labor Bureau called the factory and put some pressure on them, so they paid a bit" (Group Interview 96). Again, these quotations contrast starkly with the expressions of gratefulness to authorities made by the workers' counterparts in the YRD.

Cynicism also means reaching beyond government bureaucracies for help. A manager with a Shanghai-based company that had experienced a strike in Shenzhen showed me an internal PowerPoint analysis of the incident that read, "Employees did not trust [the company], the union or the government.... Workers engaged with external bodies, ex-employees and the media" (Interview 11). This corporate analysis is echoed by academic studies of numerous strikes in which PRD workers have reached out to sympathetic journalists, in particular (e.g., Becker 2014; Leung 2015). Trying to rope other actors into a group's framing of an issue is a classic means of growing a struggle (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tarrow 2011). In the context of Chinese environmental activism, Mertha (2008, 23) finds that for "a victory to be decisive," it is necessary, among other things, to expand "the sphere of political conflict through the

mobilization of new groups into the policy process.” Guangdong workers (who, it should be noted, have an especially liberal local media environment, with pioneering papers like *Southern Metropolis Daily*) appear to be learning this lesson. The importance of building coalitions will be explored in greater detail in the dissertation’s concluding Chapter 7.

Labor NGOs with Politically Risky Programming

Pearl River Delta labor NGOs are numerous. On the list of organizations nationwide provided to me by CLB, there were 35 from the PRD or 40.6 percent of the total. Like their YRD counterparts, NGOs in the PRD also offer cultural and educational services to workers. But PRD groups have always focused more on providing advice and training for winning legal disputes—programming that, as discussed in the previous chapter, lies at the extreme of what YRD organizations feel comfortable carrying out. Moreover, from their inception in the late 1990s, Guangdong NGOs have quietly been involved in strikes and protests, as well as petition efforts around labor legislation. And they hold seminars on the experiences of labor movements in other countries, like the United States and South Korea. Most academic studies of these organizations have focused on their more individually-oriented, institutional activities (e.g., Franceschini 2014; Gleiss 2014; Halegua 2008; Hsu 2012; Lee and Shen 2011), but the groups’ hidden, more collective action-oriented side has begun to receive overdue attention (Becker 2014, chap. 8; Fu 2012, 2016; Leung 2015). Fu (2012, 44), for example, documents organizations providing advice to workers on “verbal threats, sit-ins, staging a suicide performance, etc.”—programming that is certain to make the state uncomfortable.

In recent years, the groups themselves become more open about this politically riskier aspect of their work. Some have put themselves forward as representatives of workers in informal

collective bargaining during high-profile disputes. Others have stayed in the background, helping draw up lists of demands. For example, during the 2014 Dongguan shoe factory strike, an NGO used a series of accounts on the QQ social media platform to compile complaints from the factory's workers and then post them online in the form of an open letter, urging the formation of a committee that could present those complaints to management (Group Discussion 83). Another group assisted protesting workers at the Lide shoe factory in electing representatives to negotiate with management over the handling of social security arrears (Han 2016). The same organization helped with bargaining following strikes by workers at the Lianshen Metal and Plastics Moulding Factory, the Hengbao Jewelry Factory, the Guangzhou University town, and elsewhere (Ibid.). When a draft Guangdong law on NGOs included language barring funding from overseas, several organizations together met with the Ministry of Civil Affairs and pressed for a change; the language was ultimately dropped. This sort of activism is unheard of in Jiangsu.

Increasingly, PRD activists, like workers themselves, are expressing reservations about simply addressing problems within the framework of the law. In an interview with me, the leader of one organization aligned himself with workers' wishes in this regard:

“Only if workers take action will there be change. It is no longer a question of a law resolving things. The laws are too full of loopholes. Workers are making demands without regard to whether they are ‘reasonable’ or legal. For example, many protests are over changes to companies’ names [i.e., corporate reorganizations]. Workers want their contracts bought out in these cases. But actually, this is not a legal issue; companies *can* change their names if they want. So, the solution to workers’ demands must come from outside the law.

If you only rely on laws, you can't protect your most basic rights. These can only be protected through collective action and collective bargaining. The younger generation of workers understands this. They see the shortcomings with the previous generation's purely legal activism. These young people regard bringing

a case to court too much trouble. Given the current labor shortage, they can always find jobs elsewhere” (Interview 79).

In contrast, an activist in Jiangsu’s Suzhou I interviewed thought such activism was hopeless: “Down south, organizations are all focusing on collective bargaining. But what if a factory moves, like Beverly Silver describes? Capital is always fluid, moving. Bargaining can only do something short-term” (Interview 76). Despite the activist’s left-leaning rhetoric and reference to Silver’s research (which has been translated into Chinese), his criticism may have been a cover for organizational caution: he later revealingly added, “We don’t pick fights with the government” (Ibid.). Guangdong organizations do not intentionally “pick fights” with authorities either—but they operate up to and sometimes over the line of what is politically acceptable. Jiangsu groups do not.

Reactive Government

If the YRD approach to labor disputes is preemptive, the PRD’s approach is reactive. Not every conflict is seen as requiring an immediate response. When I asked a leading official in the Shenzhen Federation of Trade Unions if labor unrest had come to be treated as routine in the PRD, he replied in the affirmative: “It used to be that a strike was a big deal for the government. The moment something occurred, they would send a lot of police. Now strikes are indeed normal” (Interview 101). In fact, the state is sometimes remarkably slow to respond to industrial conflicts. For example, a manager with a Taiwanese company that experienced a massive shoe strike in Dongguan in 2014 said:

“When the strike started, the company wanted to get [guidance] directly from the provincial government. But the provincial government was not at all visible. Their big delay caused a lot of problems.... The company learned a lesson from the strike. Now they will communicate more with the central government. The

company needs a consistent message and a consistent decision-maker” (Interview 36).

A researcher in Beijing who visited Dongguan following the strike backed up the manager’s account: “At first, the Dongguan authorities didn’t think it [the protest] was a big deal” (Interview 23). An NGO involved in the case concurred: “It is strange how tolerant the police were at first” (Interview 78). The PRD is no less concerned than the YRD about social stability. But in the words of the Shenzhen union leader cited above: “The government can’t influence / direct everything here” (Interview 101). The region’s policy is therefore best understood as a means of saving resources for what the state deems the most serious problems.

Policy Experimentation

The Pearl River Delta’s relatively hands-off approach to disputes should not be understood as disengagement on labor issues. On the contrary, where the YRD exercises policy caution, the PRD is a center for labor law experimentation. In 2008, when China’s national Labor Contract Law went into effect, the city of Shenzhen enacted a yet more ambitious piece of legislation. Its Regulations on the Growth and Development of Harmonious Labor Relations in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone mandated a day off per week for all employees, limited the fines and deductions employers could levy from employees for various infractions, and set a new base rate for overtime pay. Such tweaks would not be out of place in YRD legislation, but other items went much further than anything contemplated in Jiangsu. Most significantly, Article 52 (Article 47 in the draft regulation) specified that in the event of a work stoppage, unions should represent workers in “negotiations” (*tanpan*, not the more common term “consultations” or *xieshang*). This contrasted sharply with Article 27 of the 2001 national Trade Union Law, which ordered unions to “assist the enterprise or institution in properly dealing with the matter so as to help

restore the normal order of production and other work as soon as possible.” At the time of its passage, some observers interpreted the Shenzhen law as “one step away from the right to strike” (e.g., China Labour Bulletin 2008). Another provision in the law (Article 58) allowed for fee shifting in employment disputes, i.e., requiring employers to cover employees’ legal costs if the employers lost cases. In 2014, Guangdong finalized Provincial Regulations on Collective Contract of Enterprises. These contained new rules on the selection of worker-representatives for bargaining, outlawed retaliation against such representatives, and punished intentional delaying of negotiations by enterprises. A potentially more far-reaching piece of legislation, the Guangdong Regulations on the Democratic Management of Enterprises, which would have theoretically mandated the involvement of workers in core company business decisions, died under sustained lobbying by Hong Kong employer groups in 2010 (see, for example, Garver 2010). Although frequently watered-down or blocked, legislative initiatives in the PRD clearly outstrip their YRD counterparts in daring.

Legislative dynamism in the Pearl River Delta has been paired with a more engaged role for the state-controlled union federation. PRD yearbooks attest to this. They describe local branches of the federation performing the same welfare functions and meeting the same centrally mandated targets as their YRD counterparts. But they also note experiments with enterprise-level union direct elections. For example, Foshan’s almanac reports that 157 basic-level unions held such elections in 2011, with an aim to “raising union chairs’ sense of responsibility and sense of mission, advancing union organizations’ mass character, democratization and legality” (Foshan Yearbook 2012, 98-99). In the yearbook sections allotted to them, PRD unions also delve into more specifics with regard to the sectors and social groups that are the targets of their union organizing and collective bargaining efforts than do their Yangtze River Delta counterparts. For

example, the Shantou and Zhongshan unions both highlight organizing directed workers in labor dispatch companies (Shantou Yearbook 2013, 218; Zhongshan Yearbook 2013, 132). Dongguan notes experiments in collective consultation initiated in the Humen textile industry and the Wanjiang tea industry (Dongguan Yearbook 2012, 137). The almanac of Guangzhou notes its municipal union's success in raising the earnings of sanitation workers 10 percent above the minimum wage and the ways in which the union has looked after this group's illnesses and family financial difficulties (Guangzhou Yearbook 2013, 109). Many of these programs are likely window-dressing. Guangzhou, for instance, has been the site of a series of large strikes by garbage collectors and street cleaners, so it is not surprising that the city wishes to demonstrate progress (however small) towards resolving their grievances. But YRD unions, in contrast, rarely feel it necessary to even window-dress in this manner.

Particular cities are at the forefront of Pearl River Delta union efforts. In 2009, I attended a presentation in Guangzhou on efforts to bring construction workers and other especially vulnerable groups under the municipal union's umbrella. Then, in 2010, the Guangdong provincial union organized a pioneering election for a new enterprise union chair at the Nanhai Honda plant in Guangzhou's neighbor, Foshan, which was at the center of the auto factory strike wave that year. Already in 2007, the Shenzhen Federation of Trade Unions (SZFTU) responded to a strike in the Yantian port by engaging in serious collective bargaining on behalf of the strikers (for a discussion, see Pringle 2011, chap. 3). Now, the union is said to be sending cadres to "live with workers, eat with them in their cafeterias, and work alongside them for a month" (Interview 41). In contrast to the staid career officials who often end up in union positions elsewhere, the SZFTU is drawing in idealistic young people as staffers (Interview 68). Starting with relatively "easy" areas of the city with big, profitable, and stable firms, the union is

organizing elections in thousands of enterprises and trying to reinvigorate district-level union organizations (Interview 69). The campaign is quite comprehensive, covering issues like the fees that sustain local unions. A Beijing-based researcher observed, “Normally enterprise-level unions get 60 percent of union fees and the other 40 percent goes to the higher level unions,” but Shenzhen “has raised the enterprise-level unions’ cut to 80 percent!” (Interview 102). According to a leader in the Shenzhen union, “The workers have been taught how to express their demands. They often say, ‘I want a higher wage.’ OK, but which part of your wage do you want to raise? Your hourly rate or a year-end bonus? And what are you willing to give up for this raise? We are making the whole process more professional” (Interview 101). These efforts, the same leader said, have drawn some corporate pushback. According to him, “We organized an election recently and the capital side closely observed things. The company put pressure on people who were going to take part in the union and fired the most important person in the process or, rather, pushed him to resign of his own accord” (Ibid.). If the anger of bosses is strong as this anecdote suggests, the union’s programs have some teeth.

The depth of the labor legislation and union reforms enacted in the PRD should not be overstated, of course. Speaking at a conference in Beijing, the former leader of the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Unions described the Regulations as an ugly, “late born baby,” highlighting a loophole in the law regarding retaliation against workers, as well as the way the law expanded the role of the police in industrial relations (Interview 6). After the historic elections at the Nanhai Honda plant, C. K-C. Chan and Hui (2013, 13) write, “By manipulating candidatedship and isolating the active workers’ representatives, who had close contact with civil society organizations during the strike, the GDFTU [Guangdong Federation of Trade Unions] and company management succeeded in getting most of the newly elected enterprise trade union officials drawn from the

managerial or supervisory levels.” Guangzhou’s previous union head, who reached out eagerly to international labor activists and was a vocal critic of union bureaucratism was replaced upon his retirement by someone who, by most accounts... is a bureaucrat. When interviewed by me, the retired leader said, “The union offices are over there. I don’t go back much, though. Things have tightened and become more bureaucratic. We’ll see if things are different in a couple years.” A 2013 undercover investigation by a group of university students found few workers knew their enterprise even had a union, including at factories that had been singled out as models by Shenzhen’s union federation (Rosenman 2013). A young union staffer said to me:

“Our best unions can really bargain over wages and benefits. They are quite good at this now. But workers don’t pay any attention to the elections. Often, they just vote for whichever person they know. In fact, the unions that do the best job are the least likely to have the base know about their work (*zuode yuehaode gonghui, jiceng yue buzhidao*). We hold democratic elections for representatives from every production line to be part of negotiations. But the workers still do not care” (Interview 70).

I asked the same staffer if workers simply disliked the union. He responded: “No. Eighty percent of workers, I think, have *no* sense of what the union does. It’s not that they have bad feelings toward the union; they just don’t know anything about it. To dislike something, you have to have some understanding” (Ibid.). Indeed, in many ways, as Friedman (2014b) argues, if Guangdong represents the leading edge of trade union reform in China, this is a sad commentary on the reform effort more generally. Yet, it bears pointing out that, imperfect as they are, the initiatives undertaken in Shenzhen and Guangzhou would be inconceivable in the YRD.

Cracking Down on Capital and Labor

If the general approach of Yangtze River Delta authorities is to constantly intervene and coordinate, nudging with quiet punishments and rewards for companies, while co-opting or

nipping civil society in the bud, then the hands-off Pearl River Delta authorities, when they *do* intervene, take a more direct approach. They are actively encouraging the worst sweatshops to leave Guangdong—or at least move further inland in the province, away from the PRD proper. At the same time, after initially reaching out to labor NGOs, the government is coming down hard on civil society, harassing, kicking out, and arresting activists, while acting increasingly coercively toward ordinary striking workers. The government state is not omnipresent; it saves its coercive arm for what it perceives as the most serious threats. Then, it takes a hard line.

Letting Go of Backward Enterprises

In contrast to the YRD's nudging of companies to obey the law, the PRD is taking more public action against recalcitrant employers. Guangdong's growth since the beginning of market reforms has relied to a considerable degree on what Lüthje (2012) dubs a "low wage classic" regime of production and what Blecher (2010) calls "globalized despotism": poor working conditions and absolute managerial authority. Yet, signs have been building that the region is eager to move on. Already in 2005, the provincial labor bureau publically condemned 20 "sweatshops," prominently posting a list of the abusive employers at job centers (China Labour Bulletin 2005). Article 38 of the 2008 Regulations on the Growth and Development of Harmonious Labor Relations in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone states that when an enterprise seriously violates laws regarding the timely payment of wages or safe working conditions, relevant government departments should ensure that the problems are reflected in the company's credit ratings, deny the company awards, cut the company off from government contracts, and ensure that for five years, the company's owners cannot register new enterprises. According to Article 46, business groups should also monitor their members' compliance with labor laws and publically report the most egregious violations. It should be pointed out that

efforts like these stalled in the early days of the global financial crisis. Then, the provincial government put out “ten advices,” including the recommendation “don’t publish reports that will affect company image at will” and the suggestion that executives suspected of ‘normal crimes’ not be arrested; local governments like Foshan’s went further, stating that companies in violation of the national Labor Contract Law would “not be fined, and [would] not have their operating licenses revoked” (E. Friedman 2012, 467–68). But after the crisis, the public pressure picked up again. The provincial Party Secretary at the time, Wang Yang, famously called for “emptying the cage and letting the right birds in,” i.e., allow polluting and labor-intensive enterprises to move out of the PRD—or even encourage them to do so—in favor of more value-added firms. In some conversations, it was suggested to me that authorities had allowed particular protests to occur in a bid to speed the exit of certain firms (e.g., Group Discussion 83). It does not appear that “social upgrading” necessarily accompanied this “industrial upgrading” drive (Butollo 2014). However, Wang Yang’s rhetoric stands in sharp contrast to the gentler, behind the scenes coaxing and prodding of YRD authorities.

Harassing Labor Activists

If Pearl River Delta authorities’ handling of backward enterprises can be blunt, the state’s approach to labor is blunter still. Full-time labor activists and ordinary striking workers alike are facing pressure across Guangdong. This was not always the case. At one time, authorities in the PRD tried to co-opt labor NGOs in a manner similar to the YRD. In 2007, for example, Shenzhen union leaders attended a conference hosted by a prominent local organization, despite the fact that the conference included edgy human rights activists. They also sent cadres to help with the organization’s legal trainings for migrants. In 2012, Guangzhou authorities set up an umbrella federation under the municipal union. Organizations were invited to join the federation

and several did. Offers were made of financial support for the groups' services and there was an assumption that those that participated would receive a measure of state protection. Howell (2015) describes this as a high point of Chinese "welfarist incorporation." But the initiative fizzled. A PRD activist said to me, "That was maybe a final, image-building gesture by [former head of the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Unions] Chen Weiguang before he left, something he wouldn't have to maintain. It [the umbrella group] had one meeting but never got off the ground, was never formally set up" (Interview 12). A Hong Kong-based organization concurred: "The effort never really went anywhere. It was never clear what the group should do" (Interview 58). At any rate, the state's attitude seems to have changed dramatically in recent years.³⁴ Outreach initiatives like this have halted.

Labor NGOs in Guangdong are now objects of intense harassment, not mere isolation as in Jiangsu. The pressure comes and goes, and it affects different groups differently. One factor determining who is targeted may be funding sources. The leader of a group in Shenzhen said he had only been visited by state security two or three times in the past year, explaining to me, "This is less than years past. They have come less because I have not been receiving foreign funding for the last period. They come when you get funding" (Interview 80). Another group had a similar experience: "Our organization has always felt some government pressure. But the government knows that we haven't had much funding recently, so they haven't come after us much" (Interview 56). A second factor may be China's political calendar. An activist said, "Whenever the 'two meetings' occur in Beijing or other big events are going on, they'll tell us

³⁴ There are still many purely service-oriented groups that receive state support (Interview 75). A Shenzhen activist said he was sometimes urged by authorities to move his organization in this direction: "Sometimes, they will point out other organizations that have registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. There are two or three who did so in Dongguan, I believe, under Wang Yang. But they just carry out very basic social work. For example, they help guide traffic with a whistle. Or they post people inside hospitals to guide you to the section you need from the waiting room" (Interview 79). However, such groups are more properly classified as "government-organized non-governmental organizations" (GONGOs).

not to distribute pamphlets, etc. Often, they'll stop by before big events and ask what sorts of events we have planned. They'll offer to help organize them!" (Interview 63). But for some organizations, the interference has become unremitting. In the words of a long-time NGO leader based outside of Guangzhou, "Different years have different pressures. But basically, things have stayed at the same level of high pressure. It has always been there. The government has always interfered (*ganyu*) and tried to control things" (Interview 104). The general trend over time seems to be toward more harassment for everyone. Each increase in repression—2010, 2012, 2016—sets a new floor for the future.

Harassment can take a number of forms. One basic form is surveillance of electronic communications. An activist formerly based in the PRD and in contact with sympathetic low-level bureaucrats said, "I talked to the daughter of one such official and sent her stuff over QQ [a social media platform]. I never imagined that they were monitoring something like QQ so closely back then. She lost her job as a result" (Interview 73). Another form of harassment is pressure on family members. A Shenzhen activist said that police had visited his parents in his hometown in the interior. He said, "Security told them that I was working with anti-China forces. My family are simple rural people and this really frightened them" (Interview 78). The activist's children now also have difficulty attending school in Guangdong (Ibid.). Organizers' moves are constantly followed. The same activist said of occasional trips he made back to his old office: "The moment I've arrived with my van, the police have come out and said that I can't drive in there. I've asked, 'What law says I can't drive in here?' They've said there will be consequences, but they then haven't done anything" (Interview 79). In a sign of cross-regional collaboration, one PRD-based activist said that his family home in another province now had a

security camera pointed at it and his wife there frequently felt followed (Interview 12). This all can take a psychological toll.

More dramatically, organizations' offices are often forced to move. The aforementioned Shenzhen organizer whose van was stopped has had his organization sent packing more than a dozen times in the past year; he now keeps the group's materials in big plastic containers for easy transport (Interview 78). Some have adapted by decentralizing. Another activist said, "I was just forced to move my home again. But it's not a big deal. They can't find my office, so they make me move my home. In fact, I don't really have much of an office anymore. My employees are spread out" (Interview 77) (Koesel [2013] has shown how Chinese underground "house churches" have used similar tactics). Other labor organizers have become itinerant "troublemakers," chased around the country from province to province. The activist whose QQ communications had cost an official's daughter her job said, "I have been kicked out of Dongguan and Shenzhen in Guangdong. In Hunan, Huaihua and Hongjiang both made me leave. Fenghuang in Hunan was beautiful, but they checked in on me because of some Gene Sharp books that were mailed to me... and they forced me away from there, too" (Interview 73). Even if the organizers can personally adapt to this lifestyle, the constant moving makes it difficult for workers to find them (Interview 97). Addresses and phone numbers must be updated. The communities activists carefully cultivate around their NGOs are strained and must continually be rebuilt.

In more extreme circumstances, labor activists are detained. In December 2015, police detained seven NGO leaders in one night, while interrogating a dozen others; three of the activists were subsequently formally arrested on charges of "gathering a crowd to disturb social order" and another was charged with "embezzlement." They were denied access to their lawyers on

national security grounds for several months. At the time of this writing, two have been given suspended jail sentences and a third, who apparently refused to confess to his alleged crimes, remains in detention and has still not been sentenced. As noted above, when the massive shoe strike occurred in Dongguan in 2014, police were at first slow to respond. However, after initially being able to meet with the strikers, the NGO activist most involved in the dispute had one of his meals with workers interrupted by police. The next day, security took him to dinner and tried to force him to stay at a hotel of their choice. A week later, police detained one of his employees for posting a message to social media about *another*, unrelated strike that turned out to be a rumor. The employee remained in custody for a month, and the group's QQ account was shut down (Interview 78). Now, the organization's leader says he is afraid of being arrested himself: "They are looking for me to make a mistake. No one can avoid making any mistakes whatsoever" (Interview 79). He described to me having a couple drinks with a group of workers and driving the long way home only to find police already at his door, ready to administer a breathalyzer test (which he passed) (Ibid.). When the activist went to the aid of another group of striking shoe plant employees a year later, he said, "State security was already there, waiting.... I was told that the government had had a meeting about me and had given me a new name, 'cancer cell'" (Interview 79). At least one interviewee told me that the activist had been picked as a target for future arrest by the highest levels of government (Interview 40).

Violence toward labor NGO leaders is rare but not unheard of. In the spring of 2015, undercover police in Zhongshan picked up a group of activists supporting striking workers at a Japanese-owned handbag manufacturer. After undergoing interrogation at a police station, the activists were let go in the middle of the night. Police refused to call the group a cab and instead told them to walk down a dark road, where they were promptly beaten by unknown persons who

jumped out of a vehicle (China Labour Bulletin 2015; Lau 2015). Yet another NGO leader was attacked by toughs after helping strikers. Meeting with me in his office, the activist said, “I’d never been beaten before! It happened right here.... they came up to the office and beat me. I was in the midst of a meeting with some university professors when the attackers came in” (Interview 104). Violence by company thugs has occurred in the past. In 2007, for example, a Shenzhen-based NGO director was knifed outside his organization’s offices. But then, the Deputy Chairs of the Guangdong Federation of Trade Unions and the Shenzhen Federation of Trade Unions both visited the activist upon his release from the hospital, and police arrested the assailants—and the factory owner who had hired them—after two months (China Labor News Translations 2009). No such efforts have been made following attacks in the past year. In fact, in both of the recent incidents mentioned above, the violence was a prelude to the arrest of not the attackers but the activists themselves.

Cracking Down on Strikers

Labor NGO leaders are not the only ones coming in for increased repression. When Guangdong’s usually hands-off authorities *do* decide to take action regarding a strike, the striking workers themselves are treated more poorly than in the recent past. Policing in the Pearl River Delta has always been rough. Until 2003, workers from other parts of the country could be detained if they did not have temporary residence permits. An interviewee based in the YRD who used to be a migrant laborer in Guangdong and now edits collections of labor poetry recalled, “Back then, people thought of the police like the mafia. Police would ask for your registration. And even if you were registered, they could tear up your card” (Interview 42). Now situation is again tightening, with workers who participate in collective action at greater risk of detention than at any point in the recent past. A labor lawyer in Shenzhen explained:

“The pressure started in 2010. It was then that the police started hassling workers. Before, there was no pressure on workers. Why? This was when unrest peaked (*bofeng*). The government’s response was 1) not supporting the workers and 2) using the police more. In 2014, over a 100 workers were detained by police and 1,000 were fired by their employers with the support of courts” (Interview 64).

An activist concurred that things were worsening, “Whenever there is a strike, police are sent. It is said that they are sent to ‘maintain stability’ (*wei wen*), but they are really there to suppress (*zhenya*). If things go too far, they will detain workers” (Interview 80). This analysis was echoed by the former leader with the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Union in a conversation with me: “Workers are being detained more. In the past, this also occurred, but then they just took some worker leaders down to the police station and urged them to tone things down. As long as things stayed contained within the factory grounds, the police would just warn them. Now, it is different. They will bring charges against workers, though usually they just hold them for a few days” (Interview 62). The most prominent worker to be arrested in recent years is Wu Guijun, who was charged with “gathering a crowd and disturbing the order of public transportation” for taking part in a protest at a furniture maker in Shenzhen in 2013. Other detainees have included a group of hospital security guards who faced the same charges following a rooftop protest the same year.

As with labor NGO leaders, violence against striking workers is not uncommon. A Shenzhen activist said to me, “The government is rougher now than before. It used to be newsworthy if the police used dogs on workers. When I put a picture up of a police dog biting a worker, lots of people shared it. If you didn’t show a picture, no one would believe you. Now, using the People’s Armed Police and dogs is not unusual. People feel it’s like when the Japanese invaded” (Interview 79). The new aggressiveness of police toward ordinary workers was on full display in the city of Zhongshan, where I spoke with striking workers at the Japanese handbag factory

where NGO leaders were beaten (as explained above). One of the workers, sitting and talking to me at a grocery store across the street from the plant, said that previous strikes at the factory had been met with promises to improve conditions. However, this time, she said, “We were told to choose representatives for bargaining, but then all the representatives—more than ten people—were detained. They were just pushed into vans. I didn’t see it happen, but I heard people tell about it. Two are still in detention, both women. After they arrested the representatives, no one dared speak up” (Interview 60). The same interviewee said, “People were beaten.... They were beaten by people in military-style uniforms. I don’t know if they were police or mafia. When we were all gathered outside, the police and labor bureau people just laughed at us (*xiao women*). How can you not do anything for people and then just laugh at them? It was so cruel!” (Ibid.).

When I returned to the factory less than a week later, workers were gathered inside for negotiations with management. I spoke with a group of the workers afterward, as they left the plant to return to their nearby dormitories. They said that Zhongshan’s city-level union had dispatched a team to help with bargaining and that the union (as opposed to more local authorities) was “speaking for the workers” (Interview 61). However, the workers added, “Some people are still in the hospital. That man with the phone there was responsible for beating people up; he takes revenge on people.... Those cars over there belong to the government” (Ibid.). My interviewee in the grocery store further said, “Many people say they just don’t have a feeling of safety (*anquan gan*) in the factory anymore, after the beating. Even if things are resolved, we aren’t sure we want to go back to work there. It wasn’t like this in the past” (Interview 60).

Confrontations like these can clearly leave a chilling impression on workers.

Police, finally, are increasingly moving to force strikers back to work, not just guarding the perimeter of demonstrations (or beating and detaining workers). In the words of one activist,

“The police are intervening and suppressing workers' protests much more than in the past. Definitely much more. They go inside the factory and make sure the workers on the line are working! Isn't this forced labor?” (Interview 77). Said another activist, “Before 2014, you rarely heard of police forcing workers back to work. It used to be that if you didn't block an entrance or a road, they would leave you alone and not make you resume production. But in the past year, I know of over 30 instances in which this has happened. It is a new situation” (Interview 79). The most prominent instance of this kind of strikebreaking was the 2014 Dongguan shoe strike, which has already been discussed at several points in this chapter. A manager with the shoe company defended the actions of his employer and authorities to me but ended up essentially confirming the active role of police: “I wouldn't say that the police were pushing people back to work. Workers were going into the factory and clocking in in the morning and then clocking out at the end of the day but not working at all. Police saw this pattern and addressed it. If you want to go in, you work....” (Interview 36). A Beijing-based academic who has been consulted on PRD union reforms explained:

“The police definitely don't *want* to intervene themselves. But the local governments are making the police force workers back to work. Why? Because workers are raising demands that go beyond the law and involve political questions that are difficult to resolve. And even if there are representatives to negotiate for the workers, those representatives don't necessarily have workers' trust. So, disputes go unsolved and strikes last longer and longer. The government then feels a lot of pressure to get people back to working” (Interview 102).

In other words, increasingly intense confrontations have pushed the state to respond in a more forceful manner (when it does respond). As the economy continues to slow, this coercive reaction to worker resistance is likely to deepen.

A Field in Crisis

If the YRD constitutes a stable regional field within the broader field of Chinese labor politics, the PRD is a field in crisis. The dynamics in Guangdong are unsustainable, not in an existential sense—the Guangzhou government will not be replaced by a rebel “Canton Commune” as it briefly was in 1927!—but in the sense that the trend is toward constant breakdown and alteration. The careful coordination of social forces practiced by authorities in the YRD, with companies nudged to obey the law, workers engaged through pragmatic bargaining, and NGOs co-opted or isolated, appears to be impossible in the PRD. Standard operating procedures must be junked and the government must think more on its feet. Capital has always jockeyed with the government for power in Guangdong and is using its business associations to block new rules. But now labor has taken on the role of challenger. Its strikes, protests, and riots are frequent and, it seems, large and long lasting. Workers are also raising new, more ambitious demands and show little trust in the state. In the face of this challenge, authorities have sped up changes to their labor laws and trade unions, i.e., made serious efforts to be responsive. They will likely need to change these even more in the future. The Guangdong government has also fitfully moved to push out the lowest value-added and most abusive companies. This, too, may need to increase, as long as employment opportunities do not fall too much. Finally, police are treating both labor NGOs and ordinary strikers in a more overtly repressive manner than in Jiangsu. Yet more severe crackdowns should be anticipated. In the PRD, change is the rule, and no change on the government’s part ever seems to be enough.

Examining the PRD's Crisis

All else equal, my statistical analysis found that increased resistance yields increased state repression and responsiveness. But when we dig deeply into this extreme case, more forces emerge as potentially important than are found to be significant in national averages—or that can be operationalized quantitatively in the first place. As with any crisis in a field, both external and internal sources of change are conceivable in Guangdong. Some are rooted in differences of kind or degree between the YRD and PRD that did not appear in the “most similar” comparison set up in Chapter 3. These include differences with regard to sequences of reform, capital composition, worker demographics, and regional culture. An extended chain of interacting factors can be tentatively sketched to explain the PRD's slide into crisis: external economic boom → interaction with specific characteristics of groups inside PRD (light manufacturers and migrants) → “social skills” developed through protest → more powerful protests. In the next sections, I deal with each link in the chain in turn. I argue, though, that the last two are essential.

Economic Boom

With regard to external factors, Guangdong's extended economic boom has likely provided a steady spur to protest. Labor economists and political scientists have shown that strike rates tend to be pro-cyclical: rising with more local job opportunities and corporate profits to be divided and falling when the cost of losing one's job is higher and companies have less to offer (Ashenfelter and Johnson 1969; Hibbs 1976; Hicks 1932; Tracy 1987). In the words of Hibbs (1976, 1057), “On the whole strikes are timed to capitalize on the strategic advantages of a tight labor market.” As noted, Guangdong was the earliest mover in terms of China's opening to the global economy (although not necessarily other aspects of marketization). Relationships with

Hong Kong and overseas investors have thus been able to achieve a certain measure of path-dependency. Even during hard times, investment has kept flowing (although this may now finally be changing, see Interview 82). During the 2008 financial crisis, when Chinese exports went into “free fall” and factories were shuttered, the PRD did not suffer as much as the YRD: industrial employment fell 3.8 percent in Guangdong but 7.1 percent in Jiangsu (J. L. Wallace 2014, 168). By the end of 2009, Shenzhen had a labor *shortage* of 800,000 workers; Dongguan, 200,000 workers; and Guangzhou, 150,000 workers (Stratfor 2010). Compared with their northern counterparts, workers in the PRD have thus enjoyed an enviable leverage over employers and cushion against the repercussions of activism.

Regional Culture

Regional culture is a possibly significant factor of an essentially internal sort. I have already noted the YRD’s claims to a more “civilized” style of governance. The PRD, in turn, may have a down-to-earth, pragmatic political culture that encourages greater reformism. Some of this may be the result of policy trials pushed on the region by the central government or models of governance consciously imported from elsewhere. For example, in Chapter 4, an interviewee in Jiangsu characterized Guangdong as “small government, big society” (Interview 37). Whether the interviewee knew it or not, “small government, big society” is the slogan attached to a specific program of offloading certain government functions to the private sector and civil society that started in Hainan Province (Brødsgaard 2006). However, pragmatism and reformism seem to run deeper than any particular policy in the PRD. Walking with me through the streets of an older section of Guangdong’s provincial capital, a former leader of the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Unions pointed to the entrances of various bureaucracies, saying, “Here, government offices tend to be fairly small. Up north, they build them much bigger. They care

more about face there” (Interview 62). A PRD-based corporate social responsibility officer added, “The YRD has a stronger sense of hierarchy. Levels are clearer in the north, even though there is more conflict in the south” (Ibid.). Some interviewees also noted the influence of Hong Kong civil society on Guangdong labor activism (e.g., Interview 2; Interview 8; Interview 46; Interview 50). In her field theory-informed study of women’s movements in India, Ray (1999, 7–9) argues that the political culture of a field, specifically whether it allows for “the coexistence of multiple and oppositional discourses,” shapes the framing and coalition-building options available to protesters in important ways. But culture can also be a cause of conflict. Moreover, the majority of workers in the PRD’s factory zones are migrants from elsewhere in China (the same, again, is true of the YRD, but the proportion of workers who are migrants there is smaller). Local culture thus would seem to have the greatest impact (if it has any impact) among officials—many of whom are locals—and on the margins of state decision-making.

Characteristics of Groups

At the level of groups, the unique characteristics of labor and capital in the PRD—migrant workers and light, low value-added manufacturers—have likely compounded the influence of the region’s booming economy. As already noted, migrant workers, drawn by the tens of millions to Guangdong by its growth, may be especially open to challenging their bosses. It might be added that the PRD’s migrants also come from further away—Sichuan, Henan, Hunan, and Hubei—compared to neighboring Jiangsu’s large bloc from neighboring Anhui, meaning not so much that their culture is more different as that they are possibly more at the mercy of firms and more concerned about wages. Moreover, the chaotic character of Guangdong’s migrant-dominated industrial districts, where people are constantly switching residences, makes Jiangsu-style surveillance more difficult (though it should be noted that many PRD workers do live in factory

dormitories, if a shrinking number, see Siu 2015). The labor-intensity of light manufacturers has increased workers' leverage. These manufacturers' extremely thin profit margins—a product in part of their weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the multinationals they supply—might seem to be a deterrent to strike activity. However, the margins have meant unusually abusive working conditions, deepening grievances (see, again, L. Liu, Yong, and Shu 2011). This, as noted, could add a more volatile edge to contention in the PRD. But if these conditions all render protest more likely in the PRD than the YRD, they do not explain why PRD workers' tactics have become so sophisticated. A measure of agency on the part of workers is clearly also involved.

Protests and Social Skills

The final internal source of dynamism in the PRD is the region's repeated confrontations between labor and capital themselves. Fligstein (2001) writes that crises can occur in fields when subordinate groups develop the “social skills” to assemble coalitions against incumbents. In his words, “Skilled actors understand the ambiguities and uncertainties of the field and work off of them” (Ibid., 114). Most importantly, “Skilled actors end up often convincing others that what they can get is what they want” (Ibid.). In the context of Chinese labor politics, this entails workers explaining to fellow workers the political space available for various forms of protest—halting production, blocking roads, rallying at government buildings, mass threats of suicide, etc.—and giving them the confidence to actually employ these tactics (Becker 2014; Fu 2016). It also entails labor NGOs networking or following each other's progress from a remove, as well as observing workers' autonomous activism, and, in the process, becoming confident in employing more confrontational tactics. Skilled actors are made, not born. Through their repeated clashes with capital and the state, Guangdong's migrant workers and their NGO allies are learning how to push the envelope. Contention has its own momentum: participation instills

a love of participation or, as Wood (2003) describes it, the “pleasures of agency.” In this way, it is similar to dynamics observed with regard to participatory democracy by Pateman (2012, 10): “Individuals learn to participate by participating.” Structural conditions may set the stage, but it is up to activists to act or not and for others to follow them or not. As activists act and are followed, they affect state policy.

Protest and Policy

As noted in Chapter 1, considerable research has been devoted to how state policy shapes protest. Drawing on McAdam (1999), Elfstrom and Kuruvilla (2014) argue that China’s new labor laws send “cognitive cues” that there is more space available to workers for challenging their conditions than they might otherwise have thought. The passage of legislation like Shenzhen’s Harmonious Labor Relations Regulations has likely sent such cues. But in the course of my fieldwork, interviewee after interviewee emphasized the opposite direction of impact: protest to policy. A prominent labor lawyer in Shenzhen, for example, stated, “The government changes because of what workers are doing. The government is not the main force” (Interview 64). Meanwhile, a civil society leader said, “NGOs are taking on some of the tasks that the government *should* be doing, such as stepping in and mediating conflicts. Now, the government is taking up some of this work, too, but this is just because of pressure from the NGOs” (Interview 56). Nor was it just labor-side interviewees who said these sorts of things. Officials made similar points. For example, according to a young staffer in the Shenzhen Federation of Trade Unions, “Worker pressure plus pressure from NGOs leads to union reform” (Interview 68). A former head of the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Unions echoed this: “Union reform doesn't come from companies and it doesn't come from the union itself pushing it. Reform is pushed forward by the labor movement.... There is no momentum from the top”

(Interview 62). Unrest exercises an impact on governance above and beyond the impact of governance on unrest.

Extreme Guangdong

If dynamics in the YRD are average and representative of much of China, then PRD represents the extreme, cutting edge of worker-state interactions. Runners-up to Guangdong in terms of their total numbers of strikes per capita include Hainan, Zhejiang, Shanghai, and Beijing (see, again, Figure 11 above). None of these provinces have shown the same willingness to both crack down on labor groups and initiate pro-worker reforms as the PRD, but some have clearly gone further in both regards than the YRD. Jiangsu's neighbor, Zhejiang, for example, experimented with elections for enterprise-level union leaders before Guangdong (Pringle 2011, 160–88). Moreover, at least one labor rights NGO was recently forced to close in Zhejiang's provincial capital, Hangzhou (Interview 2), and an interviewee reported that another Hangzhou group that had managed to establish a partnership with the local trade union was prevented from even using the word “worker” in its name (Interview 24). Shanghai has been especially strict with NGOs—much more so than Jiangsu—even as it is also tougher on noncompliant businesses (Interviews 18, 26, 111). These places have their own peculiarities, however, which make it fruitless to try to draw too many parallels to Guangdong. The PRD is far and away the leader in worker resistance and therefore also in state repression and responsiveness. Over time, labor unrest there has become a force that authorities have had difficulty stopping, upending the government's best-laid plans and tipping the region into an uncertain, fluid situation. The next chapter examines the precise mechanisms, including at an individual level, connecting the PRD's powerful protests and policymaking: how unrest flips the norm of stability against authorities

and how the cadre promotion system pushes officials in unstable areas to deal with grassroots challenges in a more daring manner than they otherwise would.

6. Linking Protest and Policy

In the previous chapter, the final and most important links in the long chain of interrelating factors that I suggested have tipped the Pearl River Delta regional field of labor politics into crisis were workers' growing "social skills" of organizing and, with these skills, their more frequent, large-scale, and long-lasting—and ambitious—strikes and protests. However, the precise mechanisms connecting protest and policy were not identified. On a broad scale, as I argued in Chapter 2, authoritarian states, especially state socialist and post-socialist ones, are especially vulnerable to sudden cascades of open workplace dissent, lacking as they do accurate information about people's preferences and effective institutions (including independent trade unions) for channeling discontent. As such, they must throw themselves more fully into containing unrest than their democratic peers, utilizing repressive and responsive measures at once. One approach provides an insurance policy in the event of the other approach's failure. If protest has not advanced to the level of a full-scale movement, this only deepens the dynamic. But what is the local rather than regime-level logic of this reaction? What exactly makes individual local officials in a given regional field care personally about unrest? In this chapter, I argue that protest, especially if repeated over time and ratcheting up in its demands, can flip the logic of "stability maintenance" against local authorities. Whereas the state's focus on stability is normally a source of legitimacy for leaders and a constraint on worker mobilization, when protests rise dramatically, it becomes a liability. Concern about unrest then interacts with China's cadre promotion system: officials must chase after social harmony with concessions and crackdowns because their careers are on the line.

Organization

In support of this argument regarding the local and individual-level links between protest and policy, I first explain the state's stability norm and document the YRD and PRD's shared concern with the norm. Then, I show how rates of workplace contention in the two regions have diverged over the past decade, after starting at roughly the same level. Next, I use automated content analysis of the public security sections of local yearbooks to show that, in step with rising strikes, protests, and riots by workers in the PRD, police discussions of labor issues have become more pronounced in the PRD than the YRD, suggesting unrest is indeed sparking stability concerns. Finally, drawing on interviews I conducted and secondary literature, I explore the institution at the core of the protest-policy nexus: China's cadre promotion system. Officials' promotions are contingent in part on their handling of unrest in their spheres of responsibility. For an official in a relatively stable field, I argue, the incentive is to keep a good thing going and not rock the boat; in a field in crisis, it is to, at least, show that the government is doing *something* to solve the problem—the more aggressive and inventive the better. Both types of cadres feel pressure to perform, in other words, but their options for demonstrating competence are different. Thus, if there is logic to the general pattern of repression plus responsiveness in autocracies facing labor conflict, then at a local and individual level, that logic is undergirded by a confluence of norms (stability) and inducements (in China, the cadre promotion system) in their various clusters of activity (regional fields).

The Norm of Stability

As noted in Chapter 3, if there is one overriding norm in the field of Chinese politics and its sub-field of labor politics, it is the state's concern with social stability. In the past, continual

revolution was arguably the *raison d'être* of the Chinese Communist Party. Now, after the chaos of the country's twentieth century, the CCP is seeking legitimacy through delivering the peace necessary for development, with leaders arguing that even greater prioritization of stability is necessary for further progress. Former President Hu Jintao made "constructing a harmonious society" one of his signature slogans, and the phrase was emblazoned (in different formulations) on everything from traffic cones to the country's new Harmony-class high speed trains to the iconography of the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. But the norm is bigger than Hu. In January 2016 speech, President Xi Jinping connected the successful implementation of the country's thirteenth five-year plan and the construction of a "moderately well-off society" to raising the government's ability to "preserve national security and social stability" (The Procuratorate Daily 2016). The People's Liberation Army's bloody suppression of the Tiananmen Square democracy protests is frequently justified in these terms. For instance, on the twentieth anniversary of the massacre, the English-language version of the state paper *Global Times* approvingly quoted a "senior commentator" who argued that if China had followed the course of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, it "would very likely have fallen apart because of political struggles, racial conflicts, and social and regional discrepancies" and it "would not have been able to achieve sustained and rapid economic growth, or become the world's third-largest economy and a major trading partner of the US, Japan and the European Union, not to mention participate in the process of globalization as a WTO member" (Jiang 2009). But like other norms, stability maintenance is a double-edged sword: what does it say about the Party if it cannot even deliver on its guiding principle?

A Shared Norm Across Regional Fields

If stability is the rule in the broader field of Chinese labor politics, it is also the rule in regional fields. Despite their many differences, there is no daylight between the YRD and PRD in this regard. The Politics and Law sections of municipal yearbooks from the two deltas all place a heavy emphasis on resolving “mass incidents.” Nantong in Jiangsu, for example, claims in its yearbook that it was able to successfully mediate 97.2 percent of disputes in 2005, which allegedly represented a 0.2 percent improvement over the previous year; it also resolved “325 mass incidents” (Nantong Yearbook 2006, 165). The Guangdong provincial yearbook reports a drop in mass incidents of 17.1 percent in 2012 (Guangdong Yearbook 2013, 166-167). Guangdong’s Nanhai, meanwhile, says it reduced petitioning to Beijing by 61 percent (Nanhai Yearbook 2011, 181). Shenzhen says it resolved 78,600 disputes and 419 mass incidents in 2009 (Shenzhen Yearbook 2010, 162). Dongguan takes credit for handling 224 mass incidents and dealing with 260 “different kinds of destabilizing factors” (*gelei bu wending yinsu*) in 2011 (Dongguan Yearbook 2012, 179). Shantou writes of a drop in petitioning of 66.5 percent, as well as effective responses to, in particular, “instances of instability” started by a death at the hands of a security guard in Chenghai and a protest over Japanese claims to the Diaoyu Islands by over 1,000 retired soldiers in 2012 (Shantou Yearbook 203, 249-250). The yardsticks clearly vary from report to report. Is it the absolute number of incidents that matters? The number of “serious” incidents? The percentage drop in incidents? Or the percentage successfully resolved? One gets the distinct impression that the most flattering measure for a given local government is the one used. Regardless, the goal seems to be to convey measurable progress.³⁵

³⁵ The yearbooks’ frequent resort to numbers should be familiar to scholars of state socialist systems (post-socialist China, of course, retains the political apparatus of such systems). It also echoes the more particular findings of

In addition to such quantifiable achievements with respect to stability maintenance, both Jiangsu and Guangdong local governments frequently highlight their responses to specific challenges. Zhongshan, for instance, reports “perfecting emergency plans” to deal with a movement described as “one million people marching countrywide” (*quanguo baiwan ren sanbu xingdong*), local citizens’ participation in the international “Kony 2012” awareness-raising campaign regarding Lord's Resistance Army atrocities in Central Africa, and “other illegal assembly actions” (Zhongshan Yearbook 2013, 116). Nanjing reports “sternly striking against enemy forces’ destructive activities” and establishing “no superstition districts” (*wu xiejiao diqu*), with the aim of maintaining “national security and social stability” (Nanjing Yearbook 2011, 394-395). Wuxi says it “continues to manage outside non-governmental organizations’ activities [in the city] in accordance with the law” (Wuxi Yearbook 2011, 111). The city also reports that it cracked five cases involving national security in 2010 and “deepened” its struggle against Falun Gong and other “superstitious” organizations, arresting 26 related people (Wuxi Yearbook 2011, 112). Special events like the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic, the Shanghai World Fair, and the annual “two meetings” of the National People’s Congress and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee are noted as a focus of politics and law work (e.g., Changzhou Yearbook 2013, 89; Nantong Yearbook 2006, 165; Nanhai Yearbook 2011, 181; Dongguan Yearbook 2012, 179). Zhenjiang reports that it strengthened its surveillance during a laundry list of “sensitive” dates: March 12, April 24, May 1, and June 4 (Zhenjiang Yearbook 2010, 95). Some of the implied threats seem absurdly inflated (the Kony 2012

O’Brien and Li (1999) concerning “selective policy implementation” in rural China: what can be enumerated is given priority over more amorphous state priorities. National-level leaders are the likely target for these yearbooks. Officials might be handed copies during inspection tours. Beijing would presumably find claims of a place being entirely conflict-free unbelievable. Thus, continuous improvement is the next best thing. Documenting improvement has an additional benefit: you can always improve more the next year, but you cannot improve on a perfect record.

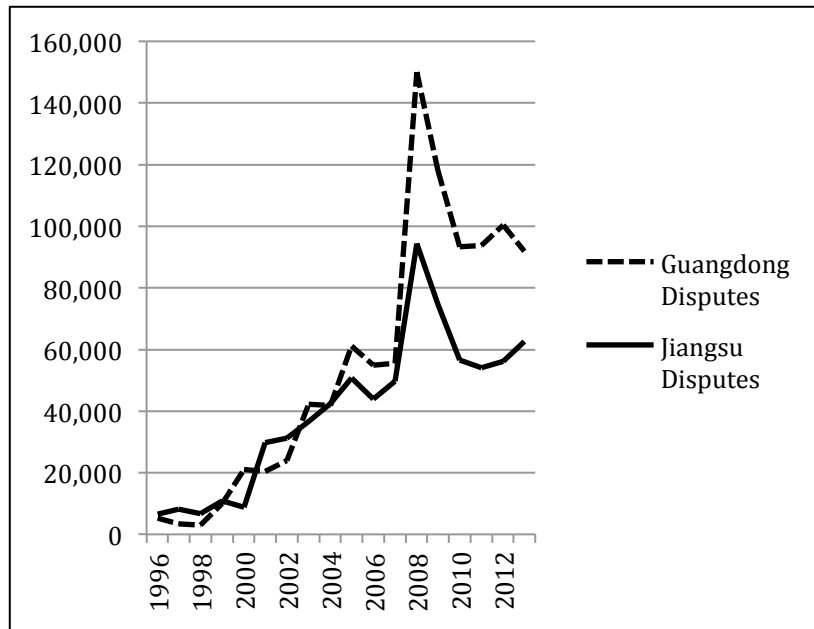
campaign!). Yet, the message of all such reporting seems to be: “We take nothing for granted. Stability is our top priority.” In this, the YRD and PRD authorities are simply echoing in different ways a national imperative.

Diverging Patterns of Worker Resistance

Although the YRD and PRD governments vary little in their prioritization of stability, the challenges they face have diverged over time. As documented at length in the previous two chapters, Jiangsu authorities enjoy relative industrial peace, while Guangdong authorities face an increasingly restive workforce. This might lead us to imagine that the two regional fields have more or less unchanging “characters.” However, their dramatically different rates of contention are relatively recent phenomena. Figure 12 tracks the total number of employment disputes accepted for formal mediation, arbitration, and court in Jiangsu and Guangdong between 1996 and 2013. These statistics are used because they can capture a longer time frame than the *China Strikes* dataset, although as noted in Chapter 2, formal disputes have a different relationship with police spending than activism in the streets. The figure shows that conflict in the YRD and PRD only really began to show a clear contrast around 2006-2007. The regions then both experienced spikes in conflict in 2008—but to very different degrees—and have remained on different tracks ever since, with the PRD typically experiencing 40 percent more disputes annually than its northern counterpart. This variation provides more leverage on the question of the impact of protest than would a more static distinction between the regions. If, as already suggested, a norm regarding the importance of social stability is shared by the YRD and PRD regional fields (as with all such fields in China), and if local police in the PRD can be documented to have raised their prioritization of labor issues over the same period that workplace disputes in their region are observed to have increased, this would suggest—although not definitively prove—that

protests affect policy at least in part by activating (to different degrees) the regions' (shared) concern with stability. Put differently, it would provide some indication that protesting workers can transform the stability norm from a source of legitimacy to a liability.

Figure 12: Numbers of Formally Adjudicated Employment Disputes In Jiangsu and Guangdong 1996-2013



Source: China Labor Statistical Yearbooks.

Setting Policing Priorities

The priorities of China's public security system are difficult to access. One means of gaining a sense of what police in different parts of the country find important is to analyze the public security sections of local yearbooks, where police departments discuss their challenges and (more commonly) list their accomplishments. I therefore conduct an automated content analysis of the yearbooks of nine leading cities each from YRD and PRD, plus the Jiangsu and

Guangdong yearbooks, for the years 2004 to 2012, the most recent years for which a complete selection of almanacs are available, for a total of 180 yearbooks (10 yearbooks x 2 deltas x 9 years = 180). In the PRD, the cities included are Changzhou, Huai'an, Nanjing, Nantong, Suzhou, Taizhou, Wuxi, and Zhenjiang; in the PRD, Dongguan, Foshan, Guangzhou, Huizhou, Jiangmen, Shenzhen, Zhaoqing, Zhongshan, and Zhuhai. Based on my hand-coding of a selection of yearbooks and using the content analysis program Yoshikoder, I create a dictionary of words relating to labor issues (e.g., “workers,” “wage arrears,” “jobless”), corporations (e.g., “enterprise,” “company,” “work unit”), social conflict more generally (e.g., “protest,” “political incident,” “unstable”), policing innovation (e.g., “informationalization,” “oversight,” “risk analysis”), and routine policing (“drugs,” “theft,” etc.). Appendix 5 contains a complete list of the words. I then apply the dictionary to the 180 yearbooks. Figures 13a and 13b show fifth order polynomial trend lines for actual employment disputes in Guangdong and Jiangsu (based on the same data as Figure 12) versus the percentages of yearbook public security section word counts devoted to labor issues in the PRD and YRD (both for the years 2004-2012). Figures 14a, 14b, and 14c then display the percentages of word counts devoted to labor issues alongside other topics, using linear trend lines for greater clarity. Labor issue percentages are displayed on the second y axis in the second set of figures.

Figure 13a: Numbers of Formally Adjudicated Employment Disputes In Jiangsu and Guangdong 2004-2012

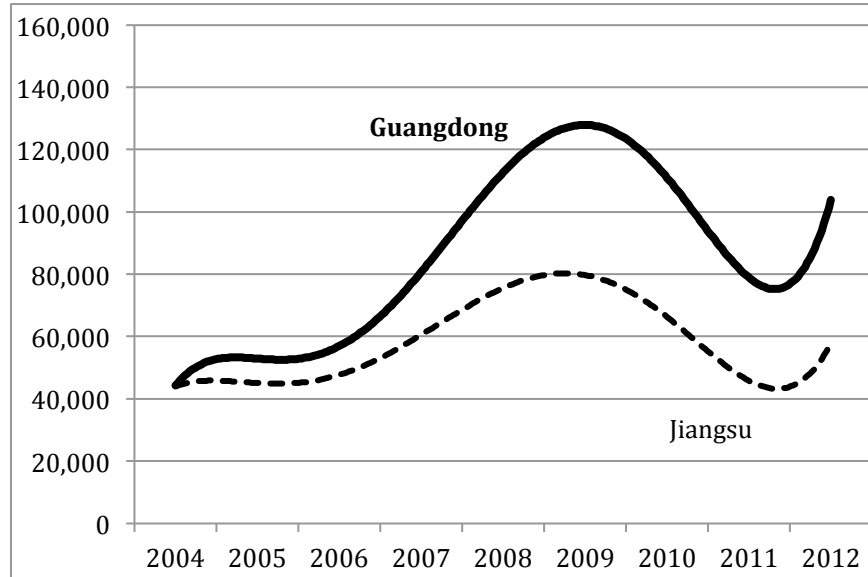


Figure 13b: Percentages of Words in Public Security Sections of Yearbooks in the YRD and PRD Devoted to Labor Issues 2004-2012

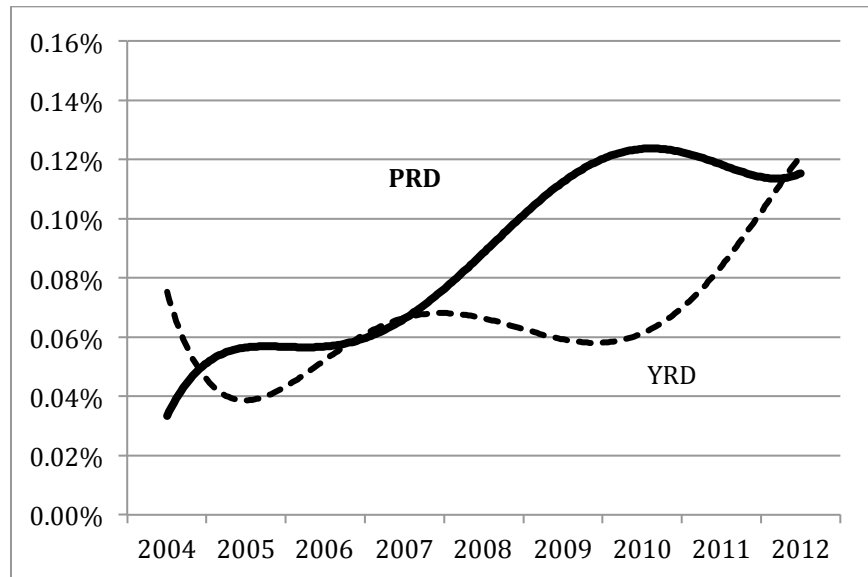


Figure 14a: Public Security Sections of Yearbooks in the Yangtze River Delta 2004-2012

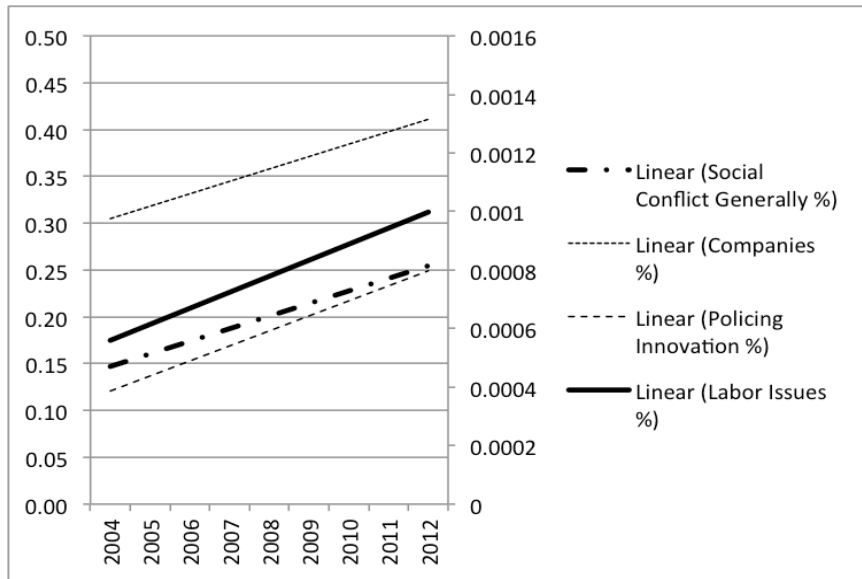


Figure 14b: Public Security Sections of Yearbooks in the Pearl River Delta 2004-2012

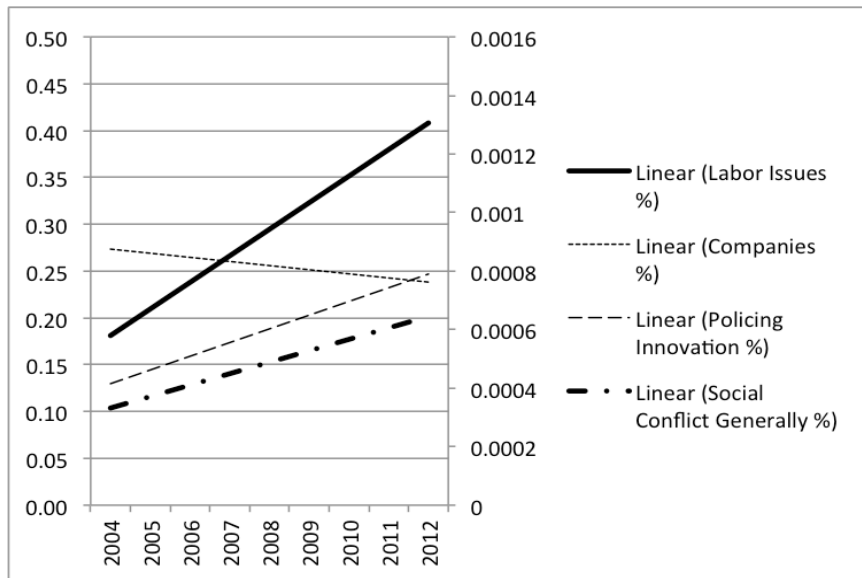
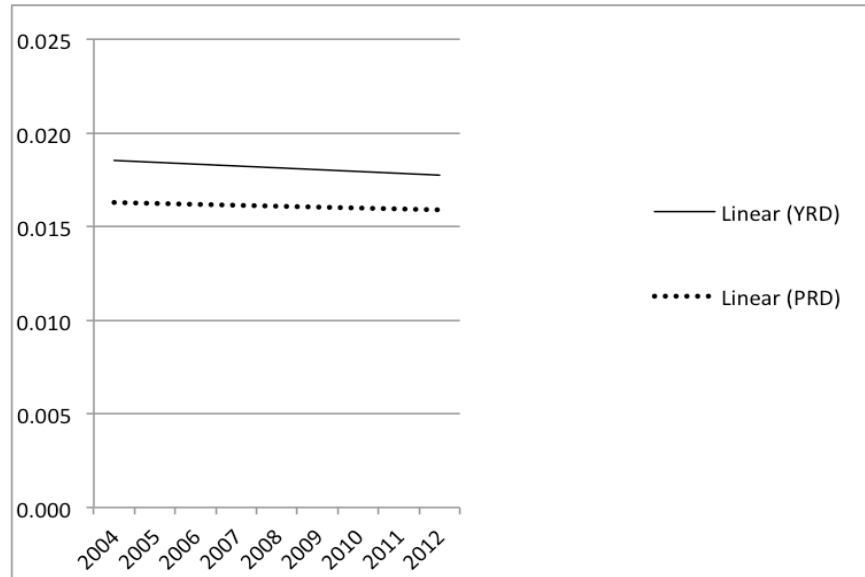


Figure 14c: Discussion of Routine Policing Issues in the Two Deltas 2004-2012



From Figures 13a and 13b, it clear that police attention to labor issues in the two deltas started out at similar levels but diverged in much the same manner as actual employment disputes around 2006-2007, breaking apart most in 2008. Interestingly, discussion in the YRD seems to have caught back up to the PRD in recent years, while the regions' dispute numbers have remained dissimilar. Perhaps Guangdong's growing tumult has made Jiangsu officials concerned about the unrest in their own backyard, even if that unrest is less serious. Such diffusion effects are dealt with in the next chapter. Or perhaps a new national emphasis on stability maintenance has made yearbook language across regions converge. Nonetheless, the overall relationship between workplace conflict and security discussion is remarkably tight. Figures 13a and 13b reveal other interesting relationships. For example, in both regions, discussion of policing innovation has closely tracked discussion of general social conflict. This suggests that unrest spurs an upgrading of the state's regulative capacity (an issue I return to in

Chapter 8). Moreover, in keeping with the YRD's emphasis on coordinating different industrial relations stakeholders, the percentage of words dealing with companies has risen in Jiangsu yearbooks over the past decade along with mentions of labor issues. However, in the PRD, where regional authorities have expressed a willingness to let the worst enterprises go in favor of "new birds," the percentage of words dealing with companies has gradually declined. In contrast to all these dynamics, as seen in Figure 14c, the proportion of words relating to routine policing has changed little in either delta. The various patterns discussed here do not, of course, by themselves establish a causal relationship between protest and policing, let alone the direction of causality. But they show clear changes over time in state security priorities or, at least, in what the state advertises (via its yearbooks) as its priorities, and they suggest that labor unrest plays a role in setting those priorities distinct from other security concerns. Might reverse causality be an issue? Although an increased police presence might harden existing conflicts, as in the Zhongshan handbag factory strike discussed in Chapter 5, there is no reason why it would spur *more* strikes and protests, given that, with a few exceptions (e.g., the 2011 Zengcheng riot sparked by cops beating a vendor), most activism is directed at immediate workplace issues, not security abuses. The most likely direction of change is still: protest → policing.

An Individual-Level Mechanism

At a general level, it is thus plausible to argue that labor protest affects policy by flipping the norm of social stability, shared by all regions of Chinese labor politics, from a source of legitimacy to a liability (or at least a cause of concern). The goal of stability, in short, provides leverage to workers. These pressures, in turn, should affect policymaking. But what is the individual-level mechanism in this process? Why should a Mayor or Party Secretary somewhere care whether the stability norm has been challenged by workers, given all the other issues on

their agendas? Different officials, of course, have different values. Some personally feel strongly about “law and order” as public safety issues. Some, including several I interviewed, are genuinely concerned about the plight of workers and see strikes as cries for help. Others worry about the difficulties facing businesses. But the most consistent conduit connecting protest and policy, I argue, is likely China’s cadre promotion system, specifically the promotion versus non-promotion (or, more rarely, demotion) of officials based on their track records in terms of maintaining stability in their jurisdictions. In the sections below, I first summarize what we know about the cadre promotion system as a whole, then explain how stability maintenance figures into the system, and finally provide interview evidence for workplace incidents having an impact on promotion, albeit not always in a direct manner.

The Cadre Promotion System

As Brødsgaard (2012, 76) states, “Personnel policy is the heart of power in a Leninist system.” In the view of Bell (2015), the Communist Party’s elaborate promotion practices are what make it a “meritocratic” state worthy of emulation. Others criticize these practices, with their emphasis on impressing superiors, as precisely what insulates officials from real, *outside* oversight (e.g., Nathan 2015). Practically, the cadre promotion system is what allows China to implement a remarkably decentralized form of authoritarianism conducive to rapid, capitalist economic development—in fact, to be “one of the most decentralized countries in the world”—*and* maintain Party control (Landry 2008, 3). In the words of Landry (Ibid., 57), “Leading local cadres may well have extensive prerogatives, but their ability to govern depends ultimately not on the locality in which they serve, lying instead in the hands of higher-ranking Party officials positioned above (and outside) these localities.” Put differently, the system rewards effectiveness, but only effectiveness that serves Beijing’s objectives. In the case of the stability

maintenance, “effectiveness” means preventing protests or, failing that, responding appropriately to protests, i.e., by introducing policies that have the potential to reduce unrest in the future.

There are, however, blind spots in the system: incentives for officials to focus narrowly on their own jurisdictions, to hide incidents from superiors, to place blame for problems on other actors, and to “kick the can down the road.”

How the System Works

How exactly does the cadre promotion system work? As of 1998, what China terms “cadres” numbered 40.5 million and included both Party members and non-members, with Party members making up 38 percent (Brødsgaard 2012, 73). Cadres comprise everyone from mayors to professors, but the individuals ultimately responsible for managing unrest—officials at the city- and provincial level, including in “mass organizations” like the ACFTU—rank among the 508,025 “leading cadres” or even more select “2,562 “high level cadres” (Ibid.). Party members make up a larger proportion of leading and high level cadres. Since the onset of Reform and Opening, the CCP has tried to rationalize its management of such people (Manion 1985). Rising cadres are regularly evaluated by a succession of committees: within their own work unit, by the unit above theirs, by the Organization Department at the next level, and via “individual recommendations” (Ibid., 226-232). From the 1990s onwards, the Party has exerted more, not less control of this process relative to government organs (Brødsgaard 2006). In an effort to foster intra-Party democracy and clamp down on corruption, the CCP has recently pushed the “democratic recommendation” of candidates for certain offices and semi-competitive elections at Party Congresses (Zeng 2016). However, these initiatives have been hampered by the non-binding nature of recommendations, the rotation of cadres between localities and functional departments, and excessive control by the Organization Department (Ibid.). Personal

connections and votes aside, performance with regard to key benchmarks set by the Party is still paramount.

Benchmarks

Officials are evaluated according to a range of criteria. Landry (2008, 82–85) highlights a China Urban Development Research Committee collection of 33 benchmarks used to rank cities. The indicators are broken into five categories: economic development, human capital, quality of life, environmental protection, and key infrastructure (Ibid., 83-84). But not all indicators are equal. Some are formally designated “one vote vetoes” (*yi piao foujue*), meaning failure on these items cancels out any other achievements by an official. Based on a survey of township and village cadres administered over three years, Liu, Hou, and Tao (2013, 92) find that, in terms of “veto” policies, “family planning, comprehensive management of social security and workplace safety all rank top three in the three years without any change in their rank over these years.”

However, in general, officials deem economic targets to be especially important (but see Shih, Adolph, and Liu 2012). Those surveyed by Liu, Hou, and Tao (2013) consistently rank investment as their most critical goals. Lü and Landry (2014) find that greater competition between officials (as measured by a “greater the number of officials accountable to the same principal”) yields more taxation. In a similar vein, G. Guo (2007) shows that fiscal performance, especially revenue collection, is significantly correlated with the probability of promotion. In part, this prioritization of economic targets may be a result of their relatively easy quantification (K. J. O’Brien and Li 1999). An overreliance on numbers is certainly a weak point in the system. Officials can simply fake their statistics: Wallace (2015) finds that official provincial

GDP figures and a less easily rigged measure of growth, electricity production, diverge in years featuring leadership turnover, suggesting that leaders “joke the stats” to win promotions.

Social Stability

Where does social stability fit into all this? Liu, Hou, and Tao (2013, 95) note that the reason veto items like “comprehensive management of social security, workplace safety, anti-corruption and cadre development” are present is likely because of the conflicts caused by “land acquisition, unclear village financial [accounts] and... disputes among village cadres.” More directly, the 2005 National Petition Regulation and a 2008 Party decision regarding “strengthening the implementation of integrated public security management,” among other documents, establish that if a major “social disturbance” occurs in a given jurisdiction, “the hierarchy of leaders responsible for that jurisdiction will all be subject to the ‘one veto rule,’” depriving “officials of bonuses, promotion, and the eligibility of the unit to compete for organizational honors” (Lee and Zhang 2013, 14853–54). Any accomplishments will be disregarded. Y. Wang and Minzner (2013, 352) write that officials face “increasingly tough career sanctions whenever outbreaks of citizen petitioning occur within their jurisdictions,” in particular (petitioning being the practice of aggrieved citizens skirting the legal system and bringing their complaints directly to Letters and Visits Offices, including the central offices in Beijing).³⁶ In an experiment, J. Chen, Pan, and Xu (2016) make online requests for social support to local governments, and they find that the requests that include a threat of collective action or of contacting officials’ superiors are more likely to receive meaningful responses. It is reasonable to assume that cadres seeking promotion feel substantial pressure to manage labor unrest effectively.

³⁶ On the other hand, high conflict numbers can be used to argue for more local “stability maintenance” funds (see again Lee and Zhang 2013). Acquiring such funds may, of course, affect cadre promotion, too.

Evidence from Interviews

My interviews reinforced the findings of the research cited above. They made clear that maintenance of social stability, including workplace stability, is closely linked to cadre promotion. Some people I spoke with described elaborate formal processes of evaluation. For instance, an official in Tianjin's labor bureau said to me:

“There's a city-level mediation group that will grade districts. The districts must report to it... Everyone takes this issue seriously (*zhongshi*). Why do officials care? Every year, the city will review their reports. The officials from different places will just have to sit there and not be able to say anything while the city notes where [he or she] has done well or badly. This puts a lot of pressure on people” (Interview 49).

A researcher at a government think tank in Nanjing emphasized this preoccupation with stability and relayed in detail how it plays out across different levels of government:

“The government is always concerned about stability. It is especially concerned around events like this summer's Youth Olympics. Or when there have been big protests in Guangdong, it pays careful attention, let alone when something happens nearby, like in Shanghai. It is afraid of things spreading. We write up risk assessments.

When really big things happen, reports must be made to the central government and they will respond... The central government will have certain topics every year that it wants paid attention to. We will send our reports on that straight to the central government. It grades reports, giving them good, medium, bad scores, etc.

It usually wants to give places a bit of face, so what it will do is say these two places did excellent work and say the third places did alright. That way it is clear that the third place needs to improve its report but it doesn't criticize that place directly” (Interview 37).

If the indirect criticism the researcher described sounds mild, the same person said to me at another point, “Officials are judged as much or more on stability as they are on economic development. It doesn't matter how much you grow the economy; if you have a lot of big incidents, that cancels out your economic achievements” (Interview 52). The “one vote veto”

with regard to unrest was also mentioned in my interview with a Jiangsu provincial labor bureau official (Interview 113). Although perhaps sometimes couched in polite terms, the pressure on cadres seems to be quite real.

Nuances Regarding Accountability

How officials *respond* to instability may be as important as how much instability occurs on their watch. In the words of a trade union leader at an SOE in Nanjing, “People know if you have had disputes. But disputes can happen anywhere, so officials are not blamed for having something happen in their area of responsibility. The question is how they react. If they are very cold (*leng jing*) about things and don’t seem to care, then this will be a problem” (Interview 27). (There may be a cut-off at which the scale of unrest in a given place outweighs official responses to it, but it is unclear where that cut-off lies.) Nor are grassroots cadres left entirely alone to handle unrest. When big decisions are made, central authorities are consulted. According to an instructor at the Central Party School, “Local officials only have authority to use a certain number of People’s Armed Police; beyond that number, they need central government permission. For a province a certain number; for a city, a certain number; and so on down” (Ibid.). At its best, then, the system gives officials a sympathetic hearing and relieves them of the biggest choices—but ensures that they are taking action.

Breakdowns of Accountability

The system of accountability for cadres in regard to stability management is imperfect. As in other countries, security efforts tend to stop at the edge of an official’s jurisdiction, and cross-jurisdiction coordination is weak. An activist in Shenzhen commented to me, “Mostly, they just don’t want you to cause problems in their area. When I left Shenzhen for Dongguan, the

Shenzhen people didn't care anymore what I did. There's a very strong district-level bias" (Interview 79). A policeman in Zhongshan confirmed this: "We don't usually cross boundaries. Whoever is responsible for an area handles problems in that area" (Group Discussion 61). This is obviously not always the case. The experiences of activists who are hounded from province to province (Interview 73) or whose family members in other parts of the country are visited by state security (Interviews 12, 78) speak to considerable harmonization of surveillance and intimidation. Yet, such harmonization may be exceptional.

More importantly, reporting to or access by higher levels of government can be blocked and blame shifted. Speaking again of the 2014 Dongguan shoe factory strike, a researcher from Beijing said:

"At first, the Dongguan authorities didn't think it was a big deal. In fact, they might have hoped the strike would push the factory on its way. They refused entrance to provincial-level officials, including from the trade union, demanding certain documents before they would receive them. Once higher level officials started to take the incident really seriously, though, Dongguan itself paid for police from neighboring cities and even from other provinces to come help—gave each a stipend, covered their housing, etc.... This was not coordinated by the province. They also brought out People's Armed Police, though they did not have permission for this." (Interview 23).

Furthermore, this kind of chaotic response may not always be punished if things seem to "turn out alright in the end" for authorities—or if a problem can be attributed to others. The same researcher said, "Dongguan was ultimately evaluated positively for its handling of the incident. They were hardline in their handling of things. For example, they followed the phones of all the workers. And they broke a lot of rules. Originally, the social security issue [which had sparked the strike] was partially their fault, as they'd given the company permission to not pay out; and

when workers were told about this, it made the situation even worse. But in the end, the authorities could blame NGOs” (Ibid.).

Finally, there can be strong temptations for cadres to “kick the can down the road,” which provides openings for aggrieved workers to act (showing, again, that there is some endogeneity in the protest-policy linkage). In the words of the Party School instructor quoted above, “How municipalities respond depends on the leader. Some just pay people off to settle things. Others know that this will encourage more protests and don’t want to pass on the problem to future leaders” (Interview 115). According to the former leader of the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Unions, “Chinese people are very good at using the opportunities provided by the government being so anxious about stability. *Beigong shiyong*—the government is like a drunk person who sees the reflection of a bow in his alcohol and thinks it’s a snake” (Interview 62). Thus, the cadre promotion system, and in particular its focus on social stability, creates unintended incentives for a range of actors.

Nonetheless, there are redundancies built into the system. For example, the Nanjing government researcher cited above explained to me, “When a particular big labor incident occurs, maybe everything should be handled through the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, as this is in its jurisdiction. But other departments... will go around it, and report directly up the chain. Departments report up to the provincial government when maybe the city or county government would prefer that things stay with it.... Our own research department often reports things directly to the provincial authorities, skipping levels” (Interview 37). It may be possible for an official to stay safely within his or her jurisdiction, temporarily block access by the central government, shift blame, pass problems on to other officials, and inadvertently encourage further unrest—but big incidents cannot be covered up entirely.

A Likely Conduit for Pressures

Despite its shortcomings, the cadre promotion system conveys workplace pressures up the state hierarchy, even if not always as its designers planned. When the system's signals are distorted, this, too, contributes to the evolution of governance. The belated and then heavy-handed response of Dongguan authorities to the 2014 shoe strike, for instance, added to a preexisting trend in the reaction of Guangdong's police to industrial issues more generally: reaction, not preemption. But when the system works smoothly, it is extremely effective at disciplining officials to the stability imperative handed down from Beijing. Cadres know that they must deliver harmony above all else or miss out on job opportunities—and they act accordingly.

However, if stability is always important, the incentives (or put differently, the menu of options) for officials are different in different places. A Jiangsu official will focus on maintaining the stability he or she already enjoys in his or her jurisdiction. In contrast, a Guangdong official's task is more complicated. They cannot snuff out every potential dispute before it develops. Instead, they must show grit and creativity in how they respond to their turbulent environment. Of course, innovation must still stay within certain bounds, and judging where those boundaries lie can be tricky. A mid-ranking trade union official in the PRD was disciplined (and may have furthermore hurt the careers of some of his associates) because he joined a study trip abroad organized by a labor NGO deemed an “enemy” by the government (Interview 55). Thus, the individual-level mechanism—the cadre promotion system—governing officials' response to unrest remains the same, but its results vary by field.

Findings and Remaining Issues

A close look at China's regional fields of labor politics generates insights as to the manner in which their respective governments react to labor unrest. A shared focus on stability normally serves a legitimizing function. But unrest flips this focus on its head. When worker protests rise, public security organs get worried. Because of the cadre promotion system, individual officials are held accountable for chaos in their jurisdictions. This responsibility rewards caution in more quiescent places like the YRD and experimentalism and crackdowns in places like the PRD.

Two issues remain to be examined: first, whether elite politics contribute to the regions' contrasts, and second, the degree to which the principle groups under study—workers, officials, and businesspeople—are learning from each other's experiences across regions. In the next chapter, I engage these questions.

7. Elites and Diffusion

In this chapter, I address two remaining issues: the role of political elites in Chinese labor politics and the diffusion of both protests and counter-measures against protests across China. Tackling these questions is important. First, as with the rest of my field theory-based investigation up to this point, it allows me to present a more holistic picture of how workers and the state interact than is allowed by simple, $A \rightarrow B$ causal reasoning. Second, it allows me to engage important existing and emerging strands in research on Chinese politics and comparative politics more generally. Elites have long been a focus of China studies, with scholars combing through everything from official photos (MacFarquhar 1971) to leaders' résumés (Shih, Shan, and Liu 2010) for insights into the “black box” of high-level decision-making. To date, the geographic diffusion of movements and state initiatives has received less attention in the Chinese context but diffusion dynamics are of increasing interest to a range of disciplines (more on this below). Third and most importantly, both of these issues have the potential to undermine my findings thus far. If the idiosyncratic priorities of particular regional leaders significantly influence both protest and policy, then I may have overestimated the impact of protest on policy in the preceding analysis. Conversely, the diffusion of protests and counter-measures against protests from hotspots of labor conflict to more quiescent areas could make regions appear more similar than they really are and generate an *underestimation* of the impact of protest.

Elites

The issue of elites has already been highlighted in this dissertation. In my statistical analysis in Chapter 2, I raised the possibility that national-level politics influenced the relationship between resistance and repression; specifically, the handover between the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping

administrations in 2012-2013 and the investigation of former public security czar Zhou Yongkang coincided with a switch from a positive to a negative correlation between strikes and police spending. Might individual, lower-level officials be responsible for much of the regional variation observed, both in terms of protests and policy? Officials could conceivably at once spur or dampen workers' propensity for unrest (by signaling through public gestures an opening or closing of local political opportunity structures, see Meng and Lu 2013) *and*, of course, direct government responses to unrest, confounding many of the arguments I have advanced up to this point. If elites are essential, we would expect powerful politicians, especially those with strong ideological reasons for intervening in industrial relations, to be associated with relatively consistent sets of policies with regard to labor wherever they reside (and spur or dampen labor unrest wherever they serve). If, instead, dynamics on the ground are decisive, then the same elites should behave differently in different places.

Diffusion

On the issue of diffusion, all of my analysis—quantitative and qualitative—has implicitly adopted the “stable unit treatment value assumption” (SUTVA). In controlled experiments, “SUTVA rules out ‘spillover effects’ that occur, for example, when treated individuals transmit the information contained in the treatment to the control group” (Sinclair, McConnell, and Green 2012, 1055). With regard to my series regressions of provincial data, as well as my field analysis of the YRD and PRD, this means that I have assumed that each province or region is independently “exposed” to the “treatment” of worker resistance. But China’s various subnational units are not hermetically sealed from each other: strikes clearly spread from area to area; so, too, do official initiatives aimed at preempting or containing contention. In fact, Fligstein (2001) identifies spillover between fields as a primary source of crisis in a given field.

Ignoring diffusion could obscure important dynamics of change.³⁷ If a general convergence between fields is underway, blurring regional differences, this could also, as noted, lead to an underestimation of the relationship between protest and policy. To the extent that learning between regions is demonstrated to exist, this suggests that contention in a given field can ripple outward, changing other places, through actors in those other places' efforts to emulate or avoid the dynamics taking place in the original hotspot.

Organization

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I address the issue of elites. Given the opacity of decision-making in China, this is a difficult topic to tackle in a systematic manner. I therefore use the example of the southwestern municipality of Chongqing and its successive Party Secretaries, Wang Yang and Bo Xilai, as a sort of plausibility probe for the idea that individual leaders are important. Chongqing is a dynamic city ripe for policy experimentation. And Wang and Bo, who for a period represented distinct ideological poles within the CCP and each had his own reasons for caring about worker issues, constitute “crucial” tests for any elite-centered analysis. I find, however, that even this combination of a propitious location and unique individuals did not result in much progress on workplace problems. The reason, I posit: labor unrest in Chongqing is only moderately high, below even the level of Jiangsu. Elites are thus likely more barometers or elastic parameters than drivers of subnational progress in industrial relations there. Then, in the second part of the chapter, I engage the problem of diffusion, drawing on a thinner set of interviews conducted in Chongqing, as well as Jiangsu, Guangdong, Hubei, Sichuan, and Beijing to provide tentative evidence that workers are

³⁷ If anything, diffusion should blur the differences between regions, making me *less* likely to find significant statistical correlations. In my qualitative work, diffusion should make it harder to set up clear contrasts between cases.

spreading protests via both relational and non-relational channels, while officials are “diffusion-proofing” via relational, non-relational, and mediated channels. This suggests that Guangdong’s influence is bigger than it might first appear. But it also, paradoxically, gives us reason to believe that the region’s conditions do not represent the future for the rest of the country. The effect of Guangdong is both amplified and refracted by actors in other fields.

Provincial Leaders in Labor Politics

My statistical analysis in Chapter 2 suggested that national-level elite politics affect the relationship between protest and policy. Specifically, it raised the possibility that the maneuverings of individual leaders and their associated bureaucracies affect how industrial contention is translated into state budget priorities. If confirmed, such a pattern would not be surprising. Soviet spending also tracked leadership succession cycles (Bunce 1980). But might this effect also be felt in regional fields? For instance, by expressing sympathy for labor’s claims or refusing to send in the police during a high-profile showdown, might local officials convey to workers that there is more leeway for dissent, thereby (intentionally or not) spurring increased unrest? Could Chinese labor politics then actually be elite politics “all the way down?” This issue can clearly become something of an analytical rabbit hole. Before exploring it further, it is therefore useful to carefully delineate a) which elites would provide the most leverage on the topic, b) under what circumstances these elites’ influence (or non-influence) would be most likely to be apparent, and c) what areas of the country would be considered the most ripe for elite legacy-building.

Provincial-Level Political Elites

Despite the façade of unified, centralized authority that the CCP strives assiduously to maintain, China has been described as practicing “decentralized authoritarianism” (Landry 2008) or even “federalism, Chinese-style” (Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1995), with power spread out to subnational political elites. Provincial-level authorities, in particular, hold considerable power. Shirk (1993) thus argues that China’s market reforms were only possible because reformers incentivized regional chiefs. With the “soft centralization” of governance in the late 1990s, local bureaucracies were made more responsible to their functional administrative superiors and less responsible to local authorities—but this pattern broke down at the provincial level, as control of “personnel and budgetary resource allocations” simply became concentrated in provincial governments (Mertha 2005, 792). Today, as C. Li (2010, 2) writes, “China’s provincial leadership is both a training ground for national leadership and a battleground for various political forces.” Provincial Party Secretaries may try out innovative policies or initiate new levels of social control to make positive impressions in Beijing. It is thus reasonable to think that elites at this level would have the most obvious influence on Chinese labor politics in its various regional fields. They will therefore be my focus.

Ideologies of Political Elites

There are many possible bases for political elites to intervene in labor politics. Elites may, for example, serve the interests of particular bureaucracies. In this vein, Lampton (1987) analyzes bargaining between officials associated with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Animal Husbandry, the Electrical Power Bureau, and the Ministry of Water Conservancy in the lead-up to the construction of the Three Gorges Dam. Elites might also represent factions within the

Communist Party. Today, debate rages over the relative importance of factions like the “Princeling” sons and daughters of previous Party leaders, officials with backgrounds in the Communist Youth League (“the Youth League faction”), and the “Shanghai clique” connected to former Party Secretary Jiang Zemin (e.g., Fewsmith 2012; C. Li 2010; Shih, Adolph, and Liu 2012). But bureaucratic and factional affiliations lend themselves more to post-hoc explanations for elite behavior than consistent predictions. For example, how does an official with experience in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security *and* the Public Security Bureau behave? And what will a former Youth League official’s position be on collective bargaining? A more workable place to start is arguably individual officials’ ideological predilections. These predilections are typically unclear. But when they *are* obvious, if indeed elites and not local dynamics are essential to the evolution of labor politics, one would expect certain policies to be enacted by certain officials with certain ideologies—and, perhaps, certain levels of protest to also *follow*—irrespective of where those officials are posted.

Chongqing on the Cutting Edge

Chongqing offers a useful vantage point for evaluating the precise impact of subnational elite politics. The city is up and coming. Through the Mao era and early reform period, it remained a backward interior outpost devoted to weapons manufacturing and other state industries. But in 1997, as a part of the administrative reorganization necessitated by the Three Gorges dam construction downstream (and the millions of people the dam displaced), Chongqing and its vast surrounding rural areas were broken off from Sichuan Province and elevated to the same status as Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin. China’s leadership further made Chongqing a hub in their “Develop the West” and then “One Belt, One Road” initiatives (HKTDC 2016; Lai 2002). Major Taiwanese and foreign electronics firms have now established operations in Chongqing,

including Hewlett-Packard, Foxconn, Inventec, and Acer (HKTDC 2016), as have auto companies like Hyundai, Iveco, General Motors, Ford, and China's own Chang'an Automobile (S.-L. Wong 2016). The city has long been a source of migrant labor for other provinces, but it is becoming an important destination for migrants in its own right. For example, in a cafeteria near Chongqing's massive Foxconn facility, I spoke with workers from neighboring Hubei Province who had chosen to move further inland to work, rather than make the more traditional journey to the coast (Interview 110). As economic growth in the rest of China slowed to 6.9 percent in 2015, Chongqing's growth powered ahead at 11 percent (S.-L. Wong 2016)—the highest in the country for the second year in a row. A Chongqing arbitrator said to me, "There is a relatively high rate of disputes here, the most of the interior. If coastal areas represent the 'Himalayas' of disputes, then Chongqing and Sichuan are 'Mount Tai'" (Group Discussion 107). But as Figure 10 in Chapter 5 shows, being "Mount Tai" means falling behind not only Guangdong, but also Beijing, Shanghai, Fujian, Hainan, Shaanxi, Hubei, Ningxia, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu in strikes, protests, and riots per capita. In sum, the city is the kind of place where important officials are sent. If elites are crucial to Chinese labor politics, then Chongqing should be a site of considerable labor policy innovation and, maybe, dramatic clampdowns on labor activism. But if levels of industrial contention on the ground (i.e., problems for the government) are instead decisive, then Chongqing is not necessarily where you would expect important policies to be enacted, regardless of the leaders in charge.

Powerful Local Leaders

Two of the country's most influential politicians of the past two decades have led Chongqing: Wang Yang (from 2005 to 2007) and Bo Xilai (2007 to 2012). For a period, these men were understood to represent distinct ideological poles within the CCP: Wang, liberalism; Bo,

populism—or, as they themselves put it in their widely followed “cake debate,” “dividing the cake” (Bo) versus “making an even bigger cake” (Wang) (Cartier and Tomba 2012, 50–55). Contemporary Chinese liberalism combines two characteristics not associated with each other in today’s Europe or United States: first, a deep faith in markets and suspicion of an overbearing state, and second, a powerful concern for the welfare of “vulnerable groups” (Pan and Xu 2015; Tian and Wu 2007; C. Wang 2003, chap. 5). Thus, during his stint in Chongqing, the liberal Wang might be expected to have supported reforms that allowed workers to resolve their own problems, such as through collective bargaining with their employers or streamlined judicial procedures. Populist Bo, meanwhile, might be expected to have gone even further in supporting labor. The fiery Party Secretary was in close contact with many of the country’s New Left and Neo-Maoist intellectuals, who frequently express concern about the fate of the Chinese working class since Deng Xiaoping’s rollback of the planned economy (Fewsmith 2012; Freeman III and Wen 2011). And in his own speeches, Bo decried “the polarization of rich and poor” as a symptom of “the backward culture of slave owners, feudal lords and capitalists” (Yuezhi Zhao 2012, 7). When he was ultimately brought down in a scandal involving allegations of corruption and murder, Bo’s supporters saw this as a “coup” directed by the wealthy (Ibid.). Bo, was also known for a brutal streak. In particular, he was accused of running roughshod over civil liberties during a crackdown on organized crime he led (W. He 2011). One can easily imagine that Bo would have clamped down hard on labor civil society groups as threats of a traditional sort (“bourgeois liberalization”), even as he supported workers in other ways. Yet, a close analysis reveals that neither Wang nor Bo chose to initiate significant overhauls of Chongqing’s workplaces, whether in the form of repression or responsiveness to worker concerns.

Wang Yang

True to his reputation, Wang Yang was a liberal reformer when he was in charge of Chongqing. He drew national attention by negotiating a peaceful settlement to a high-profile standoff between developers and a “nail house” homeowner who had held out against demolition for three years (Fong 2007). Such property conflicts are common in China, especially in places with breakneck growth like Chongqing. In addition, Wang made waves by issuing a circular on media reform that pushed state news outlets “to prioritize reports according to the importance of news events rather than to the ranking of the officials concerned,” which had the result of shifting local reporting to grassroots social issues, including the lives of migrant workers (Ibid.). In a prominent speech, he called for “liberating thought” (*jiefang sixiang*)—a phrase associated with Deng Xiaoping and the reformer Hu Yaobang—and vigorously supported a strong private sector (Chongqing Daily 2007). In terms of more thoroughgoing changes, Wang worked to break down the distinctions between Chongqing residents with rural and urban household registration, a policy carried on by Bo Xilai after him (Jin 2007). In 2007, Wang declared that by 2012, there would only be one form of household registration in the city, namely a “Chongqing resident registration” (*Chongqing jumin hukou*), and that this change would help migrant workers with “employment, training, settlement, their children’s education, and other difficulties” (Ibid.). (He subsequently engaged in similar, if perhaps less far-ranging initiatives on the urban-rural divide while in charge of Guangdong). Many of these policies doubtless directly or indirectly affected the city’s workplace relations.

However, Wang Yang did not choose to concentrate on labor policy *per se* in Chongqing. No important workplace regulations were passed during his tenure. Nor did he launch any major rounds of repression against labor activists. A prominent local labor lawyer said to me, “Wang

Yang was only here a short time. His main thing was opposing bureaucratism” (Interview 141). A Chongqing-based academic agreed that little changed in terms of industrial relations under Wang, commenting, “It was more or less the same under Wang Yang and Bo Xilai. Wang Yang focused work on migrants and pulling together the city and countryside. But Wang Yang was only in power a short bit” (Interview 138). Wang’s speeches to municipal trade unions were anodyne and focused on things like, again, bridging the rural-urban divide (G. Li 2006). The final municipal trade union congress he presided over called for the construction of a harmonious city and basic legal rights protection work (Chongqing Federation of Trade Unions 2007). If not labor laws or union programming, then the registration of labor civil society groups might seem to be a likely area for a breakthrough under someone with Wang’s outlook. However, a local NGO leader commented to me, “Chongqing was the same under Wang Yang and Bo Xilai. There was no change” (Interview 111). The activist added, “It was only last year that Chongqing allowed NGOs to register directly with the government without a sponsoring department. In Chengdu, you could register directly a long time ago” (Ibid.). In other words, Wang was a reformer, just not a workplace reformer; he was a liberal, just not a liberal concerned with labor issues, in particular—at least not while he was in charge of Chongqing.

In contrast, when Wang Yang was subsequently made Party Secretary of Guangdong, from 2007 to 2012 (when Bo Xilai took over the reins in Chongqing), he oversaw significant changes to PRD industrial relations. During his reign in the south, the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Harmonious Labor Relations Regulations were passed and the Guangdong’s abortive Regulations on the Democratic Management of Enterprises were discussed. A Beijing-based academic explained to me that while in charge of the PRD, “Wang Yang would observe how things developed first and only afterward decide how to react. If there were leaders among the

workers, Wang Yang saw this as a good thing, as there was thus a way to negotiate a solution to the conflict” (Interview 74). Thus, under his watch, the police did not intervene in the 2010 Nanhai Honda strike and, after initial missteps by the relevant municipal-level trade union, he allowed the Guangdong Federation of Trade Unions to take charge and organize direct elections for enterprise-level union leaders (C. K.-C. Chan and Hui 2013; Meng and Lu 2013). This kicked off a wave of union elections across the PRD that continues today. Wang also adopted a different approach to Guangdong NGOs than his successor, Hu Chunhua, encouraging organizations to take over certain government services and, unlike in Chongqing, lowering their barriers to registration (Simon 2011a, 2011b).³⁸ A number of labor NGOs even received state funding, although a crackdown—then the most intensive to date—was launched against the groups during the last year of Wang’s term (Franceschini 2012). Wang Yang’s ideology clearly did not change between Chongqing and Guangdong, but his policy focus did. Guangdong was deemed ripe for labor reform (and repression); Chongqing was not.

Bo Xilai

Bo Xilai’s rule in Chongqing was widely viewed as pro-worker. Even a labor lawyer who served as counsel to one of the alleged mafia leaders targeted in Bo’s crime crackdown said to me appreciatively, “Bo Xilai was better for labor relations. You can’t say because he broke the law we must therefore deny everything he did. Yes, he broke the law and no one is above the law. But he did a lot that was good for labor” (Interview 141). Chongqing taxi drivers I interviewed were uniformly nostalgic for the Bo years. One typical response to my questions about the former Party Secretary: “Things were better then. Things were better in all respects”

³⁸ In fact, the rule changes regarding NGO registration in Chengdu noted in Interview 111 and cited above followed on Wang Yang’s reforms in Guangdong.

(Interview 123). Or in the words of another driver: “Everyone says things were better under Bo. If he had become the top leader and not been taken out by Xi Jinping, things would be much better [now]” (Interview 126). Yet another remarked, “There are no good leaders. They are all corrupt. If there’s a good leader, the others will knock him down” (Interview 131). When I pressed this driver for an example of such a “good leader,” he responded quickly, “Need one say? Bo Xilai” (Ibid.). Did this mean that workers were encouraged to challenge their bosses during Bo’s time in power? A driver who helped organize the city’s massive 2008 taxi strike denied this in 2011, saying to me, “The decision to strike didn’t have anything to do with Bo Xilai and people’s opinion of him. The drivers would have struck no matter what, no matter who was secretary. This was about the masses’ interests” (CQ TX #12). Indeed, the number of Chongqing incidents in *China Strikes* dataset did not increase during Bo’s any more than under his predecessors or successors. But what precise labor policies did he enact?

Like Wang Yang before him, Bo Xilai pushed initiatives that indirectly impacted the city’s workplaces. Bo tried to permanently integrate large numbers of migrant workers by fairly compensating them for giving up their rural land (again, an extension of Wang’s efforts) and, in a revival of the Mao-era “mass line,” forced officials to spend time among the masses (S. Wang 2011). He engaged in a massive round of public housing construction and bolstered state industries alongside the private sector, providing more stable jobs (Zhiyuan Cui 2011). Bo also made several dramatic, one-off interventions on behalf of workers. For example, he provided free meals to 1.3 million left behind children of migrants (J. Chan 2012). In May 2011, in an unprecedented move, a city SWAT team was dispatched to recover protesting construction workers’ wage arrears and confront thugs hired to intimidate them (Fauna 2011). Most famously, in 2008, when the city’s taxi drivers went on strike, Bo negotiated on live television

with putative representatives of the drivers, promising improved conditions. This contrasted with the reactions of leaders in some other cities experiencing taxi strikes that year. In Xining in remote Qinghai Province, for example, authorities arrested 11 cabbies they claimed had “organized a plot, agitated people to cause trouble, instigated people to petition, and... maliciously caused a ruckus” (China Labour Bulletin 2009a). (It should be noted, though, that during his organized crime crackdown, Bo later arrested an individual who had played a prominent role in the strike, see Interview 128). But what of labor laws, specifically?

In terms of the staples of industrial relations policy—rules on the working conditions or the resolution of conflicts or trade union reforms—just as with Wang Yang, little changed in Chongqing under Bo Xilai’s leadership. One of the most important labor laws passed in the city in recent years was the Chongqing City Employee Rights Guarantee Regulations, which a local labor bureau leader described to me as a “relatively big deal, a substantive law... [that] put restrictions on labor dispatch companies before the national Labor Contract Law was passed” (Interview 112). Another significant piece of legislation was the (procedural, not substantive) Chongqing City Labor Guarantee Inspection Regulations, which “clarified the division of responsibilities with regard to handling cases [and] set standards for levying fines” (Ibid.). These two laws were enacted in 2003 and 2014, respectively, before and after both Bo and Wang’s tenures (and neither law diverged dramatically from countrywide trends). Meanwhile, in the cab sector, where change would perhaps be the most probable, not much concrete actually came out of the 2008 negotiations. A taxi activist who played a central role in the strike said, “Bo Xilai raised a number of good ideas—such as for [the establishment of] a cab drivers’ union and lowering cab fees paid to—but these were not implemented” (Interview 140). Drivers, too, said little had changed for them (e.g., Interviews 119, 124). Interestingly, this lack of action extended

to repression. Chongqing labor NGO leaders may not have been able to register easily during either Wang or Bo's tenure, but when I visited the city at the height of Bo's power, they seemed relatively unmolested, contrary to liberal critiques of his rule, whereas the groups were afraid to even meet with me two and a half years after his fall. Neither repression nor responsiveness was particularly marked for labor under either politician.

Average Chongqing

Chongqing and its leaders arguably constitute a “most likely” or “crucial” case for the influence of elite politics on Chinese labor politics (on “crucial cases,” see Gerring 2008). If particular personalities and their ideologies are key to where policy change occurs, then *if any* city and politicians could be said to be *especially likely* to engage in wholesale reforms of labor institutions or large-scale crackdowns, they would have to be Chongqing, Wang Yang, and Bo Xilai. Yet, aside from some one-off interventions and policies that were indirectly beneficial to workers, little occurred with regard to industrial relations innovation in the municipality from 2005 to 2012. Summarizing labor programming in Chongqing across its different administrations—Bo's, Wang's, and others'—one local academic said, “There have been no real distinctive local policies enacted that I can think of, no real breakthroughs, especially compared to Guangdong. For example, Guangdong recently passed the—what's it called?—‘collective consultation regulations’ or whatever. Chongqing might try out some new things, but they are usually not theoretically innovative like that” (Interview 108). Said another academic, “Chongqing doesn't have the courage to pass a right to strike, but maybe Shenzhen will have the courage” (Interview 139). Yet another: “There's nothing very unusual about local legislation here. Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong are representative [of where labor policy is right now]—not Chongqing” (Interview 138). In other words, in terms of workplace governance,

despite the presence of such powerful personalities at its helm, Chongqing resembles regions like Jiangsu or Tianjin. It is a dynamic city, just not in its labor policymaking.

Political Elites as Barometers More than Drivers of Regional Labor Politics

All this suggests not so much that political elites are unimportant as that they are barometers more than drivers of regional labor politics. Local Chinese leaders may increasingly act as “policy entrepreneurs” (Mertha 2008). But different popular pressures in different places create different opportunities for entrepreneurship. Where worker resistance is intense and labor NGOs developed, labor issues rise to the top of a Party Secretary’s agenda—both as a challenge in need of addressing and as a chance to make his or her mark. Guangdong’s PRD is such a place. Where workplaces are less contentious, other issues dominate and labor policy develops more or less as elsewhere, regardless of the ideological orientations of leaders. Chongqing is such a place. Thus, while in Chongqing, Wang Yang focused on issues like housing rights and media freedom; in Guangdong, he turned his attention to labor reforms and civil society. Dramatic interventions aside, the populist Bo Xilai, too, did little to change workplace fundamentals while in Chongqing. Instead, like Wang, he focused on more general issues of integrating the city’s rural and urban areas, as well as building social housing and fighting official corruption and crime. At most, leaders therefore amplify dynamics in their fields or put a weak outer bound on how much things can change (i.e., act as an elastic parameter) or determine the balance between responsiveness and repression. Thus, under both Wang Yang and his successor as Party Secretary of Guangdong, Hu Chunhua, trade unions experimented with direct elections and labor NGOs were harassment. But the balance of emphasis was different: there were more reforms under Wang and more crackdowns under Hu. Knowing something about the ideology of a leader

in a given place can help us understand the evolution of governance in that place, but leaders do not fundamentally confound the relationship between protest and policy.

Diffusion of Protests and Counter-Measures Against Protests

The second issue dealt with in this chapter is diffusion. In recent decades, this issue has become a topic of increased interest in political science, sociology, and organizational studies.

Accordingly, the concept has been defined a number of ways. Elkins and Simmons (2005), for example, define it as “clustered decision-making” marked by “uncoordinated interdependence,” while Strang and Soule (1998, 265) write simply, “Diffusion refers to the spread of something within a social system.” If we adopt a wide view of the different forms that “social systems” can take, then that spreading “something” is an innovation of some sort: innovation in broad governance trends like democracy and neoliberalism (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2008), in specific government policies (e.g., Elkins and Simmons 2005; Shipan and Volden 2008; Tolbert and Zucker 1983), in corporate management techniques (Strang and Soule 1998), in social movement repertoires (e.g., Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010; Tarrow 2005), in revolutions (e.g., Beissinger 2002; Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Weyland 2009), or civil wars (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008). My interest here is in both innovations in protests and counter-measures against protests. Attention to how these two things diffuse across China has the potential to reveal patterns in the development of Chinese labor politics that are obscured by the model of pressure-response in isolated regional fields that I have implicitly employed up to this point. It can also give us a sense of the full magnitude of the impact of unrest in hotspots of contention like Guangdong.

Mechanisms

If diffusion itself is subject to a range of definitions, then the mechanisms by which diffusion has been said to operate are legion. Strang and Soule (1998) provide a long list: mass media, change agents, cohesion through strong ties, news through weak ties, competition, prestige, spatial proximity, cultural categories. In his study of the 1848 wave of revolutions in Europe and Latin America, Weyland (2009) identifies four mechanisms, each lodged in a different theoretical tradition: external pressure (realism), rational learning (rational choice), normative promotion (constructivism), and inferential heuristics (cognitive psychology). Tarrow (2005, chap. 6) and Givan, Roberts, and Soule (2010) focus on relational, non-relational, and mediated (or brokered) channels of diffusion. Beissinger's (2002, 17) account of nationalist protests during the fall of the Soviet Union usefully emphasizes how the "clustering and linkage of contentious events themselves can provide a structure like patterning of action that can gain a particular weight and alter expectations about the possibilities for future action, thereby facilitating further agency." Here, I focus on specific forms of both purposive and accidental diffusion: the relational (purposive), non-relational (accidental), and mediated (purposive again) mechanisms of diffusion highlighted by Tarrow and Givans, Roberts, and Soule. I first address relational and non-relational diffusion of protests in China, then relational, non-relational, and mediated diffusion of counter-measures against protests.

Relational and Non-Relational Diffusion of Protests

The most straightforward manner in which protest tactics can spread in China is through individuals personally bringing their experiences with them from one setting to another and sharing these experiences with their new co-workers, i.e. relational diffusion. Although the

prevailing image of Chinese labor activism is (correctly) one of “cellular” contention (e.g., E. Friedman and Lee 2010; Lee 2007), Pun, C.K.-C. Chan, and J. Chan (2010) and C.K.-C. Chan and Pun (2009) all provide examples of cross-factory mobilization. In one instance related by Chan Chris King-Chi and Pun (2009), a march to a government office by workers from a single factory drew in workers from other factories; in another instance highlighted by the same scholars, workers were transferred to another location by their employer and then organized a protest across their former and current places of employment. Leung (2015), meanwhile, has documented how strike leaders drift between jewel factories in the Pearl River Delta, sharing their experiences of struggles with co-workers, while being hounded by bosses and authorities, who compile blacklists of troublemakers. In my interviews with workers who acted as plaintiffs in work injury cases, I found lively circles of people sharing advice about pursuing claims; these circles were sparked by the work of a specific labor NGO, but the workers had clearly grown beyond its guidance (Interviews 99, 100). Activist skills are being passed on and refined.

As capital and workers alike move inland and away from places like the PRD, the “social skills” of organizing ought to move inland, too.³⁹ I met with a group of women in Nanchong who had previously been migrants in Guangdong and who shared stories of their activism on the coast, while expressing a determination to stand up for themselves again if necessary. One woman said, “Once, a boss seemed like he was going to delay payment. We said that we would strike if he did, so he backed off!” (Group Interview 114). Said another: “I helped block a road once. The factory had gone bankrupt. In the end, the labor bureau paid us.... They paid *everything*” (Ibid.). The same worker continued, “We will definitely use what we learned away from home. We learned how to bring a case to the labor bureau. Now, we will definitely take action if we’re

³⁹ This echoes Silver’s (2003) argument that unrest follows particular sectors as they relocate around the world.

not paid. We will say, ‘If you pay up, we won’t block roads’” (Ibid.). The extent to which returned workers are actually emerging as activists in the interior—rather than just threatening to do so—is unclear. But there are intriguing clues that this is occurring to at least some degree. For example, when workers at a Foxconn facility in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province rioted, it emerged that many of the employees had been transferred there from Shenzhen (Mozur 2012).

In addition, protest appears to diffuse non-relationally. In interviews with me, taxi drivers, in particular, frequently showed considerable knowledge of strikes in other cities. Said one driver in Chongqing: “There was a taxi action Beijing this year, though it wasn’t exactly a strike. At the peak time for cabs, around 7 to 8am, drivers all ate breakfast. They said it wasn’t a strike—they were just eating breakfast. What could the government do?” (Interview 132). Another said, “There are lots of strikes around the country. Didn’t Chongqing just have a strike? Nanjing, too, right?” (Interview 118). Yet another commented, “Guiyang, Chengdu, and one of the northeastern cities, I think Shenyang or somewhere, all have gone on strike recently” (Interview 126). Another: “There was a strike on January 11 in Jinan, then one on January 13-14 in Chengdu” (Interview 128). In Nanjing, a driver commented, “I’ve heard of some... taxi strikes abroad. I pay attention to strikes in other cities here, too. Recently, there was a strike in a little township outside Nanjing” (Interview 90). High-profile factory strikes capture attention outside of their regions, too. The 2010 Honda strike, for example, inspired copycat actions as far away as Tianjin, where Toyota workers downed their tools.

In a grey area between relational/purposive and non-relational/accidental diffusion, social media platforms, radios, and texting appear to spread the news—both within and between regions. Striking factory workers frequently set up Weibo accounts advertising their cause (Interview 58). They tag each other, NGO leaders, and local media outlets in their posts to draw attention. A

plaintiff in a work injury lawsuit in Shenzhen: “Do you use Weibo? You should follow it, too. There’s lots of rights protection stuff there. I use it a lot” (Group Discussion 97). One leading cab activist in Chongqing blogs, maintains contact with national intellectuals online, and helps his coworkers learn to use the Internet (CQ TX #12). Asked how drivers had coordinated their demands during a recent strike, a Nanjing cabbie pointed to his smart phone and said, “Using this! We used software we downloaded” (Interview 88). Another driver in Nanjing: “We have a program we listen to about cab drivers’ issues... we... hear about taxi strikes in other parts of China” (Interview 91). Said a driver in Chongqing: “We taxi drivers have a QQ group. You can look it up on Baidu” (Interview 126). Websites like Workers Forum (*Gongren Luntan*) collect tales and pictures of industrial actions.

Technology is unsurprisingly a double-edged sword. Its benefits for workers are clear. In addition to providing access to information, the Internet can empower people by informing them that others are watching their strikes from afar. A driver in Xianning, Hubei, which had had a massive taxi strike lasting over a month, remarked to me about the local government in 2011, “They wanted to ‘kill the chicken to frighten the monkey.’ [But] the news was put online and now the whole world knows that Xianning’s drivers challenged the government” (XN TX #1). Said another driver proudly, “The whole country has heard of the Xianning strike!” (XN #11). But relatively unsecured platforms pose a danger. Online organizers were arrested in Nanjing when drivers went on strike there in early 2015 (Interview 90) and preemptively detained in Chongqing before drivers could strike around the same time (Interviews 15, 17). A staffer with a Hong Kong labor advocacy group said that people who had been picked up by police had been shown evidence of their communications while in custody (Interview 58). Perhaps out of such security concerns, there is little *mediated* diffusion from city to city and even less from city to

countryside (for a conversation with an activist whose work is an exception, see Interview 73). More fundamentally, there has been very little “scale-shift” in workers’ activism, i.e., no directing of claims at the central government (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010; Tarrow 2005). Technology does not break down all barriers and may create some new ones.

Relational, Non-Relational, and Mediated Diffusion of Counter-Measures Against Protests

On the other end of the equation, much attention has been paid in academic literature to *policy* diffusion. Elkins and Simmons (2005) distinguish between “adaptation” and “learning” by local governments. Shipan and Volden (2008) contrast “learning” and “competition.” Tolbert and Zucker (1983) highlight how, after an initial, experimental phase, late-adopting officials embrace certain policies because those policies have become the only “legitimate” solution to a problem. All of these mechanisms can be observed in Chinese labor policy. Local authorities must sometimes *adapt* to the impact of unrest or improved conditions in other areas. For example, an Anhui union staffer said to me that when wages rose in Suzhou in Jiangsu, workers in her area “felt the gap and went on strike,” leading her government to in turn improve earnings (Group Discussion 38). She concluded, “Neighboring places have a big influence” (Ibid.). Some governments may also use labor policy to actively *compete* with each other for investment, engaging in a race to the bottom through lax enforcement. A Shenzhen union official, for instance, criticized neighboring Dongguan for undercutting his city, remarking, “Dongguan is just like that; it has a small township mentality about these things” (Interview 101). National documents, like the recent Harmonious Labor Relations guidelines promulgated by the CCP and State Council, finally, may also make particular innovations the only *legitimate* course of action.

But “learning”—systematically studying the example of other regions in an effort to formulate more effective policies—is at least as common of a diffusion mechanism.

In the context of Chinese labor politics, the end goal of policy “learning” is typically preempting protests or what Koesel and Bunce (2013) call “diffusion-proofing.” “Diffusion-proofing” has been observed at the international level, where authoritarian states like Russia and China engage in policies to stop the diffusion of unwanted politics and policies and study one another’s handling of protests (Ibid.). At the sub-national level, Gibson (2005) has shown how authoritarian regions within democratic polities (e.g., Mexico’s Oaxaca and the U.S. South) exercise “boundary control” to prevent national dynamics from unseating local hierarchies. In China, “diffusion-proofing” operates as a rough inverse of Gibson’s “boundary control”: the vast areas of the country with less dynamic working class activism and less open civil societies act to keep the contagion contained in hot spots. The central state occasionally raises up certain experiments as “models” for emulation (Heilmann 2008). However, the ultimate purpose remains a conservative one: restricting the spread of unrest, not making governance more humane or rational for its own sake. Authorities are “learning” ways to avoid being put in the position of having to enact more serious reforms.

Practically, such “learning” can occur several ways. First, authorities can meet directly (relational diffusion). This may entail officials from hot spots visiting other officials to pass on advice. For example, the Shenzhen union leader cited above said, “I travel about a lot. I just got back at 1:00am the other night from Hunan. They are eager to learn from our experience there” (Interview 101). A former Guangzhou union official similarly remarked, “The Shandong union invited me to speak recently, as did another northern union federation. They want to learn from our experience” (Interview 62). Relational diffusion can also occur between moderate-unrest

areas. For example, a labor arbitrator in Chongqing said, “Beginning in 2012, we have had a program of constructing ‘harmonious enterprises’ Jiangsu did this first. We were the second. We sent a delegation to Jiangsu, then started things here” (Group Discussion 107). Finally, it can mean meeting with authorities outside of Mainland China. Both a Chongqing labor bureau officer and the Guangzhou union official just quoted spoke of sending groups of staffers for study trips to Hong Kong (Interview 112, 62). Union delegations travel frequently to Canada, Germany, and even the United States, where few unions formally recognize the ACFTU.

Second and probably more commonly, regions can study each other’s experiences from afar and plan accordingly (non-relational diffusion).⁴⁰ Thus, government researchers in Jiangsu I spoke with showed they were closely observing the role of labor NGOs in Guangdong, and one researcher said he was examining what characteristics of civil society groups there were most likely to result in confrontation with the state (Group Discussions 51-54). Third and finally, officials can be brought together and taught by central government trainers (mediated or brokered diffusion). An instructor at the Central Party School explained to me:

“Usually, at the Party School, they conduct trainings on a single case. For example, recently, they’ve been focusing on the Wukan incident [a conflict over land and corruption in Guangdong]. Legal experts will discuss the case’s legal aspects, etc. They analyze what was done well, what went wrong, with a focus on prevention. A lot of the cases have been environmental recently—the PX [paraxylene] plants, disputes over water pollution, etc.—not so much labor. People who come to receive training are from the provincial level, but also sometimes the county level” (Interview 23).

Shambaugh (2008, chap. 7) has documented the growth of such instruction. However, the training is not restricted to CCP organs. For example, a professor at Beijing’s China Institute of Industrial Relations explained that every year, every prefecture-level city must send their trade

⁴⁰ This is similar to how Chinese officials have carefully studied the revolutionary downfall of regimes abroad.

union Chairman / Chairwoman and Executive Vice Chairman / Chairwoman for trainings at the Institute. These gatherings facilitate skill sharing.

Regardless of the diffusion channel, however, the goal is at heart, again, always “diffusion-proofing.” A Shenzhen-based corporate social responsibility officer observed, “The logic in Zhejiang and Jiangsu is: if there are strikes in Guangdong, then this shows there are problems with management in Guangdong. People [in the north] don’t see worker voice as something to strive for” (Interview 67). Indeed, A Jiangsu labor bureau officer said, “So, regarding Guangdong’s issues... I can’t say they definitely won’t crop up here. But we do a lot to prevent them from occurring. If one day we come to have the same problems as they do, this shows we have not done our work well” (Interview 113). This kind of preemption has an important impact on the trajectory Chinese labor politics. Paradoxically, it means both that places like the PRD have an outsized impact—everywhere else is actively studying them and reacting to their dynamics—and that other regions are not necessarily converging with them in a linear manner.

Long-Term Implications

It is common in China to debate whether “Guangdong’s today is the tomorrow of other places.” For example, at a Beijing conference, an official from the national Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security declared, “It is not necessarily the case that Guangdong’s today is the tomorrow of other places. Different places in China are different.... If we make our goals too high, we may depart from Chinese culture” (Group Discussion 6). Asked if Jiangsu would become more like Guangdong in the future, a pair of local researchers responded, “Maybe, but Jiangsu and Chengdu and elsewhere can learn from others, leapfrog over them.... maybe there will be a convergence, ultimately, between the Guangdong and Jiangsu models” (Group

Discussion 53). Meanwhile, a Shenzhen labor lawyer said, “Guangdong can’t go back to being like the YRD, with everyone trusting the government, while the YRD *could* become more like Guangdong” (Interview 64). A labor NGO leader in Shenzhen, went further still:

“The difference between the YRD and PRD is just a question of time. In a few years, the YRD will be like the PRD. If you go and talk about ‘strikes’ in the YRD, people get afraid. Here [in the PRD], strikes are already normal. My organization used to be concerned about being too prominent in strikes, now I drive my van up to them. It’s become routine! But in the past, even if you pointed out to people that they had stopped production, they would say, ‘We’re not striking, we’re just using the law to protect our rights.’ In the future, it will be like this in the YRD, too” (Interview 79).

It is beyond this dissertation to adjudicate between these predictions. What can be said is that if the Pearl River Delta represents the logical extreme of today’s trends of worker resistance and state responsiveness and repression, then there is likely no linear path for most areas of China toward that extreme. Even as protests spread outward, “diffusion-proofing” ensures that it will, at the least, be some time before “Guangdong’s today” becomes “other places’ tomorrow.” In other words, the PRD has more of an impact than is apparent when regions are treated as fully independent observations. But that impact is distorted. Elites matter less than it might first appear but diffusion is important and its effects complex.

8. Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the impact of worker unrest in authoritarian countries, where some of today's most vibrant labor activism is occurring. I have used an intensive analysis of the case of China and its internal variation to assess the plausibility of an argument: that autocracies, especially state socialist and post-socialist ones, tend to react to worker resistance in a dual manner—repressive and responsive—because of their vulnerability to cascades of public dissent, their lack of effective institutions for channeling conflict, and, in the case of state socialist and post-socialist governments, their more transparent unity of economic and political power, hollow trade unions, and pro-worker founding ideologies. This is doubly true if such regimes are faced with a proto-movement only, lacking movement leaders and consistent demands, as authorities cannot be sure what will succeed in demobilizing labor. Opting for “all of the above” provides an insurance policy in the case that any individual approach fails. Using a decade's worth of statistics I have collected on strikes, protests, and riots by workers, along with official data, I have shown that, in line with this argument, the Chinese state's reaction to rising labor unrest has, on average, been to spend more on the police (repression) but also to rule more in workers' favor in formally adjudicated employment disputes (responsiveness).

To check the validity of the statistical measures I used, to try to capture the full interplay of social forces in China's workplaces, and to trace the mechanisms linking protest and policy, I have then conducted in-depth case studies at a lower level of analysis. I have conceptualized the field of Chinese labor politics—itsself rightly understood as a subfield of Chinese politics more generally—as divided into regional fields. In two otherwise “most similar” fields, Jiangsu's portion of the Yangtze River Delta and Guangdong's portion of the Pearl River Delta, I have observed sharply different patterns of governance: preemption, caution, and nudging, in the

former; reaction, experimentalism, and crackdowns, in the latter. The roots of these contrasting practices lie in deep, structural variations between the regions not evident in superficial comparisons of GDP or FDI, including different sequences of growth, different types of manufacturers (light manufacturers versus high-tech firms), and different worker demographics (different percentages of migrant workers). However, I have argued that the most salient factors distinguishing the YRD and PRD are the militancy of the PRD's workers and the "social skills" of organizing they have gained through sustained conflict. In both regions, there is a feedback loop between protest and policy, but in the YRD, dynamics on the ground tend to reinforce a relatively harmonious equilibrium, while in the PRD, workplace conflict and state responses to it are driving the regional field into crisis. The national pattern of resistance leading to greater repression and responsiveness is thus borne out at a local level, but the interplay of social forces and their results are more complex than is obvious from statistical averages.

If there is a regime-level logic to the Chinese state's dual reaction to unrest, so there seems to be a similar logic driving the actions of local governments and local officials. All regional fields are ruled in accordance with the state's guiding norm of "stability maintenance." The YRD and PRD show little difference in this regard. However, to a greater degree than their YRD counterparts, protesting PRD workers have made a liability of the norm. Thus, I have shown that the divergence in instances of labor unrest between the YRD and PRD in the mid-2000s was accompanied by a corresponding divergence in concern about labor issues from the two regions' police apparatuses, as evidenced by commentary in the public security sections of local government yearbooks. By threatening social harmony, I have argued, labor activists threaten the promotion prospects of local officials. This, in turn, incentivizes a different approach to governance. In situations of calm, like the YRD, officials must avoid "rocking the boat" if they

are to advance their careers; in situations of turmoil, like the PRD, officials must show grit and creativity through, once again, a combination of repression and responsiveness.

Finally, I have addressed two remaining issues: the role of particular politicians and the diffusion of protests and counter-measures against protests. The former could lead us to overstate the impact of protest on police; the latter, to understate it. With regards to politicians, I have found that regional leaders may vary in their ideologies and willingness to enact thoroughgoing reforms (or crackdowns), but where they focus their attention is determined by dynamics on the ground. They react to the situation at hand rather than ignore or shape it. More labor unrest means more of a focus on labor issues; less unrest means that politicians direct their energies to other causes. Thus, individual leaders, while important, are not crucial to the very different trajectories of places like the PRD and YRD. Officials are mostly conduits for popular pressures. Regarding diffusion, I have provided some evidence that workers are indeed spreading protest tactics outward from the Guangdong, but officials elsewhere are also actively “diffusion-proofing” against the South’s turbulence. This means that hotspots of contention have an even bigger impact than is apparent when they are viewed in isolation. Yet, it also means that if China is, on average, becoming a more repressive and more responsive place for workers, it is not doing so in a linear manner. Instead, change comes in fits and starts, two steps forward and one step back, as actors in different places react to each other’s moves.

In this concluding chapter, I will explore the theoretical implications of these various findings for studies of social movement and proto-social movement outcomes and authoritarian state capacity. I will argue that the dissertation provides evidence that movements can have a powerful impact, even—or perhaps especially—in the absence of democratic institutions.

Furthermore, my research raises the possibility that unrest actually strengthens the state in at

least two respects: regulative capacity and responsive capacity. This dual strengthening is not necessarily contradictory, and it may even provide a partial explanation for the remarkable staying power of governments like China's. Yet, authorities who embark on the course described in this dissertation set themselves up for a constant spiral of encouraging popular demands for change and then having to contain those same demands or, at least, limiting their spillover effects. Building the state's regulative and responsive capacities alone is unlikely to yield long-term harmony, especially if a government's distributive capacity is not similarly increased. Beijing's approach to containing conflict may help it avoid (or postpone) regime collapse, but it is a recipe for chronic instability—and gradual, uneven, dialectical change.

Movement Outcomes

As noted in the dissertation's introduction, it is more common for scholars to analyze the origins of movements than their consequences, especially outside of democratic regimes (see, again, Amenta et al. 2010; Giugni 1998; Tarrow 2012, chap. 9). Making the case for a protest-policy linkage is difficult (again, Gamson 2009; Ritter and Conrad 2016; Tarrow 2012, chap. 9). In this dissertation, the impact of worker activism on governance (as opposed to governance on worker activism) was clearest in my statistical analysis. When my study shifted to the level of regional fields in Chinese labor politics, the feedback loops between state actions and labor actions—and state counter-actions and labor counter-actions—became obvious. Yet, it was also clear that change ultimately sprang from the ground up. As observed in the PRD, it was worker pressure, in the end, that made a liability of the state's commitment to stability and pushed officials to both increase their repression of labor and increase their shows of responsiveness to labor's concerns. Without the same level of pressure, the state did not evince the same creativity or aggression (as in the YRD). My analysis of the programs of two Chongqing politicians, Wang Yang and Bo

Xilai, further showed that individual leaders may vary in their general approaches to policymaking, but whether they focus on a particular issue over other issues ultimately comes down to grassroots dynamics. Autocratic regimes undoubtedly encourage particular patterns of contention, as documented by Tilly (2006) and others; more research should be devoted to how contention encourages particular patterns of regime behavior.

State Capacity

Are states strengthened or weakened by the dynamic of resistance, repression, and responsiveness I have documented? Almond and Powell (1966, chap. 7) conceptualize the capabilities of political systems as having five dimensions: extractive, regulative, distributive, symbolic, and responsive. In his study of post-war Southeast Asia, Slater (2010) argues that organized urban movements forced elites and nondemocratic governments in that region to pull together in protection pacts, yielding greater extractive capability (more taxes from elites) and more powerful militaries. The activism I studied is not as well organized as that examined by Slater. Chinese workers enjoy only the most rudimentary of institutions (small labor NGOs, native place associations, and circles of veteran strikers—no unions of their own). But by spurring a buildup of the police, even relatively uncoordinated worker activism can clearly increase a state's regulative capacity or the "system's exercise of control over behavior of individuals and groups" (Almond and Powell 1966, 196). This control should be understood to include both what Mann (1984) calls "despotic power" (the state's ability to arbitrarily dictate to civil society) and "infrastructural power" (its ability to "penetrate and centrally coordinate the activities of civil society through its own infrastructure"). Simultaneously, conflict bolsters the government's responsive capacity, understood as its ability to act on the inputs of a wide range of stakeholders (Almond and Powell 1966, 201-202). In the late 1990s, Chinese leader Jiang

Zemin pushed for the CCP to represent the “most advanced productive forces” and invited capitalists into the Party, while social scientists in government think tanks directed their attention to the needs of the new middle class at the expense of the workers and farmers they were at least nominally once charged with serving (Dickson 2003; M. Li 2008, 103–6). With increased protest, workers have not, of course, been invited back into the government’s narrow “real selectorate” or “winning coalition,” as theorized by de Mesquita et al. (2003)—if they were ever fully included in it—but authorities have become more solicitous of labor. This has, in turn, encouraged new expectations on the part of workers and thereby broadened the number of groups to whom authorities *feel compelled to respond* and, with time, the number of groups for whom the government *has developed a tested repertoire of responses*. The nimbleness required to balance the interests of multiple classes is a valuable skill for a state managing a diverse society, and this skill is rarely found in less advanced autocracies.

Complementarities and Contradictions

However, there are some complications associated with increases in state capacity of the sort experienced by China. The government's twin strengthening raises several questions. Are what Bourdieu (2008) describes as the punitive “right hand of the state” and welfare-oriented “left hand” fundamentally at odds? I submit that they are not necessarily. Repression can provide space for risk-free shows of responsiveness. Conversely, responsiveness can ameliorate the backlash caused by repression. As already noted, the two approaches act as insurance policies for each other: if one fails, the other can make up for it. The growing ability of governments like China’s to both demonstrate concern for popular grievances and yet erect some parameters on how far protesters can go in pressing their claims may provide a partial explanation for such governments’ surprising longevity, as suggested in various ways by scholars like X. Chen

(2012), Lorentzen (2013) and Lee and Zhang (2013). States that cannot grow in this manner, whether out of disinterest or a lack of adequate resources, such as Muammar Gaddafi's Libya or Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania, have met very different fates. At any rate, the formula seems sustainable for now.

But is this combination of regulative and responsive strengthening sufficient to *reduce* China's labor unrest in the long-term, not just keep it from boiling over? Here, I am doubtful for two reasons. First, managing the tangle of new expectations and fears generated by both cracking down and offering concessions is unlikely to be easy. Workers who are at once encouraged by concessions to present their demands to seemingly more solicitous authorities and are beaten and arrested when they do so can become increasingly disillusioned (as in the PRD). Second and more importantly, officials' threats and pro-labor tweaks may matter little if workers are not taking home more to their families, i.e., if the root causes of conflict on a broad scale are left unaddressed. Governments like China's have shown themselves unable or unwilling to make significant progress with regards to distributive capacity (if the self-employed are excluded, labor's share of Chinese GDP has fallen significantly over the past decades, see Qi 2014). Many democracies also fail in this regard (Picketty 2014, chap. 6). But post-socialist states are in a particular bind, given their past promises of economic justice, which could lead to a severe weakening of their symbolic capacity. As a consequence, authorities will likely continue to face challenges from below, even as the state strengthens. Concerning the Eastern European state socialist regimes in the decade preceding their collapse, Ekiert (1996, 20) writes, "Demobilization policies reshaped the relationship between the party-state elites and actors within society, and changed dominant political practices and political discourse. They also significantly influenced the political, economic, and social contradictions in decades that

followed.” As it tacks left and right in an attempt to return workers to the production line, the Chinese government appears to be changing its relationship to society in a similar manner.

What to Think of the Chinese State?

I have argued that the dissertation shows movements and proto-movements under authoritarianism to be more powerful than commonly thought. Bringing the discussion back to another theme from Chapter 1, how then should we evaluate the power of authoritarian states? Speaking only of China’s government, the dissertation leaves the distinct impression that the CCP’s grip on power is quite different from popular portrayals. The leadership compound, Zhongnanhai, is not about to be overrun by proletarian revolutionaries. As it encounters pushback against its policies, the state is shown to be continually updating its techniques—again, in multiple directions at once. The CCP is far from rigid. But neither is the Party a master-puppeteer, as recent scholarship has frequently implied. Authorities are dragged along by events on the ground. The government’s learning sometimes keeps pace with these events and sometimes does not. In the PRD, for example, the dissertation suggests that labor laws, trade union reforms, and policing are all a beat behind.

Areas for Further Research

This dissertation has explored trends in Chinese labor politics at both macro and micro levels. Nonetheless, it has left several important areas for further research. The first area is decidedly macro: a rigorous comparison of democratic and non-democratic states with regards to worker resistance, on the one hand, and government reactions to it, on the other. Although I articulate a broad, regime-level argument in Chapter 2, I only examine whether it plausibly explains one country, China. The International Institute of Social History of the Royal Netherlands Academy

of Arts and Sciences has launched a project called Global Hub Labour Conflicts to collect strike data from around the world. This project or another like it could make large-scale, cross-national analysis of worker-state interactions possible, with China treated as just one observation among many. The second area for further research, in contrast, is micro: a more intensive look at the precise process by which local officials evaluate and formulate responses to unrest. In particular, the Chinese police perspective on “stability maintenance” needs more detailed study. What sorts of tactics in protests make police most concerned? What do they report to (and hide from) other government agencies? Interviewing public security officials takes careful cultivation of personal connections in the force (Scoggins 2014), connections I was unable to establish during my fieldwork. The third area is extending my quantitative analysis of Chinese strikes, public security spending, and formally adjudicated dispute outcomes over a longer time span. The Global Hub Labour Conflicts dataset mentioned above is in the process of combining data from my own strike map and that of CLB for the years 2000 to 2015. When this collection is completed, I will have a better picture of long-term trends, including the relative importance of the anomalous relationship between protests and policing I noted in 2012 and 2013. As more county and township spending data becomes available online, it may be possible to also retest my findings at a lower level of analysis than provinces. Fourth, it would be useful to compare the outcomes of labor activism to those of other forms of contention in China, following in the footsteps of Cai (2010). As I noted in Chapter 2 with regards to rural conflict, protests in other fields are unlikely to confound my analysis (unless they are somehow correlated with both labor unrest *and* spending and judicial decisions). But comparisons across fields could sharpen our understanding of what is (and is not) unique with regards to the pressure that workers, in particular, bring to bear on authorities. Finally, as suggested at various points in the dissertation,

China's economy and society are changing. At the time of this writing, exports have slowed, a real estate bubble appears perennially on the verge of popping, and local government and corporate debt is on the rise. Workers' demands and tactics and authorities' capacity for coercion and compromise will likely evolve as a result. Whether the dynamics documented here continue remains to be seen.

The Iron House

Early twentieth century Chinese writer Lu Xun, in one of his darker moments, imagined society as “an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of suffocation,” and he wondered if he should wake these people and inform them of their situation even if it increased their suffering as they died (X. Lu 1972). This dissertation suggests that a less dismal analogy for contemporary China and for change under authoritarianism more generally might be a less sturdy structure, say, a tight canvas sheet.

If pressure is applied to a certain point on a sheet, it will stretch upward at that point, providing more room for everyone under it. But raising the canvas in that one place (Guangdong in my study) reduces the amount of slack available for other places (Jiangsu, Tianjin, Chongqing, etc.). As I have documented, responsiveness is matched with repression, and officials in quiescent areas react to the example of hotspots by studying the contention and undertaking preemptive measures. Activism generates its own limits, at least in the short term. Progress generally takes the form of wear and tear and loosening.

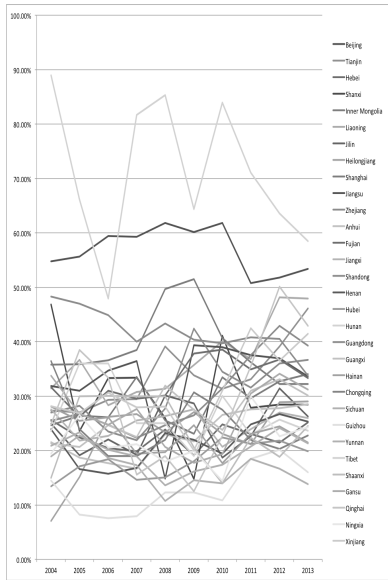
Lu Xun concluded his analogy with an unexpected note of hope, “But if a few awake, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house.” The push and pull of challengers can more easily tear holes in the flimsier structure I believe is more the reality. Authorities may continually

patch and buttress the structure—and perhaps expand it—where holes are made, but the accommodations the government makes to pressures from its occupants might ultimately prove structurally unsound. If so, a more fundamental overhaul will be in order.

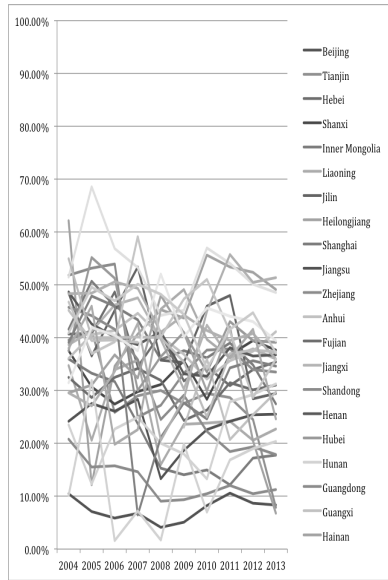
My goal here is not to provide a firm prediction about the ultimate fate of Chinese workers—or other labor movements under authoritarianism—but rather to show that political science has overlooked a dynamic, contradictory, and important process by only asking at any given moment: “Is the house still standing?” It has missed considerable grassroots dynamism and considerable change in the here and now. Scholars have underestimated the power of workers in non-democracies to alter their own conditions: for better, for worse, or for both.

Appendix 1: Types of Cases Brought to Mediation, Arbitration and Court 2004-2013

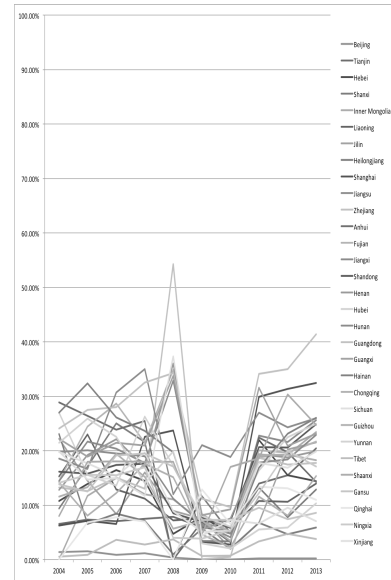
Remuneration



Insurance



Broken Contracts (Lay-Offs)



Note: In one instance, Guangxi in 2008, the number of cases recorded as featuring insurance issues exceeded the total number of “accepted cases.” This observation was dropped, as it likely reflected a reporting error.

Appendix 2a: Strikes and Policy Outcomes 2004-2011 Panel Fixed Effects Model

	<u>Judicial Decisions</u>				<u>Judicial Decisions</u>			
	<u>Public Security Spending</u>	Pro-Business Decisions	Pro-Worker Decisions	Split Decisions	<u>Public Security Spending</u>	Pro-Worker Decisions	Pro-Business Decisions	Split Decisions
<i>Δ Strikes</i>	0.325** (0.119)	0.00522 (0.0390)	0.196* (0.0979)	-0.141** (0.0674)	0.277** (0.133)	0.255** (0.104)	-0.0439 (0.0535)	-0.202*** (0.0699)
<i>GDP Per Capita</i>					0.000136 (0.000143)	0.000114 (0.000149)	-0.000190 (0.000238)	-0.000180 (0.000147)
<i>Migrant Workers</i>					0.0837 (0.111)	0.203 (0.151)	0.168 (0.0992)	-0.116 (0.178)
<i>SOE Employment</i>					2.240 (1.446)	1.777 (2.022)	1.787 (1.835)	-1.584 (2.383)
<i>Tertiary Sector</i>					0.0154 (0.203)	0.185 (0.327)	0.133 (0.242)	-0.450 (0.343)
<i>Labor NGOs</i>					-0.143 (0.354)	0.777* (0.399)	-0.372 (0.317)	-0.649 (0.467)
<i>Union Activity</i>					-0.00000706 (0.0000273)	-0.0000254 (0.0000284)	0.0000282 (0.0000211)	0.0000414 (0.0000317)
<i>Population</i>					0.0126 (0.00755)	-0.0165** (0.00641)	0.0129** (0.00507)	0.0152** (0.00654)
<i>Urban</i>					0.740** (0.308)	-0.228 (0.677)	-0.206 (0.384)	0.123 (0.706)
<i>Constant</i>	9.432*** (0.641)	14.27*** (1.058)	-0.879 (1.492)	1.868 (1.737)	-93.64** (41.84)	55.35 (40.29)	-46.99 (28.76)	-32.96 (48.93)
<i>Provincial Fixed Effects</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Year Fixed Effects</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>N</i>	217	217	217	217	213	213	213	213

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Appendix 2b: Strikes and Policy Outcomes 2004-2013 Panel Fixed Effects Model

	Public Security Spending	Judicial Decisions			Public Security Spending	Judicial Decisions		
		Pro-Worker Decisions	Pro- Business Decisions	Split Decisions		Pro-Worker Decisions	Pro-Business Decisions	Split Decisions
<i>Δ Strikes</i>	-0.0306 (0.0211)	0.111* (0.0562)	0.0125 (0.0190)	-0.0831* (0.0425)	-0.0724 (0.0465)	0.141** (0.0635)	-0.0404* (0.0237)	-0.122*** (0.0435)
<i>GDP Per Capita</i>					0.0000129 (0.0000980)	0.000133 (0.0000963)	-0.000177 (0.000158)	-0.000187* (0.0000964)
<i>Migrant Workers</i>					-0.0698 (0.107)	0.147 (0.124)	0.198* (0.1000)	-0.120 (0.154)
<i>SOE Employment</i>					2.806*** (0.947)	-0.438 (1.395)	1.092 (1.173)	0.193 (1.599)
<i>Tertiary Sector</i>					0.351 (0.363)	0.0879 (0.239)	0.235 (0.235)	-0.233 (0.259)
<i>Labor NGOs</i>					-0.251 (0.291)	0.623* (0.318)	-0.240 (0.287)	-0.589 (0.413)
<i>Union Activity</i>					-0.00000573 (0.0000206)	0.00000793 (0.0000133)	0.0000123 (0.0000106)	0.00000108 (0.0000132)
<i>Population</i>					0.00922 (0.00560)	-0.0167*** (0.00513)	0.0101** (0.00475)	0.0165** (0.00606)
<i>Urban</i>					0.940*** (0.284)	-0.112 (0.381)	-0.406 (0.335)	0.139 (0.426)
<i>Constant</i>	9.628*** (0.650)	-0.832 (1.501)	14.27*** (1.145)	1.836 (1.761)	-103.7*** (33.24)	68.53*** (23.77)	-27.29 (24.52)	-58.98* (32.17)
<i>Provincial Fixed Effects</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Year Fixed Effects</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>N</i>	279	279	279	279	275	275	275	275

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Appendix 3: Formally Adjudicated Employment Disputes and Public Security Spending 2004-2013

	Public Security Spending 2004-2013
Δ Public Security (L1)	-0.647** (0.237)
Δ Disputes	0.000241 (0.000144)
Δ Disputes (L1)	-0.000192* (0.0000975)
GDP Per Capita	0.00161** (0.000774)
GDP Per Capita (L1)	-0.00166** (0.000739)
Migrant Workers	0.316** (0.139)
Migrant Workers (L1)	-0.327*** (0.106)
SOE Employment	4.149* (2.142)
SOE Employment (L1)	-0.949 (3.325)
Tertiary Sector	1.364*** (0.470)
Tertiary Sector (L1)	-1.653*** (0.437)
Labor NGOs	-0.651 (1.635)
Labor NGOs (L1)	0.220 (1.281)
Union Activity	-0.0000420 (0.0000535)
Union Activity (L1)	0.0000222 (0.0000659)
Population	0.0334*** (0.00957)
Population (L1)	-0.0119 (0.0194)
Urban	-1.429 (1.375)
Urban (L1)	1.661 (1.163)
Constant	-81.61 (85.90)
<i>N</i>	241

Robust standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Appendix 4: Interviews

September-December 2014

1. Cab drivers and shop owners	Zhenjiang, Jiangsu
2. CSR activist	Hong Kong
3. Construction worker	Zhenjiang, Jiangsu
4. Class discussion	Beijing
5. Factory guards and others	Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu
6. Academic conference attendees	Beijing
7. Professor (phone call)	Chengdu, Sichuan
8. Professor	Hong Kong
9. Professor	Nanjing, Jiangsu
10. Technology company management	Shanghai
11. Technology company management	Shanghai
12. Labor NGO activist	Nanjing, Jiangsu
13. Job market security guard	Kunshan, Jiangsu
14. Job market employee	Kunshan, Jiangsu
15. Job market employee	Kunshan, Jiangsu
16. Job market employee	Kunshan, Jiangsu
17. Job market employee	Kunshan, Jiangsu
18. Professor	Shanghai
19. Apparel factory managers	Lianshui, Jiangsu
20. Labor NGO activist	Beijing
21. Migrant workers at job market	Nanjing, Jiangsu
22. Migrant workers at job market	Nanjing, Jiangsu
23. Academic and Party School instructor	Beijing
24. Factory manager from Wuxi	Suzhou, Jiangsu
25. Factory manager from Wuxi	Wuxi, Jiangsu
26. Foreign rule of law program manager	Shanghai
27. Trade union leader at SOE	Nanjing, Jiangsu
28. Professor	Suzhou, Jiangsu
29. Taxi driver	Kunshan, Jiangsu
30. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu
31. Textile manufacturers assn. leader	Beijing
32. Apparel co. CSR manager (phone call)	Guangdong
33. Taxi driver	Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu
34. Taxi drivers	Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu
35. Taxi drivers	Shuyang, Jiangsu
36. Apparel co. CSR managers	Shanghai
37. Government think tank researcher	Nanjing, Jiangsu
38. Class discussion	Beijing
39. Workers at factory with runaway boss	Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu
40. Professor	Beijing
41. Professor	Beijing
42. Collector of migrant worker poetry	Suzhou, Jiangsu

43. Professor	Nanjing, Jiangsu
44. Discussion with students	Tianjin
45. Foreign CSR activist	Suzhou, Jiangsu
46. Labor NGO activist	Suzhou, Jiangsu
47. Professor	Nanjing, Jiangsu
48. NGO activist	Nanjing, Jiangsu
49. Professor and labor bureau official	Tianjin
50. Labor NGO activist	Nanjing, Jiangsu
51. Professor	Yangzhou, Jiangsu
52. Professor & govt. think tank researcher	Nanjing, Jiangsu
53. Professor & govt. think tank researcher	Yangzhou, Jiangsu
54. Labor bureau official, professors	Yangzhou, Jiangsu

January-April 2015

55. Labor NGO activists	Hong Kong
56. Labor NGO activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
57. Professor	Hong Kong
58. Labor NGO activists	Hong Kong
59. Construction workers	Shenzhen, Guangdong
60. Striking handbag factory workers	Zhongshan, Guangdong
61. Striking handbag factory workers & local police	Zhongshan, Guangdong
62. Former union leader	Guangzhou, Guangdong
63. Labor NGO activists	Shenzhen, Guangdong
64. Labor lawyer	Shenzhen, Guangdong
65. Electronics factory CSR meeting	Shenzhen, Guangdong
66. Job market employee	Shenzhen, Guangdong
67. CSR activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
68. Union staffers	Shenzhen, Guangdong
69. Union staffer	Shenzhen, Guangdong
70. Union staffer	Shenzhen, Guangdong
71. Professor	Nanjing, Jiangsu
72. Human rights activist	Hong Kong
73. Labor / rural activist	Beijing
74. Professor	Beijing
75. NGO activists	Guangzhou, Guangdong
76. Injured workers and NGO activist	Suzhou, Jiangsu
77. Labor NGO activist	Dongguan, Jiangsu
78. Labor NGO activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
79. Labor NGO activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
80. Labor NGO activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
81. Electronics factory staff	Shenzhen, Guangdong
82. CSR activist	Hong Kong
83. Academic discussion	Guangzhou, Guangdong
84. Taxi driver	Guangzhou, Guangdong
85. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu

86. Taxi driver	Shenzhen, Guangdong
87. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu
88. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu
89. Taxi driver	Shenzhen, Guangdong
90. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu
91. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu
92. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu
93. Taxi driver	Nanjing, Jiangsu
94. Taxi driver	Shenzhen, Guangdong
95. Enterprise trade union leaders	Tianjin
96. Worker with injury	Shenzhen, Guangdong
97. Injured worker and NGO activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
98. Injured worker and NGO activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
99. Injured workers and NGO activist	Dongguan, Guangdong
100. Injured workers and NGO activist	Shenzhen, Guangdong
101. Trade union leader	Shenzhen, Guangdong
102. Professor	Shenzhen, Guangdong
103. Professor	Macau
104. Labor NGO activist	Panyu, Guangdong
105. People around electronics factory	Shenzhen, Guangdong
106. Striking workers at electronics factory	Shenzhen, Guangdong

July-August 2015

107. Labor arbitrators	Chongqing
108. Professor	Chongqing
109. Local official	Nanchong, Sichuan
110. Foxconn factory workers & taxi driver	Chongqing
111. NGO activist	Chongqing
112. Labor bureau official	Chongqing
113. Labor bureau official	Nanjing, Jiangsu
114. Returned migrant workers	Nanchong, Sichuan
115. Party School instructor	Beijing
116. Real estate developer	Nanchong, Sichuan
117. Statistics bureau employee	Nanchong, Sichuan
118. Taxi driver	Chengdu, Sichuan
119. Taxi driver	Chongqing
120. Taxi driver	Nanjing
121. Taxi driver	Chengdu, Sichuan
122. Taxi driver	Chongqing
123. Taxi driver	Chongqing
124. Taxi driver	Chongqing
125. Taxi driver	Chongqing
126. Taxi driver	Chongqing
127. Taxi driver	Chongqing
128. Taxi driver	Chongqing

129. Taxi driver	Chongqing
130. Taxi driver	Chongqing
131. Taxi driver	Chongqing
132. Taxi driver	Chongqing
133. Taxi driver	Chongqing
134. Taxi driver	Chongqing
135. Taxi driver	Chongqing
136. Taxi driver	Chongqing
137. Taxi driver	Chongqing
138. Professor	Chongqing
139. Professor	Chongqing
140. Taxi activist (phone call)	Chongqing
141. Labor lawyer	Chongqing

Additional Interviews: June-July 2011

CQ TX #12. Taxi activist	Chongqing
XN TX #1. Taxi driver	Xianning, Hubei
XN TX #11. Taxi driver	Xianning, Hubei

Appendix 5: Dictionary for Automated Content Analysis of Yearbooks

Social Conflict

上访
不稳定
信访
冲突
抗议
政治事件
敏感
矛盾
示威
纠纷
维稳
群体事件
群体性事件
调解
邪教
重点人

Companies

企业
公司
单位

Labor Issues

下岗
农民工
劳动者
劳资
劳资争议
劳资纠纷
外来人
失业
工人
拖欠
拖薪
流动人口
集体协商

集体合同

Policing Innovation

信息化
创新
协调
安全感
新社会管理
满意度
监督
综合治理
综合管理
风险评估

Routine Policing

事故
交通
刑事
吸毒
打黑
暴力
杀人
毒品
消防
灭火
盗窃
破案
禁毒
赌博
酒后开车
醉酒驾车
黄赌毒
黑恶犯罪
黑社会

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