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Structuring the State's Voice of Contention in Harmonious Society:
How Party Newspapers Cover Social Protests in China

LU, Cheng

Abstract

During the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) campaign of building a 'harmonious society', how do the official newspapers cover the instances of social contention on the ground? Answering this question will shed light not only on how the party press works but also on how the state and the society interact in today's China. This thesis conceptualises this phenomenon with a multi-faceted and multi-levelled notion of 'state-initiated contentious public sphere' to capture the complexity of mediated relations between the state and social contention in the party press. Adopting a relational approach, this thesis analyses 1758 news reports of 'mass incident' in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020, employing cluster analysis, qualitative comparative analysis, and social network analysis. The thesis finds significant differences in the patterns of contentious coverage in the party press at the level of event and province and an uneven distribution of attention to social contention across incidents and regions. For 'reported regions', the thesis distinguishes four types of coverage and presents how party press responds differently to social contention in different scenarios at the provincial level. For 'identified incidents', the thesis distinguishes a cumulative type of visibility based on the quantity of coverage from a relational visibility based on the structure emerging from coverage and explains how different news-making rationales determine whether instances receive similar amounts of coverage or occupy similar positions within coverage. Eventually, by demonstrating how the Chinese state strategically uses party press to respond to social contention and how social contention is journalistically placed in different positions in the state's eyes, this thesis argues that what social contention leads to is the establishment of complex state-contention relations channelled through the party press.

Structuring the State's Voice of Contention in Harmonious Society:

How Party Newspapers Cover Social Protests in China

LU, Cheng

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Department of Sociology

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Declaration

I, Cheng LU, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is all my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

No part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted by me or any other person for a degree in this or any other university.

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To my beloved grandmom, Wang, Yuemei (1939-2018),

who passed away too early to see her grandson finishing such a long journey.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

Contention and Harmony of China in 21st Century

Since the 'open-door' policy proclaimed in 1978, China has enjoyed stunning economic growth. However, the pace of development has been unequal and deepened social divides, resulting in serious social issues in this new economic superpower, such as the gap between rich and poor, ethnic conflicts, urban-rural divisions, environmental degradation, government corruption, official misbehaviour and so on (Selden and Perry, 2010). As a result, the contentions led by the deprived and dissatisfied people are not in decline by unprecedented achievements of Chinese market reform and opening up, but actually on rise. According to the widely cited sources, the annual reports published by the Ministry of Public Security, the annual number of reported 'mass incidents' in China increased from 8,700 in 1993, the first time for official statistics were released, to 74,000 in 2004 and the total number of participants also soared from 730,000 to 3,760,000 (e.g., Chung et al., 2006; Cai, 2008a; 2008b; O'Brien and Stern, 2008; Mertha, 2009; Su and He, 2010; Göbel and Ong, 2012; Ong, 2015; Heurlin, 2016; Yang, 2016; Zhong and Hwang 2016; Elfstrom, 2021). After the final official release with 87,000 instances reported in 2005, for whatever reason, the Chinese authority stopped publishing any relevant statistics.

In responses to the increasing social unrest deeply rooted in the drastic social transformation since the reform and opening up in China, the concept of 'socialist harmonious society' was initially introduced in 2004. *The Resolution on the Major Issues Concerning the Building of a Socialist Harmonious Society* was formally passed at the Sixth Plenum of the Sixteenth Central

Committee to systematically address the resolving of 'social contradictions' in 2006 and it explicitly stated the main tasks of implementing this central policy which were expected to be achieved by *2020*. Since then, building harmonious society becomes an important objective of social development in Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s rule of China, and social stability also secures its position of two top priorities of governance, along with economic growth. The dynamics of contention and harmony has been attracting a great amount of academic attention and many studies suggest that Chinese authoritarian regime gradually changes its strategy and attitude to the growing social contention and becomes more and more responsive, consultative and negotiable in the harmonious society-building era (Heurlin, 2016; Lee and Zhang, 2013; Mertha, 2009; 2014; Teets, 2014).

This thesis will study how contentious protests were covered in party-controlled mass media, which serves as a lens through which we could gain better understanding of how the Communist party interacts with the Chinese society. This chapter aims to situate the thesis in its policy background and political context and briefly delineates the changing dynamic of contention and harmony in China since the proclamation of the idea of building harmonious society. Next, the chapter begins the journey of investigation with a critical reflection of the idea and observation of *contentious public sphere*, proposed by Lei Ya-Wen (2018), by arguing that it is not only an unexpected social change in China but also an incomplete picture of the changing relations between the state and social contentions during this crucial period of building harmonious society in the history of CCP's ruling of China. After introducing the research questions and the approach adopted in this thesis, the chapter ends with an overview of the thesis and its potential contributions to the knowledge base in the field of social movement outcome study and the understanding of contentious politics in the field of China study.

1.1 Social Contention and Harmonious Society in China

1.1.1 Building Harmonious Society upon Social Contention

The concept of 'harmonious society' was initially proposed by Jiang Zemin, the core of the third generation of CCP leaders. In his report at the 16th Party National Congress in 2002**,** Jiang Zemin addressed that 'we (CCP) need to concentrate on building a well-off society … [and] will further … foster social harmony' (cited from English version of Jiang's full-text report, officially released by Chinese government). It was the first time that CCP leader sets 'harmony' as the objective and vision of Chinese social development. Then, after the power transition from Jiang to Hu Jintao, the concept of 'harmonious society' was fully developed and finally became the value orientation and major theoretical advance of the fourth generation of CCP leaders. In 2004, Hu Jintao, the General Secretary of CCP, assigned an important position to 'harmonious society building' in the 4th Plenum of the 16th CCP Central Committee and stressed that party should strengthen its governance capability of building socialist harmonious society. During the 6th plenum of the 16th CCP Central Committee in 2006, *the Resolution on Major Issues Regarding the Building of a Socialist Harmonious Society* was published to address that 'social harmony is the intrinsic nature of the socialism with Chinese characteristics and an important guarantee of the country's prosperity, the nation's rejuvenation and the people's happiness' (Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation, 2006: 261). According to Xinhua News Agency, it was the first time for the Party to devote a plenary meeting specifically to social development issues rather than political and economic affairs (cited from Xing, 2006). In 2007, 'building socialist harmonious society' was added into CCP's party constitution at the 17th CCP National Congress and thus the institutionalization of 'harmonious society' as the guidance of CCP governance was officially finalised.

Although the specific operational objectives of 'building socialist harmonious society' program cover a wide range of issues, such as rural development, regional development, employment, education, medicine, public health, environmental protection, legal system, public security, community management, party leadership, agricultural and fiscal policies, cultural enterprises and so on, its underlying objective is to 'try utmost efforts to increase harmonious factors and reduce disharmonious factors to consistently boost social harmony', by 'thoroughly understand[ing] the feature of the country in the current phase of development, study[ing] and analys[ing] the contradictions and problems and their origins in a scientific way, [and] be[ing] more active to face up to the conflicts and solve them' (Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation, 2006: 263). In the view of CCP leaders, 'there exist many contradictions and problems, which affect social harmony' and thus '[t]he building of the harmonious socialist society is a sustained process, during which social contradictions are resolved' (ibid.). Additionally, in the process of advancing the theory of harmonious society, CCP also linked 'building harmonious society' to another important political agenda, namely 'keeping social stability', which has been viewed as one of top two priorities of CCP ongoing governance, along with keeping economic growth. According to *the Decision on the Enhancement of the Party's Governance Capability* adopted at the 4th Plenum of the 16th CCP Central Committee in 2004, one principle of strengthening party governance of building socialist harmonious society is to ensure 'stability overrides everything' (Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation, 2004: 1165). Furthermore, in 2006, the 6th Plenum of the 16th CCP Central Committee unanimously agreed that 'strengthening social management and maintaining social stability are an inevitable requirement for building a socialist harmonious society' (Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation, 2006: 275). Eventually, the incorporation of the ideas of keeping social stability and building harmonious society into CCP's party constitution was approved and passed through the 17th CCP Central Committee in 2007.

1.1.2 Handling Social Contention in Harmonious Society

Almost in the same period of time, the central government issued a series of policies and programmes at the beginning of 21st century, such as the Western Development Plan launched in 2000 and Rise of Central China Plan in 2004, to fundamentally address the issue of unequal development that led to the surge of social contention in China. Also, Chinese government uses various policy means to purposively alleviate different disgruntled social groups' grievances and feelings of relative deprivation specifically. For peasants' heavy burdens, the rural tax reform was launched in 2000. Premier Wen Jiabao, in his report to the National People' Congress in 2005, set 2006 as a deadline for entirely eliminating the agricultural tax, two years before the expected date. Takeuchi's (2014) field study also confirmed the achievement of this reform objective and showed a significant reduction of financial burdens of peasants since 2002. In the same year of 2006, a 'building new socialist countryside' programme was launched to improve public services and general welfare of rural residents, particularly in poorer geographic areas (Wright, 2018: 55-56). To stress the issue of land encroachment, the State Council issued a new *Land Administration Law*, emphasising the need to improve land management, the negotiation between local governments and peasants, social security system and job allocation for landless peasants, in 2004. The central government also adjusted the policy to take more compensatory factors into account and thus to enhance the level of compensation for peasants in 2005 (Cai, 2010: 178). Turning to another deprived social group, workers, the Ministry of Finance and the National Tax Bureau jointly issued a directive that allowed laid-off workers from state-owned enterprises to enjoy tax reductions or exemptions in securing reemployment in 2002 (Cai, 2010: 162). In addition, addressing economic grievances of migrant workers and those in private sectors, central government and top leaders annually repeated the demand, formally or informally, that employers must pay their workers

'fully and on time' since 2003, until the pass of *Labour Contract Law* and *Labour Dispute Mediation and Arbitration Law* by central authorities in 2007 (Wright, 2018: 81). Similarly, *Environmental Impact Assessment Law* was renewed in 2002 and came into effect in 2003, as a response from the state to increasing environmental protests since the mid-1990. In 2003, central government also issued new policies to address homeowner protesters' main concerns about the 'inappropriate violent behaviours of government agencies' (cited from Wright, 2018: 101), and their demands of a more proper compensation and institutionalisation of compulsory house demolition.

The CCP has, therefore, adapted itself to the surge of social contention effectively and, in so doing, enhanced its capability of dealing with the challengers more fully. According to a series of empirical studies, the political status and influence of public security chiefs within the party system has been significantly increasing since 2004, also positively corresponding to the funding and other resources distributed by the governments for the purpose of public security (Wang, 2014; Wang and Minzner, 2015; Greitens, 2017). Such an incentive to enhance public security officials into leadership of governments at different levels was also underpinned by an official document issued by central government in 2003 (Feng, 2015). Besides increasing awareness of keeping social stability, the means adopted by Chinese governments to achieve this goal is also changing. Along with the establishment of national agenda, 'building socialist harmonious society', the attitude of Chinese central government to social contention turns from violent 'handling' and 'quelling', which was deeply rooted in the shocking experience of 1989 Tiananmen Movement, to soft 'managing' and 'containing' (Wright, 2018). This crucial shift of central government's attitude can be reflected into two aspects, namely the standardisation of governments' behaviours in dealing with protest, especially the strict regulation on the use

of coercive force, and the institutionalisation of alternative channels for popular grievances and expression.

Firstly, based on the directive on the settlement of social unrest issued by the Ministry of Public Security in 2000, police officers' behaviours must be strictly consistent with regulated procedures and 'Three Cautions', namely caution in employing armed force, caution in using weapons, and caution in employing compulsory measures, in dealing with popular protest. In 2003, Luo Gan, the Secretary of Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, readdressed 'Three Cautions' and claimed that leaders of party and governments at different levels must be in the frontier of conflicts on time and deal with the demands of protesters face to face (Feng, 2015). In 2004, the official definition of mass incident, issued by central government, acknowledged the contention as the 'internal contradiction among the people' also for the first time, so this official document clearly indicated People's Liberation Army (PLA), which should be deployed against the enemy of state, would not be responsible for handling domestic protests anymore. Moreover, Chinese authority further standardised the process of dealing with angry masses and their abrupt actions by issuing *National Large-scale Mass Incident Emergency Response Plan* in 2005, *National Public Emergency Response Plan* in 2006, and finally *Emergency Response Law* in 2007.

Secondly, regarding the channels of expressing public concerns, Chinese authority claimed that 'we must institute a system of making public announcements, holding hearings and so on, and expand the degree of mass participation regarding major matters closely related to the masses' interests' in its Decision on the Enhancement of the Party's Governance Capability issued in 2004 (Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation, 2004: 1153). In 2006, *the Resolution on Major*

Issues Concerning the Building of a Socialist Harmonious Society mentioned 'the channels for people to express social conditions and their opinions … a national system of information on letters and visits from the people … diverse platforms for communication' and stressed 'bring the masses' appeals for interests onto the track of institutionalization and standardization' (Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation, 2006: 278). Also, *Regulation on Complaint Letters and Visits* was renewed in 2005. The new version addresses the protection of petitioner's right and crystallises local governments' responsibility of dealing with the demands claimed. Chinese authority's attempts to expand alternative channels for citizens to institutionally participate into decision-making process of political and public affairs, to some degree, alleviate the grievances of some social groups, such as homeowners and environmentalist.

Above of all, although the policy implementation on the ground is always an issue worthy of academic investigation and assessment in China (e.g., Ahlers, 2014; O'Brien and Li, 1999; 2005; Göbel, 2011; Ran, 2013; Hensengerth and Lu, 2019), what is undeniable is that aforementioned policy responses to mitigating the forcefulness of social contention and incorporating social grievances into its 'contentious', 'consultative', 'bargained', 'accepting' and 'responsive' authoritarianism (Chen, 2012; Teets, 2013; Lee and Zhang, 2013; Heurlin, 2016; Wright, 2010) constitute an advantageous contextual opportunity for a more dynamic interactions between society and state in the harmonious society-building era.

1.2 The Rise of Contentious Public Sphere in Harmonious Society

1.2.1 As an Unintended Change

Unlike 'the intentional harmonisation of social contention to stabilising the society' that the state purposely initiated in response to the issue of social contention described above, another

major social transformation that occurred unexpectedly in the view of the state during the period of building harmonious society is the emergence of *contentious public sphere*. In her monograph, *The Contentious Public Sphere: Law, Media and Authoritarian Rule in China*, Ya-wen Lei (2018) formally introduces this specific term of 'contentious public sphere' to the authoritarian context of China and describe it as 'an unexpected consequence of state'. Based on Habermas's classic writing, '[t]he public sphere can best be described a network for communicating information and points of view …… the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions' (emphasis in original) (Habermas, 1996: 360 cited from Lei, 2018: 15), Lei explicitly refers the term of 'contentious public sphere' to 'an unruly sphere capable of generating issues and agendas not set by the Chinese state, as opposed to a sphere mostly orchestrated and constrained by said state' (ibid.: 2). Ya-Wen Lei further presents plenty of evidence to establish 'the novelty and vibrancy of political communication, contention, and participation in and beyond China's public sphere that emerged during this period' (ibid.: 2) as an empirical fact of a nationwide phenomenon with a traceable history.

In Lei's view, the rise of contentious public sphere did not emerge from the vacuum. As she argues that, 'beginning in 1998, China has seen the emergence of what began as a *contained* (italic added) public sphere that has become, since 2005, a nationwide *contentious* (italic added) public sphere. To be more specific, she stated, 'the increasing salience of public opinion between 1998 and 2005 was driven by social problems and discontent that had accumulated in the process of economic reform' (ibid.: 26), but its 'contained' nature implies that 'the central party-state did not feel that public opinion was out of its control' during this period of time. by contrast, in the post-2005 period, 'contentious events were capturing widespread public attention, sparking heated discussion and even protests and other forms of collective action'

(ibid.: 1) and 'the continuing, drastic growth of public opinion' (ibid.: 32) was acknowledged by the central party-state as an unruly force, capable of generating contentions and gradually moving beyond the Chinese state's control. (ibid.: 33) In short, while this sphere was relatively contained between 1998 and 2005, it has developed into a more contentious public sphere in the post-2005 period (ibid.: 34). In the mid-2000s, the construction of harmonious society began amid the background of social contention and the transformation from contained public sphere to contentious public sphere was also witnessed.

Furthermore, Lei highlights *unruliness* and *constancy* as the two major determining characteristics of the growing public opinion in the post-2005 period that make the contentious public sphere so 'qualitatively new' (ibid.: 33). First, as the definition of contentious public sphere suggests above, the fundamental nature of this 'independent and influential force' (ibid.: 29) is that it is capable of escaping state control to set the public agenda. As a result, there are actually 'two public spheres' that can be observed in China since 2005, namely 'the traditional state-controlled public sphere as well as an emerging public sphere not contained by the former' (ibid.: 33). Such an empirical fact was not only confirmed by the state itself in 2011, when the notion of 'two public spheres' (liangge yulun chang/两个舆论场) began to appear in *the People's Daily,* but also the view of the central leadership 'that public viewpoints had become problematic and now threatened social stability and the CCP's legitimacy' (ibid.: 28) because 'Chinese citizens were coming together not only to converse and debate with one another, but also to challenge a government infamous for censorship and political control' (ibid.: 1). Therefore, In Lei's view, what the unruliness of contentious public sphere reflects is a clear divide between the state and contentious public sphere and such a relationship between the two is mutually exclusive and even oppositional to some degree.

Second, Lei agrees with the historical existence of public opinion in the period of pre-contentious public sphere in China but cautions against the claim that it did constitute a constantly present public sphere because of the changing relationship between public opinion and social contention. In line with Liu's (1996: 5) view of specific public opinion as 'mobilised public opinion in the form of a social movement', Lei reminds us that such a type of specific public opinion 'generally erupted only when collective actions were mobilised and lost their power and visibility at the national level once the collective actions ended or were suppressed' (2018: 32), so the public opinion emerging in the period of pre-contentious public sphere was 'either sporadic or short lived' (ibid.: 34). By contrast, thanks to the key role of marketised newspapers and the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the formation of public opinion, the rise of contentious public sphere particularly since 2005 is 'characterised by the frequent participation of various social groups' (ibid.: 34) and is 'no longer directly tied to large- scale collective actions, suggesting that the Chinese people no longer have to mobilise extraordinary resources to express their concerns and to have their voices heard by the Chinese government' (ibid.: 32). In this sense, Lei turns the focus from a traditional view of mobilisational perspective of public opinion to an emphasis of *public opinion incident* (yulun Shijian/舆论事件), which covers a wide range of instances that do not have physical mobilisation on the street, like Sanlu Milk Incident. In other words, in Lei's understanding of contentious public sphere, the grassroot mobilisation of social contention and any forms of collective actions staged on the street are not necessarily foundational for the rise of constant present contentious public sphere.

1.2.2 As an Incomplete Picture

This thesis embraces Ya-Wen Lei's conceptualisation of 'contentious public sphere' and applauds her pioneering work on establishing it as an empirical fact emerging in China particularly since 2005. However, this thesis cautions against viewing such a contentious public sphere as the *whole picture* of all public opinion arising around the issue of social contention in the harmonious society-building era and notes that the concept proposed by Lei merely tackles a piece of the puzzle, because aforementioned two main characteristics, namely the divide between the state and contentious public sphere and the departure from viewing collective actions staged on the ground as necessary mobilised forms of public opinion, not only set the clear analytical boundaries of the term of 'contentious public sphere' but also show the limited conceptual capability of bridging *the top-down perspective of the central party-state* and *the bottom-up perspective of local contention*.

To be specific, as illustrated above, the role of state is conceptually excluded from the Lei's conceptualisation of contentious public sphere, but this chapters argues that the relationship between the state and the public opinions that constitute the contentious public sphere cannot be simply reduced to being exclusive and confrontational to each other. First, the party-state has various strategies and tools to either directly or indirectly to regulate the dissemination of information and shape the formation of public opinion in public space (Miller, 2018; King et al., 2013; Roberts, 2018). In other words, the state can always find the appropriate ways to exert their influence on the rise of public opinion and it is, therefore, too straightforward and neat to claim that the contentious public sphere is entirely outside the control of the party-state. Second, even for public opinion spontaneously arising from the grassroots and moving beyond the state's reach, they are not necessarily against the state or against the agenda set by the state, at all. Instead, there is a large body of literature devoted to analysing how the information produced and widely disseminated outside the system benefits the state to address social

problems and eventually stabilise the regime (Lorentzen, 2013; 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Chen and Xu, 2017a; 2017b; Heurlin, 2016; Marquis and Bird, 2018; Speelman, 2022). Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine that the political elites in China would agree on everything among themselves (Ma, 2019; O'Brien et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2022). So, in this sense, there is no room for the state in Lei's conceptualisation of contentious public sphere and thus it fails to capture how the state approaches, views and responds to the issue of social contention in the broader public sphere.

In addition, as the concept of contentious public sphere shifts the focus from mobilised public opinion to public opinion incident, Lei's operationalisation of the concept of contentious public sphere does not focus on the actual happening of social contention on the ground. Moreover, Lei did not even clearly define what the contention is in such a contentious public sphere, nor did she explicitly illustrate in which way the incidents driven and created by non-state actors can be viewed as 'contentious'. Therefore, while other studies have clearly shown the increasing visibility of various forms of collective actions in the public spaces since the early 2000s (e.g., Steinhardt, 2015; Chen, 2020), it is a significant limitation that Lei failed to locate and present the overall picture of the contentious sources, namely the instances on the ground, of such a contentious public sphere in her book. So, given this, this thesis argues that the conceptual use of contentious public sphere might lead to a systematic neglect of grassroots mobilisation in particular localities and their impacts on the establishment of public sphere, because the concept of contentious public sphere, according to Lei's understanding, is not particularly applicable to locating the incident staged on the ground as the contentious sources of the public opinions arsing around the issue of social contention or examining how theses public opinions are influenced and shaped by the actual mobilisation of social contention.

In fact, Ya-Wen Lei had, to some degree, acknowledged the blurred boundaries of contentious public sphere as a conceptual tool. For example, she argued that 'the continuing growth of public opinion in the post-2005 period … has become increasingly unruly and capable of escaping state control to set the public agenda, *at least occasionally* (italic added)' (2018: 33-34) and also pointed out the paradox strategies used by the party-state to denounce public opinion as oppositional to or threatening of the CCP's rule on the one hand and engage with it as an influential force to be reckoned with on the other hand. In fact, the critical discussion of contentious public sphere proposed by Lei is not intended to deny it as a useful conceptual tool, but to show its analytical limitations of depicting the whole picture of public opinions arising around the issue of social contention in public sphere in the harmonious society-building era. Therefore, to address this neglected piece of the puzzle, this thesis calls for bringing the state and the instances of social contention back and aims to propose a new research agenda to systematically explore the complexity of interactions between the state and social contentions in the public sphere of China.

1.3 A State-initiated Contentious Public Sphere: Research Agenda of the Thesis

1.3.1 The State-initiated Contentious Public Sphere

Based on the critical discussion of the conceptualisation of contentious public sphere, this thesis aims to advance the understanding of the information produce and promoted by the state around the issue of social contention in the public during the period of building harmonious society-building. To fill in the conceptual gaps left and unaddressed by Ya-Wen Lei's idea of contentious public sphere, this thesis proposes a new concept applicable to the context of China, namely *the state-initiated contentious public sphere*, and regards it as the general research

object of the investigation in this thesis. This new concept refers to the subordinate domain of the state-controlled public sphere which is concerned with not only the issue of social contentions but also the specific occurrence of social contention. The analytical advantages of this new concept are at least threefold. First, it addresses the rise of a particular public sphere led by social contention from a state's perspective. *All* public opinions that constitute such a state-initiated contentious public sphere, on the one hand, is endorsed by the state and, on the other hand, represents how the party-state perceives the issue of social contention in the harmonious society-building era. Next, with an emphasis on social contentions staged in various concrete forms of grassroots mobilisation, the use of this concept not only benefits the detection of specific contentious sources of public opinions that constitute the state-initiated contentious public sphere but also is helpful to examine how each event affects the formation of this particular sphere by triggering relevant public opinions and then having access to the sphere. Last but not least, the concept of state-initiated contentious public sphere is capable to bridge the state and social contention in the public sphere and thus serves like a site for observing the emerging *structure* of complex relations established between the state and various forms of social contentions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In other words, the state-initiated contentious public sphere is essentially structured by *mediated* relations between the state and social contention. Thus, given all these, this thesis aims to explore the *complexity* of state-initiated contentious public sphere and reveals the mechanisms and drives behind the emerging *multifaceted* and *multileveled* structure of state-initiated contentious public sphere in China during the period of building harmonious society.

1.3.2 Research Questions

This thesis sets out to explore three main research questions about the structural complexity of the state-initiated contentious public sphere in China in the harmonious society-building era.

1) *What does the multi- levelled state-initiated contentious public sphere look like?*
2) *How do provinces and events emerge from the multi-faceted state-initiated contentious public sphere?*
3) *Why do some provinces and events occupy more prominent positions in the multi-faceted state-initiated contentious public sphere?*

A number of related tasks need to be carried out to answer these research questions, especially the first two. First, with respect to the 'what' question, the thesis offers a huge body of empirical evidence to show the *historical trajectory* and the *journalistic contour* of state-initiated contentious public sphere and systematically depicts the overall picture of state-initiated contentious public sphere *in general* and at the analytical level of *reported region* and *identified incident* as well, respectively, from a bird's eye view. By doing so, this thesis not only comprehensively captures the landscape of state-initiated contentious public sphere emerging between 2004 and 2020 but also preliminarily establishes the *multileveled* relationships between the state and local contentions which are mediated in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

Next, regarding the 'how' question, the investigation narrows the focus down to the presence of reported region and identified incident in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and delves further into the complexity of mediated relations between the state and social contention at the level of province and event, respectively. The thesis carefully distinguishes the various *types* of mediated relations established between the state and social contention and shows how they constitute the *multifaceted* structure of state-initiated contentious public sphere. Then, by identifying the specific position of each province and each event and showing how they emerge

from such a multifaceted structure of state-initiated contentious public sphere, the thesis presents the *similarities* and *dissimilarities* in the patterns of mediated relations held by provinces and events with the state. Last, the thesis explores the generative mechanisms and drives behind such a status differentiation of various forms of social contentions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere from a *holistic* perspective. In other words, why does the state view the provinces and events so differently through a lens of social contention.

1.3.3 A Relational Research Approach

This thesis is situated in social movement outcome studies and fuelled by theoretical understandings of contentious politics in the field of China study. To address aforementioned research questions, a *relational* approach is generally adopted in this thesis to examine the rise of state-initiated contentious public sphere as a cultural type of social change led by social contention during the historical period of building harmonious society in China. In fact, a relational perspective of assessing the impact of social contention is not entirely new in social movement outcome studies but it was commonly used by researchers to narrowly highlight the changes in actor's possession of social capital generated through various forms of social contention (Diani, 1997; Tindall et al., 2012). To my knowledge, this thesis is the very first empirical study devoted to a cultural and political analysis of relational outcomes brought by social contention.

To be more specific, relational approach methodologically refers to a systematic exploration of specific changes brought about by social contentions from a collective, combinatory and connective perspective. As an alternative to a traditional 'isolated' approach, a relational approach 1) emphasises the assessable impact of the aggregate of social contention rather than

the outcomes achieved by one isolated instance of social contention; 2) emphasises the co-presence of multiple outcomes led by one instance of social contention rather than one isolated outcome; 3) emphasises the structural connections emerging from the interdependent outcomes led by social contention rather than the isolated emergence of certain outcomes. However, the adoption of such a relational approach in this thesis does not mean a full rejection of 'isolated' cases particularly in social movement outcome studies but underscore the complexity of potential outcomes achieved by social contentions.

Moreover, by drawing on the idea of complexity, this thesis, following the methodological guidance of critical realism, aims to examine not only observable but covert structures of mediated relations between the state and social contention *emerging* from the state-initiated contentious public sphere but also causal complexity behind the emergence of such a multi-faceted and multi-levelled state-initiated contentious public sphere. To be more specific, a multi-methods research design is developed in this thesis to analyse the data collected from the relevant articles published in two prestigious CCP's newspapers, namely *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020. the choice of Cluster Analysis, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Social Network Analysis shows the methodological integrity which highlight the complexity of mediated relations between the state and social contention in the public from a holistic perspective.

In this thesis, each research method is conducted separately to address different parts or aspects of the inquiry for research questions and the results eventually form a comprehensive understanding of such a multileveled and multifaceted state-initiated contentious public sphere established in the harmonious society-building era. By exploring the complexity of state-

initiated contentious public sphere and examining it as an important cultural impact of social contention in China, this thesis advances the theoretical understanding of contentious politics in China and makes contributions to social movement outcome study as well. It substantially facilitates the shift of scholarly attention from the mobilisation-centred question of how social contention initially happens to the outcome-centred question of what they consequentially change in the field of China study and introduces an alternative relational approach to the assessment of social movement outcomes in general.

1.4 Major Contributions and Main Findings of the Thesis

This thesis brings a wealth of new empirical evidence and major theoretical insights into 1) the cultural impact of social contention in China; 2) the complexity of relationships culturally established between the state and social contention in China; 3) the informational strategies adopted by the state to deliberately 'manage' the information environment in China; 4) a relational approach to the study of social movement outcomes in general.

In the first place, this thesis highlights the unbalanced research on social contention in China. Most existing studies pay a substantial amount of their attention to why and how social contention can take place in China and overlook the rich variety of actual changes potentially brought about by social contention in all aspects of China. This thesis fills this gap, by systematically examining how Chinese party newspapers covered the issue of social contention during the harmonious society-building era and, in turn, assessing the cultural impact of social contention within the state-initiated contentious public sphere. To this end, this thesis also calls for a turn from occurrence-related to outcome-related studies on social contention in China.

Next, this thesis also contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the state and social contention in China. It is known to all that the society-state relation is almost *the* most important interactive relationship in the studies on social contention in China, but, surprisingly, besides localised cases studies (Cai 2010; O'Brien and Li, 2006), it is a shame that there is no empirical study devoted to mapping out the overall picture of this important type of relationships in China and detecting the status differentiation of social contention in the eyes of the state. This thesis discloses a variety of mediated relationships between the state and social contention emerging from the multifaceted and multileveled state-initiated contentious public sphere in China.

Thirdly, this thesis further engages in the discussion about how the state informationally intervenes in the reshaping of the information environment to ensure it is always favourable to the CCP's ruling. The findings presented in this thesis corroborate the sophistication of the Chinese state's informational strategies and show how the state is capable of deliberately adopting appropriate strategies to informationally deal with social contention in different situations. This thesis also reveals a series of governing rationales behind the informational strategies used by the state for different purposes, such as the 'harmonisation' of social contention and prioritisation of economic development at a local level.

Lastly, this thesis advances the relational approach to social movement outcome studies and argues what social contention leads to can be the emerging structure of relational flows rather than an isolated 'thing' possessed by actors. This thesis suggests that such a relational approach shows a great promise for future studies on social movement outcomes in particular, because methodologically, network analysis can be polished for assessing the impact of social contention in a more standardised manner, and such a relational view has the potential to cover

a wide range of relational outcomes, such as the programme jointly initiated by social organisations and the cross-institutional policy collaborations.

To be more specific, this thesis offers a systematic exploration of such a multi-faceted and multi-levelled state-initiated contentious public sphere emerging in China during the harmonious society-building period. The main findings are threefold. First, this thesis clearly shows *an unequal distribution of contentious coverage in the party press, or state attention in other terms, on social contention.* It is known that, for newspapers which function as a crucial information-processing institution, the space for coverage is a type of scarce resource. Therefore, what contentious coverage in the party press implies is that the limited amount of state attention available for response to social contention on the ground needs to be carefully distributed to the relevant issues accordingly. Following this train of thought, this thesis provides rich empirical evidence to strongly suggest that contentious coverage in the party press is disproportionally distributed across the levels of the aggregate, individual, and even essential component of social contention. In other words, such a descriptive finding, thanks to the dual nature of party newspapers being news media and propaganda apparatus, further indicates the overall pattern of complex relations between the state and social contention established during the harmonious society-building period.

Second, this thesis reveals the political logics behind the news production of contentious coverage in the party press. In this thesis, it is strongly argued that different, even contradictory, news-making logics behind certain types of contentious coverage not only underscore the party newspapers' struggle between functioning as news media and propaganda apparatus but also suggest the complexity of producing news about social protests in authoritarian regimes like

China. Among the detailed findings offered in this thesis, the most interesting and empirically well-supported claim can be generalised with a short phrase: *'no news of protest is less good than news of no protest'*. According to conventional wisdom, the outbreak of social protests is normally viewed as a signal of state weakness and regime instability. In this sense, no news about protest is indeed good news for the rulers in an authoritarian context. However, this thesis shows that it is those regions which witness intensive social contention on the ground are more likely to receive news articles that publicise the decline of social contention at the local level and thus further argues that news about no protest is better news in China. In other words, promoting the image of social stability and harmonising social contention through the mouthpiece of the party are informational strategies that the state applies to deliberately shape the information environmental favourable to its authoritarian ruling and stability. Such an interesting finding not only serves as a reminder of significant differences between the production of news articles involving the issue of social protest in authoritarian regimes like China and that in democratic contexts but also enhances the overall understanding of diversified media-protest relations.

Third, this paper clarifies *the distinction between the highlight and the spotlight of contentious coverage in the party press*. In plain language, the highlight refers to the incident that receives the largest amount of contentious coverage. By contrast, the spotlight refers to the incident which shares journalistic connections with the greatest number of other different incidents. Of course, such a division within contentious coverage has great implications for assessing the worthiness of media coverage received by different instances of social contention as a cultural type of institutional outcomes. In the previous social movement outcome studies on this classic topic of media-protest relations, it has been widely agreed that the sheer number of relevant articles received by each reported protest event determines its impacts on the media. Briefly

speaking, the more publicity they achieve, the more influence they enjoy. In addition to this measuring approach to the detection of high-profile instances of social contention in the eyes of the state, this thesis offers a structuring approach as an alternative and argues that the focal status of each reported protest event is determined by its relative position in the networks of identified incident emerging from contentious coverage. In this sense, for the reported instances of social contention, the more connections with others detected, the more central and prioritised position occupied. As a result, this thesis not only offers two distinctive criteria for assessing the cultural impact of social contention in terms of media coverage but also further uncovers the reported number of people involved in social contention and the reported type of issues shared by challengers as two respective journalistic drives behind the formation of the high-profile and focal protest events in the state-initiated contentious public sphere of China.

1.5 Overview of the Thesis

Alongside this introductory chapter the thesis consists of eight more chapters in total. Chapter Two, *Understanding Social Contention in China*, covers three important themes that collaboratively provide background context for this thesis. First, the chapter begins with a brief clarification of key terms like protest, social movement and mass incident based on the conceptual discussion in social movement studies and China studies and then proposes 'A Triplet' as the conceptual tool used to understand and operationalise social contention in this thesis. Second, the chapter concisely delineates the historical trajectory of social contention as an observable phenomenon in the history of China since 1949 and comprehensively illustrates China's contentious road to harmonious society. Third, the chapter presents how social movement theories meet the reality of social contention in China and, more importantly, indicates an imbalanced research focus that pays more attention to the *occurrence*, rather than *outcome*, of social contentions staged on the ground in China.

Chapter Three, *Social Movement Outcome Study*, echoes the call for more investigations into the potential impacts of social contentions in China and thus offers a brief but thorough review of relevant literatures in both English and Chinese specifically through a lens of social movement outcome study. First, the chapter formally introduces Mediation Model, the landmark and widely used theoretical approach to the assessment of social movement outcomes, with clear definitions of various terms like success, outcome, and impact. Second, in line with the logic of mediation model, this chapter reviews the literatures around two important topics, namely the empirically evidence-supported changes led by social contention in China and how Chinese grassroots challengers can make it, especially taking into account the roles played by the state and the media in relation to these changes. Finally, the chapter highlights the neglect of viewing media coverage as a type of *cultural* outcome led by social contentions and the lack of a *holistic* perspective of surveying the institutional impact of social contentions as two major limitations of previous research and then offers a relational approach as the solution.

Chapter Four, *Limited Attention and Multiple Signals*, proposes a theoretical framework applicable to the understanding and exploration of state-initiated contentious public sphere in this thesis. Drawing on signaling theory derived from the knowledge of information politics, this chapter specifies how the state-initiated contentious public sphere can be informationally approached from a holistic perspective as a cultural type of institutional outcome brought by social contentions in China. To be more specific, due to the *limited* amount of institutional attention and *multiple* signals sent from grassroots challengers, the rise of state-initiated contentious public sphere is arguably resulting from the complex interplay between state and social contentions, namely, the state's selective response to protesting signals, or the

disproportionate distribution of state attention on social contentions in other words. So, in this sense, the main argument offered in this chapter is that the state-initiated contentious public sphere, which is formally processed by media institution, is not only a compilation of relevant news articles but essentially the journalistic reflection of complex mediated relations built between the state and social contentions in China.

Chapter Five, *A Multimethod Research Design*, lays out a series of methodological considerations to show how this thesis philosophically, methodologically and empirically addresses the issue of complexity in exploring the state-initiated contentious public sphere. First, this chapter sets critical realism as the philosophical foundation of this thesis and briefly explains why a 'multimethod' research design rather than a 'mix methods' is preferred here. Second, this chapter introduces the history of the use of newspapers as data source in the field of social movement study and then narrows the focus specifically down to the methodological advantages of selecting news articles from Chinese party newspapers, *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, in surveying the mediated relationships between the state and social contention in China by emphasising on the idea of media bias. Finally, the chapter reintroduces the research questions of this thesis and presents how Cluster Analysis, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), and Social Network Analysis, which serve as the main tools of data analysis, offer complementary lenses of exploring the complexity of state-initiated contentious public sphere in this thesis.

Chapter Six, *Situating Contention in Harmonious Society* is the first empirical chapter of this thesis and provides a bird's eye view of state-initiated contentious public sphere in China during the period of building harmonious society. First, the chapter introduces a set of terms,

namely *contentious coverage*, *reported region* and *identified incident*, and uses them as the analytical lens for descriptively capturing the overview of relevant news articles selected from *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020. Next, this chapter situates the observations of reported regions and identified incidents in their geographical places and depicts the landscape of state-initiated contentious public sphere on the land of China. Furthermore, this chapter views each province as an integral whole with two attributes of reported regions and identified incidents and then applies Cluster Analysis to identify the status differentiation of all 31 provinces in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

Chapter Seven, *What a Type of News!* narrows the focus down to the emergence of reported regions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and answers under what conditions the provinces can successfully capture certain types of state attention through the party mouthpiece. First, this chapter introduces the diverse ways in which the party press addresses the issue of social contentions. Accordingly, this chapter proposes four specific types of contentious coverage with reported regions in the party press, namely *Commentary-focused Soft News*, *Rise-focused Hard News*, *Fall-focused Hard New* and *Governance-focused Hard News*, which serve as different journalistic channels through which the state can allocate its attention to social contentions on the ground. Thanks to this typology of media-contention relations applicable to the authoritarian context of China in particular, this chapter not only depicts a *multi-faceted* landscape of state-initiated contentious public sphere in China but also further restresses the notable status differentiation of reported regions in the eyes of the state. Then, this chapter, by viewing each province as an integral whole with a set of five conditions, namely *Economy*, *Population*, *Protest*, *Media Visibility* and *Political Relations*, applies QCA to explore the causal complexity behind the emerging patterns of mediated relations between the state and reported regions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and reveals the logics

behind different informational strategies used by the state to respond to social contention in the form of contentious coverage.

Chapter Eight, *The Highlight and The Spotlight*, shifts the focus to the emergence of identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and explores the journalistic drives that lead instances of social contention to different positions in the eyes of the state. First, this chapter presents an overall picture of all identified incidents that successfully capture the state's attention and, more importantly, provides rich details about the visible components of social contention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. Then, in order to detect whether the mediated relation established between the state and each identified incident is equally important, this chapter not only adopts a conventional perspective of *measuring* the amount of coverage received by each instance but also offers an innovative alternative *structuring* approach to the capture of media attainment of each instance. To be more specific, this chapter distinguished the *highlight* of state attention which refers to a *cumulative, direct* and *absolute* individual reception of state attention in terms of the quantity of media coverage received by each identified incident from the *spotlight* of state attention which emphasises on a *relational, latent* and *relative* position of media visibility occupied by each identified incident within media coverage. Next, by employing Social Network Analysis with the analytic technique of Quadratic Assignment Procedure (QAP), this chapter detects the different journalist drives behind the formation of the highlight and the spotlight of state attention in the party press.

Finally, the concluding chapter briefly summarises the main findings shown in this thesis and introduces how they contribute to the knowledge base in social movement studies and China studies. In short, by viewing the emergence of *relations* observed in media coverage as a

cultural type of institutional outcome brought by social contentions and offering an alternative *holistic* approach to the analysis of newspaper data, this thesis explores the complexity of mediated relations between the state and social contentions emerging from the state-initiated contentious public between 2004 and 2020. Moreover, this chapter also clearly points out the analytical boundaries and limitations of the thesis and raises more interesting and important questions for further investigation in the future. Finally, this chapter moves the scope of research beyond the period of building harmonious society and tentatively takes a quick look at the changes in the dynamics of harmony and contention in a new era of China.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL CONTENTION IN CHINA:

Concept, History and Research

Before examining how the party press covers social contention in China and thus assessing the impact of social contention on the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of social contention in China. The three sections of this chapter systematically introduce the background knowledge of this thesis from different perspectives. First, the chapter will engage in the conceptual discussion of what 'social contention' is, which is referred to as the key concept in social movement studies and the research field of Chinese contentious politics. More importantly, this chapter presents the minimalist strategy employed in this thesis to operationalise social contention into its three definitive essential components, i.e., *actor*, *action*, and *appeal*, and shows how such a conceptual framework is beneficial to the exploration of social contention in China. Next, this chapter briefly introduces the history of social contention in China. In brief, the contentious road to a harmonious society in China can be broadly divided into three historical phases. The overview of social contention in Mao's China, the initial period of reform and opening-up era, and the post-Tiananmen Movement era, will be presented in the second section of the chapter, respectively. Finally, this chapter will delineate how social contention in China, as a crucial research topic of social inquiry, has gradually caught the researchers' attention and been placed on the research agenda in Chinese and English academic circles. More importantly, this chapter highlights an unbalanced research focus that pays more attention to why and how grassroots mobilisation took place on the ground in China while the actual changes triggered by social contention have been neglected to some extent. In short, this chapter offers an opportunity to fully understand social contention in China, conceptually, historically, and in a scholarly-developing context.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification of Social Contention in China

2.1.1 Conceptual Plethora and Ambiguity

What does social contention mean in this thesis? This chapter begins with a brief conceptual clarification of this notoriously difficult defined social phenomenon arising from the grassroots. In the field of sociological inquiry, there are numerous terms employed by researchers to conceptualise the contentious activities staged by a group of mobilised people in the public, such as collective action, social movement, protest, and contentious politics. In brief, the classic understanding of 'collective action' originally emphasises the actions of the mass that is predominantly driven by emotion, while, to a certain extent, overlooking the rationality of actors (Blumer, 1951; Kornhauser, 1959; Smelser, 1962); the concept of 'social movement' highlights the central position of social movement organisation in large-scale mobilisation of people (Gamson, 1990 [1975]; McCarthy and Zald, 1977); the concept of 'protest' turns the focus from organisational foundations of actions to the strategies, repertoires, and claims of participants (Koopmans and Statham, 1999; Rucht et al., 1999; Koopmans and Rucht, 2002; Oliver et al., 2003); the concept of 'contentious politics' refers to the non-institutional challenges from the outside of institutional polity (Tilly, 1978; McAdam; 1982). Of course, this thesis does not intend to distinguish the similarities and differences between these concepts in detail. What has been presented above is merely to briefly show each concept has its analytical focus (see more discussion in Johnston, 2014; Diani, 1992).

Turning to the conceptualisation of social contention specifically staged on the land of China, scholars have been advancing the compatibility of the aforementioned concepts originated in the West and the reality in the context of China and further calling for innovative concepts that

more accurately capture distinctive natures and characteristics of social contention observed in China. For example, 'rightful resistance' was coined by O'Brien (1996: 33) to refer to 'partially sanctioned resistance that uses influential advocates and recognised principles, [i.e., laws and policies] to apply pressure on those in power who have failed to live up to some professed ideal or who have not implemented some beneficial measure'. The idea of 'cellular protest' is another example. Many researchers agree that nowadays it is difficult for most Chinese challengers (e.g., peasants and workers) to coordinate with others across multiple sites and to organise nationwide contentious activities (Cai, 2002; Chen, 2006; Perry, 2008; Lee, 2007). Also, Fu (2017) proposed the idea of 'mobilising without the mass' to indicate an innovative form of grassroots mobilisation situated in between collective and individual contention and specifically used the concept of 'disguised collective action' to refer to the aggregation of individual actions collectively coordinated by social organisations in China.

Besides the academic efforts to conceptualise social contention in the context of China, the most dominant term referring to the occurrence of grassroots mobilisation, especially in the Chinese public sphere and political discourse, is 'mass incident'. This term has been widely used by Chinese authority to officially indicate 'behaviours implemented collectively which would violate national laws, regulations, and rules, disrupt the social order, endanger public security, and violate personal and property safety in both public and private', according to *Regulations on Public Security Organs Dealing with Mass Security Incidents* published by the Ministry of Public Security in 2000 (cited from Wei et al., 2014). Notably, the term 'mass incident' covers a wide range of public activities relating to social contention. Tong and Lei (2010; 2013) listed eight specific types of mass incident: 1) collective petition visit to upper-level government offices and sit-ins; 2) illegal assemblies, parades, and demonstrations; 3) strikes (e.g., labour, merchant, student, and teacher); 4) traffic blocking; 5) disturbances; 6)

surrounding or attacking party/government buildings; 7) smashing, looting, and burning; and 8) obstructing the performance of government administration. As Tanner (2004; 2005) stated, the term 'mass incident' is 'an overly broad, catch-all term that encompasses the full spectrum of group protests' and, unfortunately, there is no one English word or academic concept that can be used to accurately capture the breadth of these contentious activities. Even the Chinese government has not given a complete list of activities falling into the category of 'mass incident' (Chen, 2012:27).

Based on a brief discussion of different ways of conceptualising social contention, there is a serious issue of terminological ambiguity that can be detected in the literature focusing on the issue of social contention. Such a conceptual ambiguity rooted in the terminological plethora implies that the same form of social contention might be named in different ways and different forms of social contention might be analysed through the same conceptual framework. For example, regarding the Uyghurs '7.5' incident that was driven by ethnic conflicts and eventually left 197 people died in Xinjiang in 2009, there are many scholars placing this bloody contentious activity into the category of 'mass incident', analysing it through a lens of collective action, or viewing it as a remarkable protest event in the history of social contention in China (Wei et al., 2009; Vergani and Zuev, 2011), whereas many other scholars and even the Chinese government defined the 2009 Uyghurs '7.5' incident as terrorism (Barbour and Jones, 2013) and, thus, removed it from the study of social contention in China. Moreover, what makes such a situation of conceptual ambiguity in this research area even worse is the arbitrary use of these different terminologies. Despite some studies dedicated to highlighting the nuances between the aforementioned concepts, the terms are often used interchangeably in many empirical studies and thus inevitably result in the blurred, ever-changing, and uncertain

analytical boundaries of examining social contention in China (Tong and Lei, 2010; 2013; Zhang and Pan, 2019).

Of course, since the main research task of this thesis is to explore the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere in the harmonious society-building era, this chapter does not intend to deeply delve in the conceptual discussion of what social contention is, nor to figure out what the best way to conceptualise social contention in China is. In contrast, this thesis suggests understanding social contention in China in a more operational manner and adopting the most appropriate strategy to not only accurately locate contentious activities that take place on the ground in China, but also effectively serve the exploration of research questions, i.e., assessing the impact of social contention on Chinese public sphere.

2.1.2 Operational Definitions of Social Contention

For the operationalisation of social contention in empirical studies, taking a look at some influential research projects that are devoted to identifying the occurrence of social contention within media coverage sheds significant light on how researchers operationally view the social activity as the unit of analysis with the 'boundaries that define zones of inclusion and exclusion' (Mahoney, 2010: 7 cited from Schneider and Wagemann, 2012: 24). For example, the well-known newspaper-based project, the Dynamics of Collective Action (DCA) run by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, Susan Olzak, and Sarah Soule, identifies the contentious activities from *the New York Times* between 1960 and 1995 and defines it as any type of contentious activity involving more than one person and carried out with the explicit claim against, or expressing support for, a target in the public. The PRODAT project principally led by Dieter Rucht, uses German newspapers published from 1950 to 2001 to operationally identify the

event in a specific form of ‘a collective, public action by a non-governmental actor who expresses criticism or dissent and articulates a societal or political demand’ (Rucht et al. 1992: 4 cited from Hutter, 2014: 345). The European Protest and Coercion Data compiled by Ronald Francisco is based on Reuters News Agency in combination with a wide range of national newspapers in 30 European countries and operationalises the concept of social contention as ‘observed activities directed against the regime’ (Francisco, 1995: 269 cited from ibid.:). A recent online posts-based Collective Action from Social Media (CASM) established by Zhang and Pan particularly focuses on the detection of ‘an episodic, collective event among makers of claims and their targets’ (2019: 8) in China.

Notably, all these projects placed the ‘*event*’ in the central position of operationalising social contention in empirical studies. However, as Hutter (2014) distinguished the latest generation of media-based detection of social contention in social movement studies from the preceding studies, there is a trend moving beyond such a ‘event-centric’ perspective. Instead, many researchers no longer adhere to the conventional view of prioritising the event as a whole in the operationalisation of social contention but shift the focus to ‘definitional features’ of social contention by decomposing the event into various essential components. For example, Amenta and his co-authors. (Yuan et al., 2023; Amenta and Caren, 2022; Amenta et al., 2019; Amenta and Eilliott 2017; Amenta et al., 2017; Amenta et al., 2016; Amenta et al., 2009; Elliott et al, 2016) carry out the research project named the Political Organisations in the News (PONs) project, which focuses on social movement organisations that seek to mobilise an unmobilised constituency to achieve the goals that are allied with those of a social movement. Tilly (2008) addresses protest claims as an analytic dimension of examining social contention. Koopmans and Statham further introduced political claim analysis which centred on the claim-making act, i.e., ‘a purposeful communicative action in the public sphere’ (2010: 55, also see 1999). In a

recent article, researchers ‘decomposed the episodes into their component elements-actors, actions, sequences of actions, pairs of actions’ (Kriesi et al., 2019: 251) and offered a framework of the contentious episode that emphasised the action-centred operationalisation of social contention.

This part of the discussion on the operationalisation of social contention is not to argue that the focus on definitive components of social contention is better than a traditional event-centric capture of social contention, but simply to show social contention has been operationalised in empirical studies in different ways. Notably, the operationalisation of social contention varies across empirical studies and significantly affects the process of establishing social contention as an empirical fact. Therefore, what this part of the chapter calls for is the compatibility of the analytical framework of social contention with research questions and objectives.

2.1.3 Essential Components of Social Contention: ‘A Triplet’

The aforementioned various attempts to operationalise social contention in empirical studies can be summarised into three general categories of *actor*, *action*, and *appeal*. The actor-centred operationalisation of social contention emphasises social organisation, the number of participants, the group of mobilised people. The action-centred operationalisation of social contention pays more attention to the forms of action, repertoires, and strategies. Appeal-centred operationalisation of social contention highlights the claims, attitudes, and knowledge channelled through social contention. The distinctions between these different strategies of operationalising social contention in empirical studies have been highlighted by many researchers. For example, according to Oliver et al. (2003), the methodological differences between event-oriented operationalisation of social contention and viewing organisation, or

movement, as the unit of analysis indicate one of the remarkable academic turns in social movement studies. Similarly, Rucht et al. argued that, '[f]rom an analytical standpoint, we should not equate the study of protest with the study of social movement' (Rucht et al., 1999:9). As for the methodological divide between event-centred strategy of operationalising social contention and other two strategies, i.e., action-centred and appeal-centred operationalisation, Hutter stated that researchers have moved beyond the strict focus on '(aggregates of) protest events as their coding unit' (2014: 340). On the one hand, scholars unpacked single protest events or contentious performances by focusing on action and interaction inside them (McPhail and Schweingruber 1998; Franzosi 2004; Tilly 2008). On the other hand, scholars broadened the unit of analysis beyond protest to cover a larger group of public claims-making (e.g., protest events) (Koopmans and Statham 1999; 2010; Koopmans et al. 2005; Kriesi et al. 2012). … both attempts to capture the *relational* (italic added) aspect of political contention' (Hutter, 2014: 340). In short, all these trends involve 'transcending old categories and boundaries' and combining 'methodological and theoretical advances' (Oliver et al. 2003, 214).

This study agrees with such a methodological advancement of operationalising social contention in empirical studies, i.e., a research trend of prioritising essential components of social contention rather than a conventional view of approaching social contention as the event. However, what needs to be stressed is that the introduction of new paths does not mean the demise of the old tool. Diverse strategies of operationalising social contention expand the research scope of investigating social contention and collaboratively offer the opportunity to understand social contention from multifaceted and multileveled perspectives. Furthermore, this thesis, following Hutter's suggestion that researchers need to be more creative when it comes to the strategies of operationalising social contention, offers an idea of 'A Triplet', i.e.,

a definitional formula of social contention that includes *Actor*, *Action*, and *Appeal*. This 'A Triplet' of social contention originated in and developed from Franzosi (2004)'s idea of 'semantic triplets', i.e., the 'subject-verb-object'. It is Tilly (2008) who introduces it to social movement study and use it as the unit of observation to specify the relations within an event and the potential links of each component across the events. To be more specific, for the first definitive component of social contention, *actor*, there must be a group of non-state actors collectively acting as the subjective of social contention. So, by requiring at least two people to get involved, this thesis excludes individual acts of protest like self-immolation. Second, the *action* in the formula serves as the verb which is expected to link with the other two components of social contention, i.e., the actor and appeal. So, by requiring social contention staged non-institutionally and publicly on the ground, this thesis excludes those mobilisations that take place in online sphere or are not physically visible to the public in mainland China. Third, *appeal* indicates the objective of social contention, i.e., the demands, claims, and values channelled through or expected to be achieved by social contention. Thus, by requiring social contention to have clear goals, this thesis excludes those emotion and passion-driven mobilisations without any issue.

In brief, what this model of 'A Triplets' provides is a conceptual framework for understanding social contention in China. Also, it is a minimal strategy of operationalising social contention which enables this thesis to cover the widest range of social contention and thus to capture the overall picture of social contention in China. In short, in this thesis, social contention will be conceptually and empirically approached through a lens of 'A Triplet'. In short, this thesis puts diverse but ambiguous terms aside (e.g., contentious politics, mass incident, and social movement). Instead, it focuses on the essential definitive components of social contention and

aims to explore how these components interact with each other or how they interact with actors in a broader context.

2.2 Brief History of Social Contention in China

After illustrating what social contention means in this thesis, this section aims to briefly introduce the history of social contention in China and show how harmonious society-building is historically rooted in the long-term interactions between the state and social contention in the history of CCP's ruling of China. Overall, this section offers the background knowledge of the contentious road to a harmonious society in China since 1949.

2.2.1 1949-1976: Social Contention in Mao's China?

According to some scholars, the first decades in Mao's China, especially the 1950s, can be considered a kind of golden age of unusual harmony and goodwill, showing a special closeness between Chinese people and the new socialist government (Perry, 2002: 207). Indeed, for the occurrence of mobilisation in this period, it has been a consensus that frequent and nationwide *state-sponsored* mass mobilisations characterise Mao's China (Bernstein, 1977; Bennett, 1976; Cell, 1977). As Chinese researcher Hu Angang suggested, there were 67 mass mobilisations initiated by the state between 1949 and 1976, approximately 2.5 campaigns per year (Hu, 2008). Perry (2007) also labelled Mao's China as revolutionary authoritarianism and Lee (2002) termed it as mobilisational state. However, noted, this type of state-sponsored mobilisation cannot be viewed as social contention of course. As Gao and Su (2018) stated, the mobilisation in China can be analytically differentiated into two general categories based on the sets of dichotomous attributes (e.g., top-down or bottom-up, evoked or spontaneous, conciliatory or confrontational, statist or non-statist). Thus, what needs to be addressed in this section is

whether there is social contention spontaneously arising from the grassroots in Mao's China and whether there is a certain turning point in the history of mobilisation in China that remarks the break-up between state-sponsored mobilisation and social contention.

According to Perry (1993; 2002: 206-213), in the spring of 1957, there was an impressive strike wave approximately involving 30,000 workers in Shanghai. Nearly half the protests were driven by a demand for higher income or improved welfare, and the rest of the issues were related to contracts, working locations, poor local governance, and the new social control system of household registration. Likewise, Perry (ibid.: 277-284) also identified two types of peasant insurgency that took place in rural China in the 1950s, i.e., the opposition to land reform and the opposition to co-corporatisation. The first type of protest was normally led by the disgruntled persons emerging in the state-led land reform (e.g., landlords and rich peasants), and their claims were simply to revive the status quo ante. The second type of protest especially refers to the resistance staged by local religious sects and secret societies in rural areas against the policy implementation of establishing new state-sponsored rural collective organisations. Furthermore, Perry (2010) provided more examples to show the rise of social contention even during the Cultural Revolution era, which is often considered the height of state-sponsored mass mobilisation in Mao's China. In 1966, a spontaneous labour organisation, *Workers' General Headquarters*, won the official recognition from the central government by mobilising labours to disruptively halt nearly 150 trains headed to or from Shanghai. Since then, a surge of organisation-based labour protests driven by socioeconomic grievances and demands was also identified in Shanghai between 1966 and 1967. The concessions made by Shanghai CCP Committee at all levels as direct responses to labour's demands covered a wide range of financial forms (e.g., higher wages, subsidies, welfare provisions, divisions of union accumulation funds, and house supply). In addition, Burns (1987: 110) documented a

successful mobilisation of peasant demonstration against the commune and local cadres' misallocation of reserves in Taishan county, Guangdong province, in 1972 with full details and O'Brien and Li (2006: 30) also clearly stated their agreements with the existence of social contention particularly against local authorities in Mao's China.

However, what needs to be reminded is that, although Perry attempted to differentiate social contention spontaneously staged on the ground from state-sponsored mobilisation in Mao's China, she also admitted the importance of state inspiration and central leaders' encouragement to grassroots mobilisation. For example, the aforementioned Shanghai labour strike wave was endorsed by Mao's welcome of the dissent during the Hundred Flowers movement between 1956 and 1957 (Perry, 1993: 2002: 211), and Shanghai labour protest of 1966-1967, just months after the onset of Red Guard factionalism, was also workers' direct response to Mao's calling to 'bombard the headquarters', which encouraged the masses to attack party and state apparatus occupied by 'capitalist roaders' (Perry, 2002: 238). Perry's nuanced illustration of such an intertwined process of state-sponsored mobilisation and social contention spontaneously arising from the grassroots in Mao's China not only advances the understanding of the complicated natures of people's power during this period but also unveils the similar political conditions favouring the occurrences of both kinds of mobilisation. More importantly, Perry suggested that both state-led and grassroot mobilisation jointly served as a kind of basic training camp for subsequent discontent and disappointed Chinese people (Perry, 2008: 210-211). The legacy of Mao's China is rich. Mao's imprints, or anti-Mao's imprints, on social contention in China is unavoidable and cannot be ignored either. This is also the reason why this section is devoted to mapping out the historical overview of both types of mobilisations in Mao's China, even though a detailed investigation of state-sponsored mobilisation that dominated this period is far beyond the research scope of this thesis.

2.2.2 1976-1989: State Retreat and People Revival

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, it took CCP only two years to shift itself from revolutionary Maoism headed by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, through Hua Guofeng's conservative Restorationism, and finally to reformism led by Deng Xiaoping (Harding, 1987: 66). With a determination of sharp and decisive break from both Maoist and the Soviet model, the reform was launched in 1978 and the central government began to decentralise its economic power. However, many social problems caused by the reform, such as inflation, over-investment, budgetary deficits, socio-economic inequality, spiralling corruption, and the stagnation of agricultural growth, began to emerge and threaten social stability (Sun, 1991; Walder, 1991). Also, through the 1980s, social contention became an important channel for Chinese people to express their concerns about pressing social problems, and to collectively participate in the political process by claiming their demands on the streets.

From the late 1970s through the late 1980s, three influential waves of social contention attracted a great amount of scholarly attention. First, despite being officially labelled as a counter-revolutionary rebellion, 5th April Movement of 1976, the same year of Mao's death, signalled the arrival of 'mass age in Chinese politics' (Liu, 1996: 1). According to many scholars (Burns, 1987; Liu, 1996; Wright, 2018), 5th April Movement, which initially was a public commemoration of the death of Premier Zhou Enlai and eventually turned to a political movement against the central government, was the first time since 1949 that Chinese people shifted their political statuses in the mobilisation from passively being led and encouraged by the party-state in previous endless campaigns to spontaneous expression of their grievances, weariness, and expectations. Second, the Democracy Wall movement of 1978–79, which

demanded to add the 'Fifth Modernisation', democratisation, to the list of Four Modernisations proposed by Zhou Enlai in 1954 and readdressed by Deng Xiaoping as China's developmental objectives in the reform age, was also viewed by some other scholars as the starting point of Chinese people's awakening political participation, growing awareness of individual rights, and, more importantly, their unprecedented expression of democratisation (Goldman, 2002; Brodsgaard, 1981; Jiang, 2015). Third, in the 1989 Tiananmen movement, Wang (1992) stated that this movement marked a turning point the changing class relations in China. In Wang's view, the working class is no longer a pillar of socialist continuity but a force for change. Goldstone (1994) argued that, unlike other confrontations that were in some sense orchestrated by the regime, the 1989 Tiananmen movement marked the first time that intellectuals and other actors moved independently to challenge the regime. Similarly, Andrew Walder (1992: 104) described the 1989 Tiananmen movement as 'something new on the political scene: massive, independent, popular protests. The old mode of regimentation and elite-sponsored turbulence has been broken, and Chinese politics appears to have entered a new era'.

During this period, the participants of social contention covered a wide range of social groups. Students, intellectuals, and labours constituted the main forces of advancing social change, demanding political reforms and claiming their long-standing grievances caused by state oppression and the implementation of wrong national policies in Mao's China. Social contention staged in urban areas were more likely to escalate into large-scale and nationwide mobilisations drawing millions of participants (Feng and Zhao, 2013). According to Jiang's (2015) statistics, in 1978, over 100,000 people (700,000 at the peak) from other regions of China gathered in the capital, Beijing, to claim their demands almost every day (Jiang, 2015: 90). Besides, in 1986, student-led protests appeared at 150 higher education institutions in 17 cities and involved up to 100,000 students, demanding 'democracy' but often intermingled

with many other economic and material grievances, such as tuition fees, school regulations and even food quality (Kwong, 1988; Wright, 2018:31). Needless to say, the 1989 Tiananmen movement attracted both foreign media and observers' attentions (Calhoun, 1997; Zhao, 2004). The number of participants soared from 3000 demonstrators on April 17, to 250,000 on April 27, and then to above a million people on May 19 (Zhao, 1998; Deng; 1997). At the same time, 'similar activities arose at virtually every college campus across the country … [and] students from across China travelled to Beijing to join the demonstrations' (Wright, 2018: 34-35).

Turning to rural areas, scholars also stated that, after the rapid agricultural development and income increases of peasants initiated by the reform in the early 1980s, the rural economy slowed, contracted, and in some places even reversed since 1985 (Walker, 2006; 2008; Bernstein and Lu, 2003). As a result, since the mid-1980s, social contention involving millions of peasants were staged against tax burden and different forms of corruption of village and township cadres, such as 'embezzlement, bribery, kickback, graft, smuggling, currency manipulation, influence peddling, and theft of state funds' (Holstrom and Smith, 2000: 10) in the countryside. However, compared with their urban counterparts, social contention happened in rural areas in this period was relatively localised and small-scale, whereas they still firmly intended to seek the central authority's attention and intervention in their local injustices and deprivations, through disruptive actions and collective petitions (Li and O'Brien 1996; O'Brien and Li, 2006; Cai, 2010).

Furthermore, the wave of social contention in this period was characterised by its close relations with Mao's China and how challengers could benefit from the legacy of Maoism. According to Perry (2010), Maoist legacy can be generalised as rhetorical, behavioural, as well

as organisational aspects. First, for example, many scholars found that Chinese grassroots challengers instrumentally adopted rhetorical idioms and narratives from the socialist era, such as ‘only the CCP can rescue China’, ‘eradicate the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie’, ‘workers are masters of the state’, ‘end the exploitation and oppression of the peasant class‘, ’down with the urban exploiting class’, to justify their actions, to frame their claims, even to express their nostalgia for Maoist egalitarianism, throughout the reform era (O’Brien and Li, 2006; Chen, 2012; Lee, 2007; Thornton, 2004; Bernstein and Lu, 2003). Second, as Seldon and Perry (2000: 11) argued, the Maoist legacy can also be the ‘residual sense of entitlement and a repertoire of protest strategies that extended to the most remote parts of the countryside and to people of diverse social classes and ethnicities’. Indeed, Chen (2008) found many leaders of factory-based resistance were former Cultural Revolution activists and the similar situation in rural areas was also identified by O’Brien and Li (2006). Big-character posters, the dominant channel of protest, propaganda, and popular communication in the Cultural Revolution era, were still frequently used by the challengers during this period (Jiang, 2015). Last, as Zhou (1993) stated, the institutional infrastructure that created and facilitated state-sponsored mobilisation in Mao’s China like the work unit system (Danwei) and other ecology-like workplaces, such as universities, hospitals, state-owned factories and the collective commune in rural areas, have not fundamentally changed in the reform era. Although, due to the retreat of party and state from society since the reform in 1978, both work units’ capacity of controlling the individuals and, conversely, individuals’ dependence on work units had been declining, local nexus of personal and friendship ties within the work units still occupied the central position of the so-called ‘work-unit mobilisation’ (Lee, 2007), which characterised the most influential popular protests during this period. Just as Heilmann argued, work units ‘served as centres of coordination and self-organisation during the April Fifth Movement’ (Heilmann, 1993: 18).

2.2.3 1989-2004: The Surge of Contention in a Transformed Society

The insurgency and then violent repression of the 1989 Tiananmen Movement made the conservative faction headed by Premier Li Peng and the elder Chen Yun within the party believed the reform and its unintended by-products, such as uncontrolled inflation, corruption and so on, should take the major responsibility of this nationwide social unrest (Vogal, 2011: 665). However, just as Nathan (2003: 6) said, when the whole world was expecting 'the regime to fall to democratisation's ''third wave'', the regime had reconsolidated itself and proclaimed to further build a 'socialist market economy' (Vogal, 2011: 682). As a result, the whole world has been instead witnessing the stunning and sustained economic growth achieved by China in this period. However, despite the fast sustained expansion of the economy, social contention in China was not eliminated by unprecedented economic achievements of the reform, but, on the rise in terms of its frequency, scale, and scope. According to annual reports published by the Ministry of Public Security, the annual number of 'mass incidents' in China increased from 8,700 in 1993, the first year for which official statistics were released, to 74,000 in 2004. The total number of people getting involved in social contention soared from 730,000 in 1994 to 3,760,000 in 2004 (Cai, 2008a; 2008b; Hu and Wang, 2006, cited from Gilboy and Read, 2008). A similar increasing trend was also identified in many other empirical studies (Chen, 2012; Cai, 2010; Chen, 2009; Chen, 2020; Zhang and Pan, 2019).

However, unlike the large-scale grassroot mobilisation that normally aimed at the central government in the previous phase of 1976-1989, most social activities staged in this period, except the quasi-Buddhist sect Falun Gong's nationwide and cross-class mobilisation directly targeting the centre, became more and more atomised. Such atomisation of social contention

can be understood in two ways. First, the constituencies of each grassroots mobilisation became more and more narrowed and exclusive. In contrast to the antecedents in which challengers usually came from various classes, in this period, most contentious activities were merely staged by a small social group of people sharing a similar identity, experience, discontent, and location. Next, the geographical limit of grassroots mobilisation constituted the second dimension of atomisation of social contention staged during this period. According to many scholars, it became more and more difficult for the discontent and deprived people to coordinate with others across multiple sites (e.g., factory, villages and residential compounds) and eventually stage a nationwide social movement (Cai, 2002; Cai, 2005; Chen, 2006; Lee, 2007).

Moreover, for the grievances and motivations of the non-institutional challengers during this period, similarly, there was a departure from the unitary, long-standing, state-centred causes which were deeply rooted in Mao's China to more fragmented, pressing, exclusive, and materialised claims. Therefore, in other words, a very important characteristic of the surge of social contention in this period is the expanding range of issues claimed by various groups of people. For example, peasants kept challenging against corrupt local officials, irregularities in village committee elections, illegitimate taxes and fees, and land expropriation (O'Brien and Li, 2006; Bernstein and Lu, 2003); urban residents complained about insufficient compensation for house demolition (Guo, 2001; Hess, 2010;); the emerging middle class acted to stop the construction of chemical plants under the banner of 'environmentalism' and protect their property-related interests with dubious right consciousness (Lang and Xu, 2013; Li, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Wang et al., 2013; Xie, 2012); the first generation of feminists and gender activists was also awakened by the 4th World Conference on Women of the United Nations that was successfully hosted in Beijing in 1995 (Wang, 2018; Wei, 2015). Again, there was no a

unitary grievance even among the challenges. Zhou (1993) once claimed that market economy adopted by the Chinese government during the reform period not only produced 'a complex stratification system' but also resulted in 'a structure of fragmented grievances'. Such a fragmentation of grievances behind the surge of social contention can be also understood in terms of the 'immediate-frequently-monetary interests' to certain social groups and the lack of pursuit of collective and public good for the whole population (Steinhardt and Wu, 2016).

Additionally, there were two noteworthy changes in mobilisation infrastructure during this period. First, despite the sustained debate on the compatibility of Habermas's term civil society with the Chinese context (see discussion in Teets, 2009), the undeniable fact was the dramatical growth of social organisations in China since the mid-1990s. Many scholars called this unprecedented phenomenon as China's 'associational revolution' (Teets, 2009; Fu, 2017). According to official statistics published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the number of registered social organisations soared from 4,544 in 1989 to 289,432 in 2004. However, these statistics only capture a partial picture of the blossoming social organisational sector in post-1989 China, because there were a large number of unregistered organisations operating in China and those registered as business companies to avoid a redundant enrolment process and strict monitoring from the state. According to Wang and He (2004: 524, cited from Fu, 2018: 6), the estimated number of unregistered organisations can nearly reach five million and, as for those registering themselves as business companies, the Ministry of Civil Affairs officially estimated the number at 2-3 million in its report published in 2009. As a result, a diverse range of public concerns and social issues, such as labour, peasants, migrants, environment, HIV/AIDS, gender, disaster relief, had been prioritised by the expanding sector of social organisation in China and growing social organisations became to take more and more responsibility of 'public service delivery, local capacity-building, legal advocacy and policy

advocacy' (Teets, 2009: 332). Focusing on specifically social contention, many empirical studies also identified the central position of these social organisations in grassroots mobilisation relating to environmental issues (Yang, 2005), labour dispute (Chen, 2004; Chen and Yang, 2017; Pringle, 2018) and homeowners' rights defence (Wang et al., 2013).

Another crucial component of mobilisation infrastructure, leadership, was also strengthened remarkably during this period. Unlike the challengers who polished their skills mainly through self-learning from state-sponsored mobilisations in Mao's China, the leaders of social contention during this period were normally well-educated, had a strong sense of moral responsibility, and came from diverse professional backgrounds, such as academic staff, IT engineers, journalists, lawyers, NGO activists, and among others (Wang et al., 2013). As a result, these people not only advanced the professionalisation of social contention in China but also took good advantage of their rich knowledge, resources and social capitals for grassroots mobilisation (Yang, 2005). For example, many Chinese environmental NGOs were led by journalists, such as Green Earth Volunteers, Green Island, Centre for Public and Environmental Studies, Beijing Global Village Environmental Education Centre. As many researchers reported, it is these leaders' strong connections with news media that benefit organisations to receive extensive coverage on their claims during their anti-dam campaign upon Nu River (Tong, 2009; Yang and Calhoun, 2007). The research conducted by Wang et al. (2013) on homeowners' challenging mobilisations in urban areas found that most action leaders enjoyed relatively high incomes, had higher levels of education, were equipped with good organisational skills, had a good understanding of laws and socio-political issues, and possessed extensive social ties. Zhang's (2015a; 2015b) series of studies on peasant protests in Hunan province also highlighted the importance of well-educated leaders who were adept at

articulating their followers' interests better and using the policies of the state to negotiate with the local government.

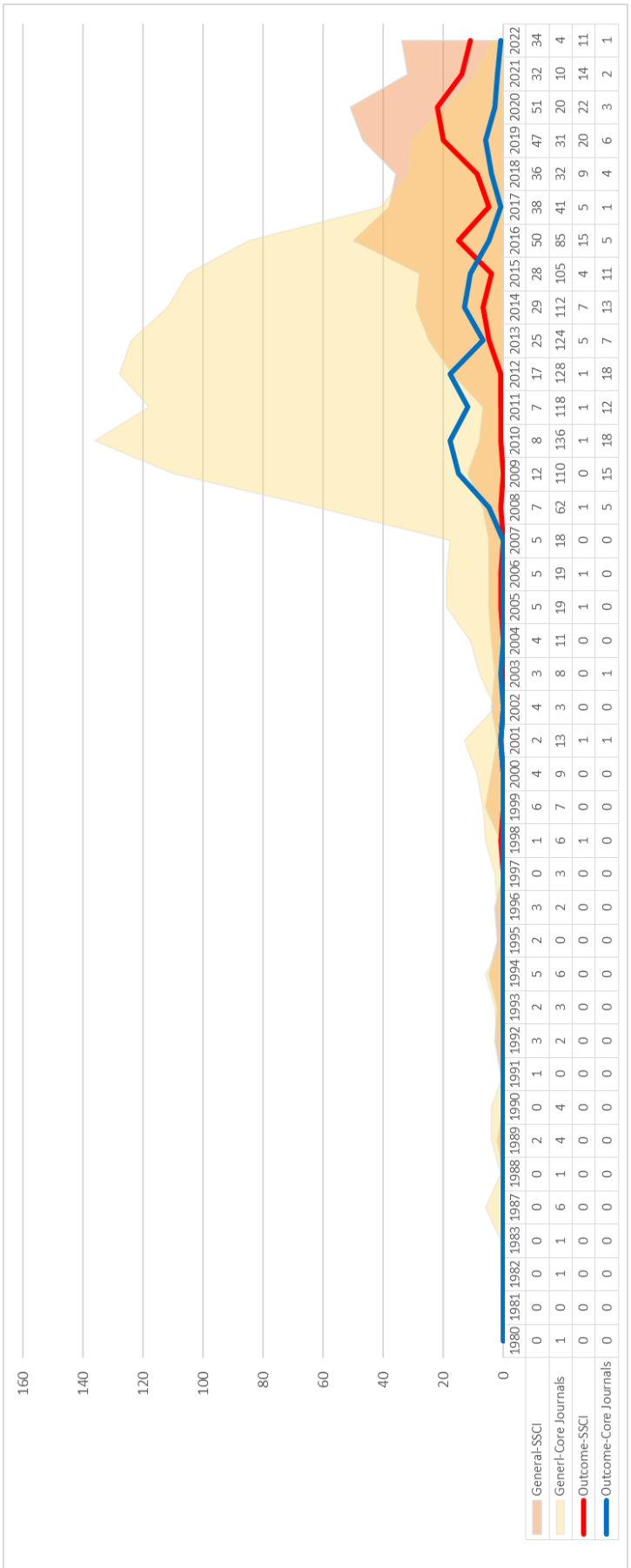
To conclude, of course, this section is not devoted to delineating the historical trajectory of social contention in China in full detail. Instead, this section aims to simply sketch the overview of the contentious pathway to a harmonious society in China and offer background knowledge to gain more insights into the harmonious society from a historical perspective. The main argument of this section is that the policy of harmonious society-building proposed in 2004 did not emerge in a vacuum but was deeply rooted in the long-term interaction between the state and social contention in China. More importantly, the introduction of such a policy in China also marked that the interaction between the state and social contention entered a new historical stage and this is the research focus of this thesis.

2.3 Unbalanced Research of Social Contention in China

Just as illustrated earlier, there was an important shift of the political power unleashed by Chinese people from state-sponsored top-down mobilisation to spontaneous bottom-up social contention in the history of CCP's ruling of China. Such a significant change which is deeply rooted in a broad social transformation in China certainly draws a lot of researchers' attention. This section presents how social contention in China, as a crucial research topic, has gradually caught the researchers' attention and entered the research agenda in both Chinese and English academic circles. First, by searching all publications indexed by SSCI and Chinese Core Journals, the two renowned academic citation indexes in English and Chinese, for the keyword 'Protest + China' and 'Mass Incident (quntixing shijian/群体性事件)', respectively, all relevant studies were selected. Next, by reading the titles and abstracts of the filtered articles,

those studies that do not directly tackle the issue of social contention in mainland China, or only focus on online incidents that did not have a physical presence on the street, were excluded. In addition, those studies that examine the consequences, outcomes, impacts, and a diverse variety of changes brought about by Chinese challengers were also specifically distinguished from others. As a result, the historical trajectory of social inquiries into social contention in China between 1980 and 2022 has been successfully delineated in this section, as shown in Figure 1. This section of discussion aims to not only show this blossoming research field since the 1980s in general but also, even more importantly, highlight the unbalanced research on this topic, i.e., the long-term overlook of the outcomes and changes achieved by Chinese challengers.

Figure 2-1 Unbalanced Research on Social Contention



According to Figure 1, it is not difficult to find that, in the 20th century, relevant studies published in Chinese and English shared very similar research trends. All annual numbers of articles published in both languages were at a low level, that is, less than ten articles per year. As depicted in Figure 1, the first wave of research articles published in both languages was driven by the 1989 Tiananmen Movement and the second wave, and the dramatic growth of literature on this issue began at the turn of the century. Since then, compared with articles published in the English world, the body of literature published in Chinese showed a significant surge. Especially between 2009 and 2015, the annual numbers of relevant articles published in Chinese remained at a very high level, that is, more than 100 research articles were published every year, and the number skyrocketed to the peak in 2010, with 136 articles. However, it is worth noting that, since 2016, the annual publication of relevant studies published in Chinese experienced a clear and sharp decline. Only four studies tackled the issue of social contention in China in 2022. In stark contrast to the studies published in Chinese, English literature on this research topic has shown very steady growth since the 2010s and reached its highest point in 2020 with a total of 51 articles published. In addition, another interesting point that needs to be noted is that, in 2018, the number of annual publications of English literature surpassed that of Chinese literature. Since then, English literature has been the largest contributor to the knowledge base of this research field.

To be more specific, for the literature published in Chinese, although some articles attempted to descriptively capture the phenomena of social contention in China in the 20th century, most of them explored the issue of social contention from a perspective of state policing and controlling and extremely lacked empirical research methods and approaches. Thus, these studies make very limited contributions to the scientific understanding of social contention in China. The situation changed at the turn of the century. On the one hand, in 2000, Yu Jianrong,

a Chinese leading sociologist, published the seminal and widely cited article, *Interests, Authority and Order: Analysis of Mass Incidents of Villagers Against Local Governments*, which highlights the rational nature of grassroots mobilisation staged by Chinese peasants and thus leads the research on social contention in China to a new stage. On the other hand, social movement theories developed by Western sociologists and political scientists were systematically introduced to China by Feng Shizheng (2003) and Zhao Dingxin (2005) for the first time. As a result, solid theoretical foundations, advanced analytic tools, pressing demands of understanding social contention, and a more tolerant environment in the era of the opening and reform ignited Chinese researchers' passions and fuelled their empirical studies on social contention in China. Since the first literature review of Chinese literature on social contention got published in 2005 (Wan, 2005), an incredible knowledge explosion on this issue has been witnessed in Chinese academe.

Moving to the studies written in English, in the early stage of researchers' attempts to tackle the issue of social contention in China, they primarily focused on large-scale revolution-like movements (Calhoun, 1993; McCormick et al., 1992; Perry, 1994; Strand, 1990), and overwhelmingly preferred a historical approach rather than theoretically situating their researches in social movement studies (Tarrow, 2008). In fact, in Tarrow's view, until the book *Popular Protest in China* got published in 2008, there was no monograph self-consciously adopting classic models of social movement studies to examine the rise of social contention in China (Tarrow, 2008: 2-3). Since then, more and more studies bridging social movement theories to the reality of social contention in China have been witnessed. The growing body of literature driven by social movement theories not only shifts the focus from 'big' revolutions to small-scale forms of social contention on the streets but also advances social movement studies in turn by stressing the unique society-state relations in China and offering theoretical

insights to the understanding of social contention in authoritarian contexts (Zhao, 2004; O'Brien, 2003).

However, if taking a close look at this growing body of literature on the issue of social contention in China, it is not difficult to find the overwhelming studies that focused on how grassroot mobilisations happened in China. Another very important issue, i.e., whether protests did make changes to China, has not yet been fully discussed. According to Figure 1, it seems that Chinese scholars entered this sub-research field earlier and produced some articles in the first decade of the 21st century. But, in fact, most early studies, adopting a perspective of the state, viewed social contention as the threat to regime and social stability and thus focused on strategic responses, tactical choices, and efficient tools adopted by the state to handle the outburst of social contention, rather than the actual benefits, institutional outputs, and social changes achieved by challengers. Thus, despite a growing body of studies on this topic published in Chinese since 2008, Xiao and Kong (2011) produced the very first literature review of outcome studies in 2011 and pointed out the lack of empirical studies directly tackling whether, why, and how social contention in China matters (also see Yang and Zhang's review on Chinese environmental impact in 2014). Since then, a series of articles formally introducing Western social movement outcome theories were published in Chinese, (Li, 2011; Lu, 2010; Kong, 2015; Zeng and Chen, 2016; Li and Zhao, 2018) and facilitated the growth of Chinese studies on social contention outcome and impact in China.

Turning to outcome studies in English, besides those focusing on the brutal crackdown of Chinese massive movements since the late 1970s and treating the failure as a direct and unintended consequence of social contention (Heilmann, 1994; Deng, 1997), Zhao (1998), to

some degree, viewed post-1989 state-led patriotic education program as the outcome of the 1989 Tiananmen movement, but he neither clearly constructed the relation between both nor explored causal mechanisms behind the scenes. Perry (2001), in line with the tradition of historical analysis, pointed out the variation of state responses to different types of protest events. O'Brien and Li's (2005; 2006) article examined the effects of popular protest on policy implementation and both activists and bystanders. In fact, to my knowledge, the publishing of O'Brien and Li's work was the first time that researchers fully embraced and adopted the analytical frameworks offered by their counterparts in the field of social movement outcome studies to systematically examine the outcome and impact of social contention in the context of China. But, unfortunately, just as Figure 1 shows, the annual numbers of outcome studies written in English did not increase significantly until 2013. But the good news is that, in recent years, researchers have paid more attention to outcome studies, which account for a considerable share of research on social contention in China, and outcome studies have become a crucial pillar of this general research field.

In summary, given the explosive growth of empirical studies on social contention in China published in both Chinese and English, what needs to be highlighted is the significantly unbalanced development in this research field, i.e., the inadequate and insufficient exploration of outcomes and impacts of social contention in China. Of course, in recent year, there were also encouraging and promising signals delivered by a growing body of studies which not only set themselves as good examples of making efforts to fill the niche between social movement outcome studies and the literature on social contention in China but also, even more importantly, showed the huge theoretical potential of this long-neglected issue (Foley et al., 2018; Almen and Burell, 2018; Sun, 2019; Chen, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Huang and Sun, 2020; Huang, 2021; Tang and Côté, 2021; Liu and Zhang, 2022). Therefore, this chapter aims to reorient the

research on social contention in China and call for a turn from occurrence to the outcome. To this end, in the next chapter, social movement outcome studies and the literature focusing on the actual changes brought about by Chinese challengers will be reviewed.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL MOVEMENT OUTCOME STUDIES:

'With Chinese Characteristics'

The previous chapter provides comprehensive insights into social contention in China from different perspectives and sets it as the background knowledge of this thesis. This chapter will introduce how this thesis is theoretically placed on the basis of social movement outcome studies and further show how it potentially advances the research on the impacts of social contention in China. To be specific, this chapter offers a brief introduction to social movement outcome studies and a detailed literature review of those outcome-centred research that has focused on social contention in China. The structure of this chapter is illustrated as follows. The chapter begins with a historical delineation of conceptual advancement and evolving research trends of existing social movement outcome studies in general by clarifying several key concepts (e.g., *success*, *outcome*, and *impact*) and introducing the mediation model that has been extensively used by outcome researchers to search for the potential explanation for the scenes. Then, this chapter is devoted to a review of English and Chinese literature on the observable outcomes of social contention in the specific context of China, especially through the lens of state and media, the two main research objectives of this thesis. The chapter will systematically review previous studies that address the questions of *what* political and cultural changes that social contention can bring to China and the questions of *why* and *how* such changes can be triggered by the challengers in China. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a critical discussion of existing research on social movement outcomes in general and those focusing on the impact of social contention in China. As a result, an alternative relational approach which hold great potential in filling the gaps in social movement outcome studies and

in contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the non-institutional challengers' impact on established institutions will be offered.

3.1 Social Movement Outcome Studies: A Brief Review

The foundation of social movement studies is a strong belief that social contention is powerful to make social changes. However, in contrast to the studies on mobilisation-related movement processes (e.g., emergence and occurrence, recruitment and participation, and tactical development and strategical choice), the understanding of the outcomes brought by the challengers had been conspicuously underdeveloped for a long time (see reviews in Giugni, 1998; Giugni et al., 1999; Earl, 2000; Bosi et al., 2016; Van Dyke and Taylor, 2018; Amenta and Polletta, 2019). Such a situation of outcome studies being a long-neglected lacuna in this academic field was not changed until the heated debate over why social movements succeeded emerged in the 1970s (Gamson, 1990 [1975]; Piven and Cloward, 2012 [1977]; Goldstone, 1980). The above-mentioned debate has particularly opposed Gamson to Piven and Cloward. While the former showed the effectiveness of organised challenges, the latter argued that social movements are more successful if they avoid building strong organisational structures but turn to more disruptive strategies. Since then, social movement outcome studies gradually become a very important pillar-like sub-field of social movement study.

Thanks to many pioneers with their seminal works, the above-mentioned sub-field is not as empty as some have pictured it years ago. A solid acceleration of outcome-related publications on social movement studies has been witnessed in five top American sociology journals witnessed since the late 1990s (Amenta et al., 2010). Also, the blossoming monographs (Amenta, 2006; Amenta and Caren, 2022; Andrew, 2004; Kolb, 2007; Cai, 2010; Luders, 2010;

McAdams and Boudet, 2012) and volumes fully devoted to social movement outcome studies (Giugni et al., 1999; Bosi et al., 2016; Fillieule and Neveu, 2019) published in recent years have also marked the promising growth of knowledge regarding the fundamental questions of 'what' social contention can change and 'why' and 'how' it can change.

With the emphasis on clarifying the key concepts like *success*, *outcome*, and *impact*, the previous social movement outcome studies that address the questions of 'what', 'why', and 'how' will be reviewed here. In this section of the chapter, the evolving views of identifying the variety of changes brought by social contention and the 'mediation model' proposed for exploring the causal relationships logically established between the challengers and the observed changes will be introduced by delineating the historical trajectory of social movement outcome studies in general. In brief, the development of social movement outcome studies can be generally divided into three phases characterised (i.e., *externalisation*, *diversification*, and *standardisation*), each of which will be discussed below. Nevertheless, the last point that should be stressed is that the historical phases proposed here do not have clear temporal boundaries. Instead, such a distinction between historical phases just serves to highlight the different strands of research in social movement outcome studies and they, to a certain extent, exist simultaneously in this academic field.

3.1.1 The Success? Starting from Externalisation

Social movement outcome studies initially begin with the assessment of whether social movements are successful. In his seminal book, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, Gamson (1975[1990]: 28), adopting a traditional perspective of social movement organisation, defined 'success as a set of outcomes' and claimed that 'these outcomes fall into two basic

clusters …the first cluster focuses on the acceptance … [and] the second cluster focuses on … new advantages'. To be more specific, the *acceptance* refers to the institutional access of the challengers to the polity and *new advantage* means the realisation of the challenger's goals and the attainment of their desired benefits. Furthermore, by stressing various combinations of outcomes, Gamson offered four categories of potential outcomes, i.e., a full success, suggesting challengers that achieve both goals of acceptance and new advantages, a partial success including co-optation and pre-emption, suggesting those social movement organisations that obtain either acceptance or new advantage, and collapse, suggesting a complete failure of the challengers to gain any benefit.

Gamson's analysis of the success of social movement organisations has significantly affected subsequent research. On the one hand, researchers advanced the typology of success by either adding more nuanced dimensions of the challenger's potential achievements, such as Kitschelt's (1986) distinction between substantive, procedural, and structural changes led by the challengers, and Cress and Snow's (2000) '4R' model, referring to the attainment of representation, resources, rights, and relief (see more in review by Giugni, 1998; Amenta et al., 2010), or simply expanding the unexhausted list of specific goals potentially achieved by the challengers. On the other hand, Giugni (1998) argued the Gamson's understanding of success also put limits on its followers. For example, Amenta and Young (1999) argued that many researchers focused narrowly on the 'new advantages' and prioritised it as the only outcome that determines whether grassroots mobilisation is successful. For another type of outcome proposed by Gamson, 'acceptance', it is increasingly 'treated as a *condition* (italic added) influencing "new advantages" or the lack of them' (1999: 27), instead of the outcome indicating the success of social movements.

Above all, the common ground shared by researchers examining the success of social movements is the analytical reduction of a complicated picture of the challengers' achievements to a simple 'yes-or-no' question about whether their claimed goals are realised or not. The criticism of Gamson's approach to studying the success of social movement of course comprises the doubts about such a simple and single criterion of success. As revealed by researchers' comments and reviews (Giugni, 1998; 1999; Amenta and Young, 1999; Amenta et al., 2010), first, the challengers do not always have clear and unchanged goals during the mobilisation and it is normal to detect the disagreements over the goals within the constituencies. Second, the demands claimed by challengers can be far-reaching**.** For some issues (e.g., gender equality, environmental protection, and identity construction), the challengers' goals may be to promote long-term public visibility of these ideas, instead of the materialisation of their beliefs into short-term benefits. Third, the idea of 'success' overstates the intention of the challengers and tends to overlook those unintended outcomes, or 'by-products' in Tilly's (1999: 268) words, that usually are not even on the agenda of social movements. In fact, despite the rational efforts made by participants of social contention, many types of obtaining and achievements are neither controlled by themselves nor associated with their actions or claims, but directly produced by other actors involved in the contention (Tilly, 1999).

As a result, as Tilly (1999: 268) argued, '[b]y any standard, "success" and "failure" hardly describe most of the effects'. Therefore, more and more researchers begin to rethink the term 'success' and advocate the use of 'outcome'. Such a terminology turn also reflects the *externalisation* of social movement outcome studies. This research tendency in this research

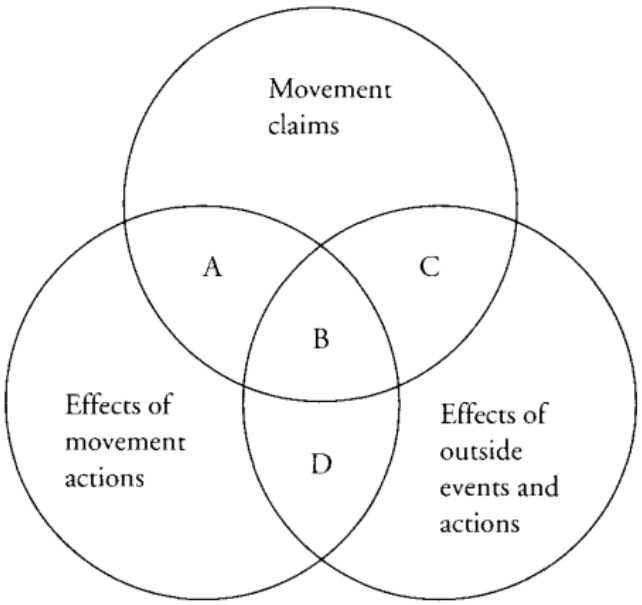
field can be understood as 1) the shift of the research focus from challenging actors to other actors regarding the contention, 2) the shift from the demands of the challengers to a wide range of responses from other actors, and 3) the shift from mobilised participants as potential beneficiaries of collective goods acquired through their actions to both participants and non-participants who can be potential beneficiaries of the attainment of collective goods. Of course, the externalisation of social movement outcome studies doesn't mean the neglect of mobilisation-centred investigations into the changes triggered by the challengers. Instead, it shows an alternative approach to examining the questions of 'what' changes may be brought about by social contention in a broader research context.

3.1.2 The Outcome? Searching for Diversification

Giugni (1998: 384-385) suggested that the abandonment of success identification based on the answer to the simple 'yes-or-no' question is the beginning of a terminological shift from 'success' to 'outcomes' in social movement outcome studies. Undoubtedly, the emphasis on the term 'outcome' expands the scope of research on this issue. By distinguishing those indirect, unintended, long-term, extra-movement, and external outcomes from those achievements directly meeting the challengers' demands, scholars even stated that outcomes potentially led by the challengers sometimes perhaps can be contradictory to their claimed goals (Giugni, 1998; Earl, 2000; Cress and Snow, 2000; Amenta, 2014). The logical map proposed by Tilly (1999) is very helpful in understanding such a *diversification* of social movement outcomes. Figure 1 schematises the investigation of social movement outcomes as three overlapping circles representing, respectively, (1) all effects of movement actions; (2) all public claims made by movement activists; and (3) all effects of outside events and actions. Notably, besides space A, which represents whether social contention leads to fulfilment of the challengers' claims or failure to do so, spaces B, C, and D not only do exist but also are significantly left behind the

traditional studies on whether the challengers are successful in achieving their golds. As Tilly stated, there is also a wide 'range of effects far surpasses the explicit demands made by activists in the course of social movements, and sometimes negates them' (Tilly, 1999: 268). Thus, notablt, the consensus shared by the advocates of the term 'outcome' is to move beyond the direct links established between the challengers' agendas and their achievements, i.e., space A shown in the figure, and to explore a diverse range of potential outcomes led by social contention. To be more specific, existing studies in the field of social movement outcomes have highlighted four major areas in which social contention can make actual changes, i.e., political, economic, cultural, and biographical outcomes (Giugni, 1998; Amenta et al., 2010; Bosi et al., 2016; Snow et al., 2008).

Figure 3-1 The Problem of Identifying Social Movement Outcomes (Source: Tilly: 1999: 269)



A = Effects of movement actions (but not of outside influences) that bear directly on movement claims

B = Joint effects of movement actions and outside influences that bear directly on movement claims

C = Effects of outside influences (but not of movement actions) that bear directly on movement claims

D = Joint effects of movement actions and outside influences that *don't* bear on movement claims

First, since the late 1990s, there has been a wave of scholarship on 'those effects of movement activities that alter in some way the movements' political environment' (Bosi et al., 2016: 4). Although scholars overwhelmingly placed policy outcomes and legislative process in the central position of the investigation into the interactions between social contention and the state in the arena of politics (recent examples, Fassiotto and Soule, 2017; Wouters and Walgrave, 2017), they did also stress the diversity of political outcomes which can be potentially influenced by the challengers (e.g., election results, judiciary decision, and the formation of the party) (Gillion and Soule, 2018; Kadivar, 2017; McCammon and McGrath, 2015; Hutter and Vliegen, 2018).

Second, since the first decade of the 21st century, potential economic changes led by protest events and social movements attracted a group of scholars' attention (Davis et al., 2008; King, 2008; King and Pearce, 2010; Soule, 2009; Soule and King, 2015; King and Soule, 2007; Vasi and King, 2012; see more in review Davis et al., 2022). Departing from a conventional perspective of Marxist thought, i.e., viewing the overall transition from market capitalism to the socialist economic system as the ultimate economic goal of labour movements, nowadays, researchers pay more attention to, just as Giugni and Grasso (2019: 466) claimed, those economic outcomes regarding 'reformist trends (e.g., corporate responsibility, ethical business, sustainable development, social enterprise, the green economy)'.

Third, Earl (2004) argued that the contention has the power to shape culture in terms of social-psychological meanings, cultural production and practice, and the view of worldviews and communities. In other simple words, challengers can change the symbolic dimension of rules and practices in all spheres (Amenta and Polletta, 2019). Due to such a broad understanding of

culture, the cultural changes triggered by social contention cover a wide range of identifiable outcomes (e.g., public opinion, social values, memories and languages, art, music and fashion, the emergence of subculture, the formation of collective identity, and the production of knowledge) (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Frickel et al., 2010; and recent examples Amenta and Elliott, 2017; Amenta et al., 2019; Banaszak and Ondercin, 2016; Della Porta and Pavan, 2017; Mazumder, 2018; Weisskircher, 2019; Roy 2013, Van Dyke & Taylor 2018; see more in review Amenta and Polletta, 2019).

Fourth, scholars also viewed the changes in people's lives as biographical outcomes brought by social contention as well (McAdam, 1999; Giugni, 2013; Vestergren et al., 2017). Following Goldstone and McAdam's (2001) distinction between the biographical consequences of individual activism at the micro level and the aggregate change in life-course patterns at the macro level, scholars explored 'the post-movement lives of former activists' (Bosi et al, 2016: 6) (e.g., their political orientations, marriage and family statuses, career trajectories and lifestyle choices) (Augustine and King, 2022), while stressing the 'ongoing awareness and action that extends beyond the boundaries of one movement or campaign' (Meyer, 2003, cited from Goodwin and Jasper, 2014: 421), i.e., the spillover effects of social movement on engaged observers and bystander publics through the mechanisms of the learning process and political socialisation (Meyer and Whittier 1994; Whittier 2004; Fillieule and Neveu, 2019).

In short, the conceptual and analytical departure from the use of 'success' to the term 'outcome', to a certain extent, leads to the diversification of identified outcomes in social movement outcome studies. As mentioned above, there is a wide range of identifiable outcomes led by social contention that have been captured in previous studies. However, there are new problems

arising with the prevailing use of the term ‘outcome’, such as the difficulties in comparing different types of outcomes achieved by challengers (Kolb, 2007), limited analytical range and methodological dilemma for causal attribution (Amenta and Young, 1999; Giugni, 1998: 2008), and the concern about ‘broad but thin’ studies (Earl, 2004). Inevitably, all the above-mentioned limitations served as the catalysts for the second terminological shift from ‘outcome’ to ‘impact’ in social movement outcome studies.

3.1.3 The Impact? Moving towards Standardisation

The emphasis and adoption of the term ‘impact’, first, highlight the analytical importance of established institutions, or actors, that can formally respond to certain mobilisation staged by challengers, and thus place the institutions in the central position of assessing the impact of social movement. More importantly, with the stress placed on the complicated interactions between the challengers and a wide range of established institutions (e.g., state, media, and business), the advocates of the term ‘impact’ further shift the scholarly attention from the contention to those different institutional processes in which challengers either intentionally or unintentionally but non-institutionally engage in (Amenta, Carruthers and Zylan, 1992; Amenta, Dunleavy and Bernstein, 1994; Amenta, Caren and Olasky, 2005; Amenta and Young, 1999; King, 2008). According to Amenta, ‘this approach means thinking not in terms of “movement outcomes,” but *institutional outcomes* (italic added) relevant to movements that may be influenced by movements’ (Amenta, 2016: 358). In other words, social contention does not directly produce any type of outcomes, and it is that formal response from institutional actors to the challengers that matter and make actual changes (Bosi et al, 2016: 15).

In addition, the use of the term ‘impact’ offers a wide conceptual range of analysis, which indicates that the challengers can not only lead to positive outcomes but also result in backfiring consequences for the whole beneficiary group represented by the challengers (Amenta and Young 1999; Amenta et al., 2010). Such a wide analytical range of the term ‘impact’ also implies that the impacts of different mobilisations staged on the ground can be assessed and compared with each other. By differentiating three basic levels of ‘impact’ in terms of the attainment of collective benefits, Amenta and Young (1999), the advocates of the term ‘impact’ make further efforts to advance the *standardisation* of assessing the impact of social movement. The solution provided by these two researchers to standardise the assessment of the impacts of social movement on established institutions lies in the idea of collective good, which refers to either material or intangible benefits obtained by the challengers but directly offered by an institutional actor for a group of people. In addition, the beneficial group can be either limited to participants of a certain mobilisation or a larger group of people including non-participants. Researchers thus suggested that the standardisation of assessing the impacts of social movement should begin with locating the potential beneficiary groups of challenging actions, then goes through identifying the type of collective goods obtained by challengers and the beneficiary group favoured by collective goods and ends with evaluating the size of the actual beneficiary population and the duration of collective goods offered. In plain language, ‘the greater the value and type of such goods achieved by any challenge or challenger, the greater the impact will be’ (Amenta and Young, 1999: 40).

The term ‘impact’ finds a way to effectively integrate the other two terms, i.e., ‘success’ and ‘outcome’. According to the strongest advocate of the term ‘impact’, Edwin Amenta, ‘outcome’ refers to the outputs formally processed through established institutions, and ‘success’ is no longer related to a simple ‘yes-or-no’ question but based on a standardised evaluation of degree.

Moreover, such an approach to assessing the impact of social contention applies to any scenario and any arena in which challengers can get non-institutionally involved in a wide range of established institutions (e.g., the states, media, and companies) to lead to actual changes. In summary, because 'the term success tends to blur conceptual issues, and … the term outcome blurs methodological issues' (Amenta and Young, 1999: 21), the move towards the term 'impact' not only prioritises the formal responses from institutional actors but also makes a solid conceptual common ground for further studies delving into the impacts of social contention.

3.1.4 Mediation Model for Causal Explanation

Such a conceptual development from 'success', through 'outcome', and eventually to 'impact', is accordingly accompanied by the advancement in the explanatory frameworks addressing the question of 'why' and 'how' as well. According to Amenta et al. (Amenta and Caren, 2004; Amenta et al., 2010; Amenta, 2014), there are three main approaches adopted by scholars to explain why and how the challengers can make changes. First, starting from a movement-centred perspective, researchers argued that it is a set of endogenous factors (e.g., organisational characteristics, tactics and strategies, resources, and leadership) that determines whether challengers can achieve their goals and thus facilitate the changes (Ganz, 2000; Andrews, 2001; Cress and Snow, 2000; McCammon et al., 2008; McCammon, 2009). However, as mentioned above, since the 1970s, there has been an ongoing debate about which endogenous factor is more effective, disruptive action or organisation (Gamson, 1975; Piven and Cloward, 1977; see reviews in Giugni, 1998; 1999). As a result, researchers began to doubt the rationale of such a movement-centred approach and question whether the challengers can make changes by their forces without any external support and favourable contextual condition.

Then, researchers shifted their attention from endogenous factors of grassroots mobilisation to contextual conditions under which social contention took place and thus stated that 'factors beyond the movement could be much more influential' (Andrews, 2004: 14). According to the advocates of such a contextual approach, the achievement of the challengers either depends on the dramatic change of political environment or specific characteristics of the polity, such as openness and capacity of the states, the democratisation of the state, accountable electoral rules and procedures, the autonomous court system, and favourable national policies (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977; Goldstone, 1980; Amenta et al., 1994; Kriesi et al., 1995; Amenta et al., 2002; Kitschelt, 1986). Moreover, contextual conditions favourable to the changes triggered by social contention can certainly move beyond the structure of the political system and cover a broad spectrum of socioeconomic factors at different levels (e.g., economic hardship, civic capacity, public opinion, local experience, and perception of oppositional activities) (McAdam and Boudet, 2012; Giugni, 2007; McVeigh et al., 2006). In the strongest voice of this argument, it is 'opportunity structures [that] determine both movement formation and what may be perceived as gains won by the movement' (Amenta et al 1992: 312).

Unlike the other two approaches directly adopting traditional theories of mobilisation-centred social movement studies, the third approach, i.e., the mediation model, is developed specifically for accounting of social movement outcomes (McCammon et al., 2007; McVeigh et al. 2003; King et al., 2005; Amenta and Caren, 2004; Amenta et al 2010; Amenta 2013). Following the studies that find certain contexts do not always favour the changes triggered by social contention (Soule and King, 2006; Cornwall et al., 2007; Uba, 2009), researchers suggest that contextual conditions need to be examined in combination with movement-centred

endogenous factors. As Amenta et al. argued, they rejected 'the magic bullet' and embraced that '[t]here are no specific organisational forms, strategies, or political contexts that will always help challengers. Instead, scholars should be looking for specific forms of organisation and strategies that are more productive in some political contexts than in others' (Amenta et al., 2010: 296). In other words, the 'fit' between the challenger's actions and institutional contexts matters. Furthermore, Amenta (2016: 358) stressed that such a 'mediation model' is not exclusively 'political'; instead, it is a 'mediation thinking' that is theoretically compatible with either state or non-state institutions and it can be applied to assess the impacts of social movements on a variety of established non-state institutions (e.g., media and market) (King, 2008; King and Pearce, 2010; Arthur, 2011; Amenta et al., 2012; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Elliott et al., 2016). To be specific, the first step of assessing and explaining the impact of the challengers is to understand institutional processes, or actors, that can potentially give formal responses to the challengers and the second step is to explore the ways through which the challengers can engage in the established institutions and then intervene in the institutional process of producing formal outcomes relevant to the challengers. Therefore, to maximise their impacts, it is imperative for challengers to adapt their strategies and actions to different contextual settings (e.g., the state, business, media, and education) to other potential institutions. In other words, the outcomes led by social contention are mediated through various institutional processes. Obviously, such mediation thinking is logically and firmly consistent with the conceptual understanding of 'impact'.

Indeed, the development of the aforementioned explanatory frameworks, to a certain extent, coincides with the trajectory of conceptual advancement in this research field. Social movement-centred researchers have viewed challenging actors as the unit of analysis and examine 'success', or 'failure', of their actors from a movement-centred perspective. Following

the research tendency of externalisation and diversification of identifiable outcomes achieved by the challengers, the studies emphasising contextual conditions not only shift the research focus from social movement to those observable, indirect, and external outcomes but also firmly hold the belief that it is contextual factors that determine the outcomes achieved by the challengers. Next, as Amenta, the pioneering figure advocating the mediation model, repeatedly stated, given movement-centred studies on one side and outcome-centred studies at the other end, the mediation model, which begins with the institutional process and works back to challengers, stands in the middle. On the one hand, the mediation model narrows the diverse changes potentially led by social contention down to those formal outcomes triggered by challengers but directly produced through different institutional processes. On the other hand, it makes a methodological shift from seeking 'the effects of causes', the direct causal effects of either endogenous or exogenous attributes of social contention, to locating 'the causes of effects' (Amenta, 2014). In brief, thanks to the mediation model, the established institutions rather than the challengers are placed in the central position of examining what, why, and how social movements can make actual changes and assessing their impacts on the formal institutional processes.

3.2 The Impact of Contention in China: A Question of 'What'

In the previous section, a series of key concepts, i.e., success, outcome, and impact, in social movement outcome studies has been clarified. This section of the chapter, turning to English and Chinese literature that has directly surveyed the impact of social contention in China, aims at systematically showing the evidence-supported changes triggered by social contention in China in the period of building harmonious society. Thanks to the 'mediation thinking' illustrated above, this section will only cover those outcomes led by the challengers but formally produced through the institutional

processes and will particularly narrow the focus down to the political and cultural impacts of social contention on China, the main research objectives of this thesis.

3.2.1 Identification of Political Outcomes

Similar to the overall pattern and general trend of research in social movement outcome studies illustrated above, the overwhelming studies that delve into the impact of social contention in China are devoted to examining political outcomes brought by the challengers. By placing the state, which can be defined as 'sets of political, military, judicial, and bureaucratic organisations that exert political authority and coercive control over people living within the borders of well-defined territories' (Amenta and Young, 1999: 30; see Skocpol and Amenta 1986), in the central position of assessing the political impact of social contention in China, researchers have identified a series of political outcomes meeting or beyond the specific demands of the challengers.

Most existing studies view policy outcomes as effective institutional responses from the state to the rise of social contention. Besides the well-known policy changes witnessed in the area of labour, peasant, environmental protection, public health, and property right (Cai, 2010; Yu, 2012; Mertha, 2014; Wang, 2018; Heurlin, 2016; Elfstrom and Li, 2019; Chung, 2021; Elfstrom, 2021; Gao and Qin, 2017), the institutional formalisation of dealing with the challengers more appropriately and the organisational adjustment to enhance the state capacity of accommodating social contention more effectively are another set of policy outcomes introduced by the central state (Meng and Zhang, 2015; Pringle, 2018; Wang and Minzner, 2015). In addition, there is also a research strand of interesting studies highlighting how domestic nationalist protests that took place in China can influence Chinese foreign policies

(Weiss, 2013; 2014; Reilly, 2011; Gries et al., 2016). Turning to a local standpoint, O'Brien and Li viewed authoritarian China as a place 'where popular input in policy-making is limited' (2005: 236) and argued that most Chinese challengers aim to prompt the central government to correct mis-implementation of policies and misconduct of local officers (O'Brien and Li, 1999; 2005; 2006). Li (2014) suggested that provincial leaders respond to intensified social unrest by loosening the control of unpopular policy implementation and expanding expenditure on the public good provision. Another series of studies suggested how environmental activists and the urban middle class are mobilised to influence the administrative decisions on the construction of public facilities and commercial plants at the local level (Tang, 2018; Tu and Wei, 2017). However, some researchers have questioned the long-term effectiveness of policy changes triggered by social contention. Yang's series of studies repeatedly indicate the temporality of political outcomes led by Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) movements and address the decisive reversion following the 'abnormal' policy change (Peng and Yang, 2013; Yang, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; Yang and Ouyang, 2018). Some other researchers directly and fundamentally questioned whether social contention matters in China. Based on the analysis of 94 NIMBY incidents against the construction of civic infrastructures, Cao and Wang (2017) found that only 39 cases successfully lead to changes in the decision on project construction. Zuo (2016) interviewed 43 Chinese urban homeowner activist leaders advocating for policy changes and found only six interviewees mentioned that they have successfully made actual progress in affecting the policy-making process.

Another major type of political outcomes identified by many studies is that social contention can also have impacts on the judicial process, especially considering the ongoing politicisation of the judicial process to maintain social stability in China in past decades (Xiao, 2015). As Burstein (1991) once suggested, laws can be applied proactively and strategically by

challengers as a supplementary tool rather than an alternative to their actions on the street. Such a kind of 'socio-legal activism' (Fu, 2013) staged on the ground of China benefits the powerless and challengers at different stages of the judicial process. First, since the powerful targets of complaints (e.g., employers, hospitals, property management agencies) normally did everything possible to pre-empt, derail or undermine the litigation (O'Brien and Li, 2004; Chen and Xu, 2012; Yu, 2012; Liebman, 2013; 2016; He, 2014), radical and dramatic actions did enhance the possibility of the challengers' cases being filed (O'Brien and Li, 2004). Even for those protesters who eventually failed, or perhaps chose not, to enter the judicial process, the actual compensation they obtained sometimes exceeded the expected amounts that would be payable in court (Fu, 2013; Liebman, 2013; 2016). Moreover, some other interesting studies show how the judicial process resiliently adapts itself to accommodate the challengers. For example, Su and He (2010) found that the courts and related government agencies can proactively engage in social contention on the street and tried to persuade the challengers to resolve disputes through 'fast-tracking' legal channels. Likewise, Chen and Xu (2012) illustrated 'the extrajudicial process' which allows the courts to extend their power beyond the courtrooms to deal with protesters. Second, with the increasing number of protest-supported lawsuits accepted in the last two decades, as reported by many scholars (Fu, 2013; He, 2014; Liebman, 2013), the actions of the challengers also enable plaintiffs to put huge pressure on the courts and thus intervene in the judiciary decision-making process. As Liebman found, the judges, facing the dual pressures (i.e., representing justice and maintaining social stability), normally did not resolve protest-supported cases entirely according to the law, but to a mix of 'law, reason, and sympathy' (Liebman, 2013: 241). He's (2014) study specifically examined how protesters directly challenged the court orders which were normally dominated by the judges and successfully turned the court into a stage favouring the challengers in the hearing and trial process. In other words, researchers found that the Chinese judicial process can be

significantly influenced by the grassroots challengers, thus serving as a tool of governance for maintaining stability. However, the difficult position of the courts sometimes forces them to backfire on plaintiffs too. It is not uncommon for protest-supported cases to last for two to three years (He, 2014: 862) and such long waits drain complainants' money, energy, and time. (O'Brien and Li, 2004: 91). Just as Lee and Zhang (2013) argued, the endless delay of judicial decisions constitutes a micro-foundation of Chinese authoritarianism and enables the state to buy time, reduce the visibility of social unrest, and eventually absorb the contention into their bureaucratic institutions (Lee and Zhang, 2013). Third, regarding the formal outcomes of the judicial process, Liebman (2013) analysed 152 court decisions on medical dispute cases. The result suggested that compensations were awarded to 117 plaintiffs, whereas most of them were lower than the demands. A similar pattern of judicial decisions on labour disputes in Guangdong was also found by Chen and Xu (2012). He (2014) stressed the innovative use of judicial suggestions and opinions, which can be considered formal notifications sent by the courts to informally resolve the conflict and rectify the unlawfulness. Above all, given the significant effect of social contention on the judicial process, Liebman made a strong argument that 'China's legal system operates in the shadow of protest and violence' (2013: 186).

Political outcomes triggered by social contention also come from cadre-related village elections and accountability. According to Ying's (2009) observation of village election in Zhejiang province, the grassroots mobilisation staged by villagers against the disqualification of the preferred candidate for the election successfully put pressure on local cadres and led to the reinterpretation of election rules, which eventually secured the qualification of the candidate supported by villagers for the election. Besides village elections at the local level, Yan (2016) stated that the rise of social contention facilitates the state-building process and results in 'accountability without election' in China in a more general sense. Almén and Burell (2018)

considered social accountability as combinatory outcomes of answerability, claim attainment, and sanction. As indicated by their result, even those challengers unsuccessfully achieved their goals may still lead to the presence of answerability and sanction, i.e., the partial social accountability in China. According to Li (2014), it is the downward accountability towards the angry mass, rather than the upward accountability towards the central state, that had statistically significant effects on the improving performance of governance at the provincial level. Foley et al. (2018) suggested a negative correlation between the rise of social contention and the promotion of local officials in the context of China.

3.2.2 Identification of Cultural Outcomes

A diverse range of cultural outcomes achieved by social contention has been identified by researchers in the context of China. Turning to the cultural impact of social contention in China at the macro level, many studies have shown that social contention is not completely invisible in the public sphere of China. Instead, the challengers can have access to media coverage, online discussion, and even knowledge dissemination (Chen, 2020; Zhang and Pan, 2019; Göbel, 2019; Steinhardt, 2016), although there is indeed a very sophisticated censorship system operated in China (King et al., 2013; Roberts, 2018). Steinhardt (2015) identified the increasing amount of media coverage of social contention and the increasingly protester-sympathising tendency of reporting from 2001 to 2010, but recent research projects suggest a downward trend in the public visibility of social contention in China since the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century (Chen, 2019; Zhang and Pan, 2019). Furthermore, Zeng et al. (2012) found an unequal distribution of media coverage across different types of social contention and pointed out that the number of news reports covering the grassroots mobilisation staged by the urban middle-class is far greater than that of peasants and labour. Likewise, Chen (2020) suggested that, between 2000 and 2019, the public visibility of social contention staged by

urban residents has been the highest, followed by that led by private-sector employees and peasants. The project of CASM and Wickedonna also agreed that labour and unpaid wages, homeowner and property, and peasant and land are three most prevalent issues of social contention visible to the sphere on the internet in China (Tong and Zuo, 2014; Gong et al., 2018). As Zheng and Huang (2015) argued, the Chinese media were empowered by noninstitutional challengers to exploit the limited space in news coverage, protect their professional integrity, enhance their credibility, and ultimately strive for greater media autonomy in the context of China, but what should be noted is that there is also some negative effects of social contention on the public opinion like the production and dissemination of contention-related rumours (Guo, 2013; Zhang and Lu, 2015).

From a socio-psychological perspective, researchers found mixed cultural impacts of social contention in China at the community level as well. On the one hand, researchers viewed social contention as a learning and constructing process through which the participants and bystanders can form collective identity and class-based solidarity (Cui, 2013; Tan and Hu, 2016; Zhang, 2016; Pringle, 2018), shape their moral supports of progressive policies favouring and justifying the contention (Xiao and Xiao, 2017), enhance their capabilities and awareness of citizenship and democratic practice (Zhang, 2016; Xia and Guan, 2017; Tan and Hu, 2016; Wang and Elfstrom, 2017), cultivate a sense of self-empowerment (Friedman, 2009), become sensitivities to social injustice and self-esteem (O'Brien and Li, 2005), strengthen their determination to more ambitious programmes like the building of green civil society and ecological modernism (Lang and Xu, 2013; Tan, 2017), and motivate them to pursue more important positions within the established political institutions (Guan, 2010). On the other hand, some existing studies have shown no evidence to support the arguments that involvement in social contention facilitates the enhancement of participant's awareness of rights, the growth

of their intentions and willingness to participate in politics, and the formation of collective identity (Hu, 2017; Xiao and Xiao, 2017; Zhu, 2010). Likewise, Woodman (2011) reported the actual damages brought by unsuccessful experiences of participating in social contention and inappropriate strategies of actions to the formation of the right-based collective identity of the challengers in rural China. There is a series of studies also suggesting the negative effect of getting involved in social contention on participant's political trust in the state (Hu, 2007), their psychological and mental health (Chi, 2018), and the widespread stigmatisation of those youngsters who take part in grassroots mobilisation in the rural area (Zhang and Wang, 2017).

Finally, there is also a growing body of literature emphasising the materiality of culture and the practice of making cultural products. Tsao (1992) offered a detailed account of the creation and display of 'the goddess of democracy' produced in the period of the 1989 Tiananmen student movement. Jones's (1992) study on Chinese music in the era of post-1989 elaborately explored the relations between rock music and the 1989 nationwide student movement. Besides, in recent studies, researchers paid their attention to the visualised and embodied challenging actions staged by artists (Guo and Zhao, 2019; Lin, 2019), art performed by feminists to advocate gender issues (Wei, 2015; Zhou, 2018), independent documentary films functioning as video activism (Viviani, 2014), and the consumer's making of short videos against businesses (Yu, 2021). However, just as Earl commented on Oldfield's work on the visual cultural products created by British abolitionists, '[t]his art was both a part of … mobilisation and an enduring outcome of the campaign' (Earl, 2004: 514). Therefore, this strand of research on the cultural impact of social contention in China suggested that the boundaries between culture as tools and of mobilisation, repertoires of action, and outcomes of cultural production are significantly blurred.

3.3 The Impact of Contention in China: The Questions of 'Why' and 'How'

After answering the question about 'what' changes the challengers can make to China, this section is devoted to addressing the questions of 'why' and 'how' they can make changes. In line with the aforementioned explanatory frameworks in social movement outcome studies, this section will offer a review of endogenous factors and contextual conditions that shape the impact of social contention in China. The explanatory approaches covered in this section are fourfold. This section will begin with an illustration of two mobilisation-related factors, i.e., the formalised organisation and the disruptive action, and then shifts the attention to the role played by the state and the media as the constructor and facilitator of contextual conditions for the challengers making impacts, respectively.

3.3.1 Formalised Organisation

Like their counterparts who place social organisations in the central position of studying social movement outcomes, researchers reconfirmed the importance of organisations that significantly strengthen challengers' abilities to make changes in the context of China. Due to the increasingly strong and strict regulation and supervision of civil society in China (Hsu, 2014; Hsu and Teets, 2016), social organisations operating in China can neither overtly claim that their objectives are to empower the powerless against the powerful, nor can they proactively label themselves as organisers of social contention. Nevertheless, there are indeed diverse social organisations that, intentionally or unintentionally, getting involved in different stages of grassroots mobilisation to amplify the challengers' impact, such as local senior civic associations (Lu and Tao, 2017; Deng and O'Brien, 2014), indigenous and transnational NGO (Chen and Yang, 2017; Dai and Spires, 2018; Froissart, 2018; Pringle, 2018), informal lineage

groups (Lu and Tao, 2017), overseas Chinese immigrant organisations (Lin and Bax, 2015; Li, 2015), religious groups (Wang, 2017), homeowner associations (Guo et al., 2017; Xia and Guan, 2017; Zhang, 2005; Sheng, 2017), and reformed labour unions (Cao and Meng, 2017).

Such a wide range of social organisations favouring grassroots mobilisation normally enjoy a relatively high degree of autonomy, rich resources, biographical availability and populational base for potential mobilisation, and solid internal formalised structure and communicative networks (Li and Ma, 2016; Deng and O'Brien, 2014; Zhang, 2013; Zhang, 2005; Yu, 2012). Besides, scholars also pointed out that the diverse linkages of these organisations to other actors, such as activists, media, social organisations, and the state at all local, national, and even international levels, are far more advantageous (Shi and Cai, 2006; Shi, 2008; Lang and Xu, 2013; Bondes and Johnson, 2017; Qi, 2017). According to previous findings, such external connections of organisations can be either 'embedded in both organisational and individual relations … that are formalised through institutional channels' (Lu and Tao, 2017: 1728) or proactively sought via 'indirect non-relational channels' (Zhu, 2017) informally. Notably, the flows of information, knowledge, funding, trust, and even legitimacy transmitted through the networks further strengthen Chinese challengers while enhancing the possibility of making actual changes.

Finally, following Ganz's (2000) distinction between resources and resourcefulness of organisation, researchers also stressed that strong leadership is another determinant of the challengers successfully promoting the changes. It is not merely due to rich resources directly brought by these leaders or embedded in their networks as mentioned above, but their determined personalities and abilities to proactively learn policies and laws and then cautiously

navigate through the authoritarian environment, translate the demands into more politically accepted frames, represent the interests of constituencies and foster group solidarity, mobilise resources efficiently, and stage collective actions with appropriate tactics (Chen, 2006; Zhang, 2005; Zhang, 2009; Zhang, 2016; Guo et al., 2017; Mertha 2009). The results of Wang and Li's (2017) experiment also supported the argument that the presence of strong leaders increases the chance of the challengers to achieve their goals. However, Su and He (2010) also argued that high public visibility of leading organisers may backfire their actions and lead to forceful state repression.

3.3.2 Disruptive Action

Many studies on the impact of social contention in China support the classic argument that disruptiveness is an effective strategy for the challengers to make changes (Liebman, 2016; Su and He, 2010; Deng and O'Brien, 2014; Yang, 2016; Cai, 2008b; Jiang, 2017). In his pioneering and seminal book, *Collective Resistance in China: Why Popular Protests Succeed or Fail*, which after more than one decade remains perhaps the most systematic attempt to inquire into how the challenging resistances succeed in China, Cai argued that 'to increase their chances of success, protesters turn to illegal disruptive action, including disruptive collective petitions, protests, demonstrations, traffic blockades, attacks on state agencies, and confrontations' (2010: 110). Cai further argued that the effectiveness of disruptiveness is significantly conditioned by the 'forcefulness' of the challengers' actions in particular terms of the number and the casualties of people getting involved in social contention.

Cai not only prioritised the use of disruptive tactics as the weapon of the powerless to achieve their objectives at the level of the individual event but also emphasised the 'forcefulness' of

social contention at the aggregate level. To explain why some resistances successfully lead to policy changes in China, Cai viewed the frequency of social contention staged by the same social group on the same issue as another important component of forceful actions at the aggregate level and then offered a cost-benefit calculation model to answer the question. In his view, the high level of forcefulness of the challengers' action increases the cost of repression and forces the governments to make concessions, which is a reasonable and better option than suppression to secure the state's interests and benefits.

However, although disruptive tactics are indeed useful and accessible tools for Chinese protesters to gain extra leverage in the game against their powerful targets, the violence may lead to the enhancement of potential risks to challengers. As Cai stated, 'violence does not necessarily increase the participants' odds of success or strengthen their intervention-seeking ability … tends to be counterproductive' (2010: 135). Even worse, the constantly increasing level of violence may change the target's attitude toward challengers from tolerated accommodation to determined repression (Li et al., 2012). Sheng's (2017) study, focusing on urban homeowners' collective action, suggested that, when the number of participants exceeds a threshold, the marginal effect of size on achieving goals decreases, and those actions targeting governments are less likely to make actual impacts than those against non-state actors.

Needless to say, numerous scholars directly challenged the argument of forcefulness and advocated more moderate actions, especially for those challengers who possess rich resources and personal ties with strong actors (e.g., the urban middle class) (Zhang, 2005; Zhang, 2013; Shi, 2008; Gao and Qin, 2017; Sheng, 2017; Zhang, 2016). Cai also acknowledged the importance of the support and alliance in or outside the political state for the challengers. As

he stated, ‘the effectiveness of these tactics, which largely means the likelihood of intervention from above, is determined by whether it has a large number of participants, whether the action is disclosed by the media, and/or whether it involved serious casualties or death of the participants’ (111). Therefore, given all these disagreements raised and supplementary arguments added by researchers on the effectiveness of entirely relying on disruptive actions, the roles of the state and media as external forces shaping the impacts of social contention in China need to be discussed.

3.3.3 The State Matters

The state is the actor not only interacting with the challengers but also creating the political opportunity structure for their actions. First, it is undeniable that the states are key players in the game of dealing with the challengers at different levels in China since it is the state that can decide how to respond to challengers, through acceptable concessions, supportive interventions, institutional outcomes, or direct suppression (Du, 2016; Li et al., 2016; Yan and Zhou, 2017; Cai, 2010; Huang et al., 2015; Wright, 2018; Heurlin, 2016). However, just as the classic fragmented authoritarianism (Lieberthal, 1992; Mertha, 2009) and many empirical studies implied (Lee, 2007; Tong and Lei, 2010; Chen, 2012), the Chinese states cannot be simply viewed as a homogeneous whole. Instead, due to the hierarchically multiple layers and geographically unequal development, the states that challengers need to deal with are different actors with various capacities, priorities, and concerns (Wang and Zhang, 2017; Wang et al., 2018). As Heurlin stated, ‘the impact of protest signals is mediated by the political incentives of regime officials’ (2016:183). Besides, many studies point out that the state capacity to properly respond to the challengers varies across regions and hierarchical levels. Su and He (2010) argued local states with more money are more likely to make concessions to protesters. Du (2016) stressed the unequal development of governing and stability-maintaining capacities

of local state agencies leads to variation in their responses to social contention. Yan and Zhou (2017) examined six large-scale protest events in different cities and argued that it is state capacity, which consists of fiscal, coercive, and institutional dimensions, that shapes the achievement of the challengers, rather than the tactics used by protesters. Other researchers also found social contention that happened in eastern coastal provinces, which have been normally viewed as well-developed regions, were more likely to win the battle against the powerful (Gao and Qin, 2017; Zheng, 2019).

Second, the Chinese states act as players in the game while creating the arena for the game. Researchers identified a wide range of opportunities initiated by the state but unintentionally favourable to the challengers with certain claims, such as the nationwide anti-corruption campaign (Schmalz et al., 2017), the state-guided developmental initiative of 'ecological civilisation' (Hansen and Liu, 2018), and a more generalised issue opportunity structure set and allowed by the state (Yang, 2016). Moreover, opportunities emerge from the contradictions and divisions within the state. Such a kind of political opportunity can be materialised as either the inconsistency between the commitment made at the central level and the mis-implementation at the local level (O'Brien and Li, 2006; Jia, 2016) or the power struggle between the agencies with disparate priorities and different interests within the state (Cai, 2008a; 2008b; 2010; Gu, 2016). Thus, the contradiction and division within the state leave room for challengers to make actual changes through boundaries-spanning actions (O'Brien, 2003) and forming alliances with potential political allies within the states (Cai, 2010; Mertha, 2009).

Finally, what should be emphasised further is that the turn from movement-based analysis of endogenous factors to an exogenous perspective regarding the state does certainly not mean contextual determinism. Instead, such a shift of the research focus is to reject any type of 'the magic bullet' (Amenta et al., 2010: 296) which empowers challengers to win everything all the time and to welcome the 'fit' between the contention and specific contexts. Accordingly, the 'fit' can be understood as 1) the tactical appropriateness at different stages of grassroots mobilisation (O'Brien and Li, 2004; He, 2014; Gao and Xu, 2017), 2) the compatibility of challenging actions with the changing political contexts (Chen, 2006; Wong, 2016; Li, 2016; Hsu et al., 2017), and 3) the convergence of the challenger's claims and the state's agenda, interests and ruling objectives (Mertha, 2009; Cai, 2010; Deng and Yang, 2013; O'Brien and Li, 2006; Jia, 2016; Zhang, 2017).

3.3.4 The Media Matters

Media is another actor that takes on critical significance in boosting the changes led by social contention in China. As Cai (2010) stated, 'in China, the media are perhaps the most crucial third party in citizen's resistance, despite the party's control (15)'. Indeed, many studies reported the facilitating effects of a variety of media forms (e.g., domestic media, international media, and social media) on the achievements of the challengers in China (Cai, 2010; Huang and Liu, 2018; Gao and Qin, 2017; Zhou, 2015; Tian et al., 2015; Yang, 2016; Tang and Côté, 2021; Hess, 2015). In plain language, researchers argued that the publicity favourable to social contention places enamours pressures on the states, thus increasing the probability of the challengers in achieving their goals and making changes. In other words, it is the co-presence of media visibility and challengers' actions that collaboratively lead to the consequential changes, i.e., the 'joint effects' in Guigni's (2007) words. As Yang (2017) argued, the very first step for Chinese challengers who expect to intervene in the policy-making process is to have

access to media coverage. Wei and Chen (2019) found that allying with the media also facilities the professionalisation of grassroots challengers as well. Liao (2018) further stated that, compared with endogenous factors of grassroots mobilisation, the communicative attributes of social contention enjoyed in the public sphere (e.g., the favourable public opinion, the presence of supportive key opinion leaders, and even the production of rumours) show a more significant effect on the realisation of the challengers' goals.

To be more specific, Zheng and Huang (2016) distinguished three main rationales for such positive effects of media on social contention, i.e., the appropriate frames used in media coverage for reporting challenger's actions and claims, the hierarchical embeddedness of media institutions to the political system, and the challengers' proactive use of ICTs to have easy access to social media. First, regarding the frames used in contention-related media coverage, the frame of socialism, collectivism, and the disadvantageous group were identified by researchers (Huang et al., 2015; Zheng and Huang, 2016). Zeng (2013) further indicated that mass media act as framing mediators and offered a discursive site of negotiation between different parties involved in the contention. Through promoting the publicity of social contentions and constantly adapting the frames to be acceptable to all players, media facilitate the formation of consensus through a frame alignment process and eventually influence state response and institutional outcomes.

Second, as Zheng and Huang (2016) stated, the effectiveness of news frames for the success of social contention was embedded in the political system. Given the hierarchical levels of media institutions and their tight relations with the state in China, many studies indicated that challengers receiving coverage from state-controlled media agents were more likely to lead to

positive outcomes and favourable changes (Gao and Qin, 2017; Huang et al., 2015; Guo, 2017). In line with such a rationale of hierarchical embeddedness, Hess (2014) further proposed a four-level model, which consists of protest-relevant coverage at the local, provincial, national, and international levels, and argued that foreign exposure also significantly increased the chances of local protest event in China to success. However, Tang and Côté (2021) suggested that 'not all media coverage produces the same effects on protest outcomes because media exposure does not necessarily equate with media support for protesters' (348).

Third, having access to technology-supported social media empowers the challengers to make rightful claims and mobilise the grassroots with higher efficiency and lower cost (Zheng, 2007; Qin et al., 2021) while influencing the chance of the challengers to achieve goals and make changes (Gao and Qin, 2017; Huang and Liu, 2018; Yang, 2016; Lee, 2016). The challengers' proactive uses of ICTs to build non-relational ties with predecessors and other actors to learn from each other (Zhu, 2017), collect, produce, disseminate, and share different types of information (Lang and Xu, 2013), constitute collective identity (Zhou, 2015), influence public opinion (Tian et al., 2016), and more productively interact with traditional media (Huang et al., 2011; Huang and Sun, 2015), have been identified as crucial pathways to the favourable outcomes achieved by the challengers

3.4 Critical Review: Making a Relational Turn

The above reviews of the overall development of social movement outcome studies and the outcome studies specifically focusing on the impact of social contention in the context of China suggest that, though a wide range of outcomes led by Chinese challengers has been identified by researchers, most existing studies on the consequential changes triggered by social

contention in China are analytically based on whether the challengers' demands have been met and whether the state, or the challenged targets, have made the concession. There are only a few studies that follow the mediation model to assess the impact of social contention in China. For example, O'Brien and Li stated in their seminal book, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (2006), that '[m]any of the effects of rightful resistance are mediated … in that villagers rely on others to do their bidding and because the spectre of further unrest can provide ammunition for elites in their bureaucratic battles' (2006: 101). Cai Yongshun argued that '[p]opular resistance in China, as elsewhere, not only helps participants achieve success specific to them but also exerts influence on matters of government policy' (2010: 13). Heurlin's book, *Responsive Authoritarianism in China* (2016), to my knowledge, is the one explicitly claiming that it adopts the 'mediation model' to examining the policy outcomes led by social contention that took place in rural China. Thus, given the review illustrated above, this section will clearly indicate that the existing outcome studies, particularly those focusing on the context of China, suffer from three major limitations, which eventually will lead to a new approach to assessing the impact of social movements in China, that is, the relational approach, which is not only adopted in this thesis but also recommended for future research in social movement outcome studies in general.

First, like their counterparts who study social movement outcomes in the West, researchers focusing on social contention in China have also paid a substantial amount of attention to policy changes brought by the challengers and thus inevitably emphasise the role that the state plays in the process of the challengers making changes to China. In the views of many researchers, seeking state intervention *is* the ultimate goal of the challengers' actions, and the state's favourable response *is* the ultimate achievement of the challengers since it is the state that mediately determines whether the claims of social contention can be realised and whether the

concession can be made (Cai, 2010; Huang et al., 2015; Yan and Zhou, 2017; Xiao, 2015; Sun, 2018; Li et al., 2016; Wang and Song, 2018; Huang and Liu, 2018; Chen, 2009). Following such a research approach, researchers transform the main research questions regarding what, why, and how Chinese challengers can successfully make changes to the questions about how the state decides to intervene in social contention and in which the challengers can strengthen the 'intervention-seeking ability' (Cai, 2010: 9). In other words, most researchers are more interested in answering how Chinese challengers can successfully catch the state's attention in favour of their actions rather than assessing the actual impacts of social contention on the established institutions. Although the importance of the state, or political institutions, cannot be denied especially in an authoritarian regime like China, such a full reduction of all the efforts made by challengers to state intervention and the overwhelming emphasis on the role that the state plays in mediating the impact of social contention on China inevitably lead researchers to a systematic overlook of the complexity of the outcomes potentially achieved by the challengers. The complexity of this thesis implies 1) the potential responses to the challengers from other established institutions, at least to some extent, outside the Chinese polity; 2) the observable variation, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the pattern of outcomes achieved by social contention; 3) a holist understanding of multiple and distinctive outcomes led by social contention and formed through various pathways. In short, this thesis does not argue that that aforementioned perspective of the state is meaningless but argues that the impact of social contention in China should be assessed in a broader sense to capture a more complex and comprehensive picture that moves beyond the state.

Next, another major gap in existing studies devoted to assessing the impacts of social contention in China is rooted in academic perceptions and understandings of the relationship between media and social contention in China. As illustrated above, there are many studies

prioritising the significance of media coverage in facilitating the achievements of the challengers and in promoting the actual changes triggered by social contention, but it is a shame that most studies focusing on media-contention relations in China have just looked at only one side of a coin. Most of the existing research regards having access to media coverage as an important strategic mean, or tool, for challengers to gain greater influence rather than viewing media coverage on social contention as a cultural type of institutional outcome achieved by challengers. As a result, while emphasising the media as a powerful ally of the challengers, researchers have surprisingly neglected another series of important research questions, such as whether all challengers can achieve media visibility indiscriminately, why the media prefers to cover certain types of social contention, and how the media formally responds to grassroots mobilisation staged on the ground of China. The questions regarding the journalistic relationships established between social contention and the media logically precede the questions regarding how media coverage benefits challengers to be more influential. Nevertheless, interestingly, it seems that researchers are not interested in dealing with the former set of questions in the very first place. Few existing studies followed the 'mediation thinking' to survey media coverage of social contention as a cultural outcome brought by Chinese challengers and then to explore the mechanism of making news about social contention in China (Yang, 2016). A very latest article sheds light on this issue and shows great promise to understand another side of media-contention relation as the coin. Jung and Zeng's (2022) recent study, focusing on five major environmental protests against Para-Xylene (PX) in China, revealed how the CCP has utilised domestic news media to deal with the challengers and ensure regime stability. They argued that, instead of indiscriminately suppressing information on social contention, the party has deliberately chosen when and what to permit and what images to project onto the challengers. Jung and Zeng's study offered a good example for exploring the political logic of media coverage of social contention in China. Therefore, what this thesis

calls for is a ‘cultural turn’ (Amenta and Polleta, 2019) in assessing the impacts of social contention in China, and more attention should be paid to the establishment of media-contention relations in the public sphere, instead of the effects of established media-contention relations.

The third limitation of the aforementioned research on social movement outcomes that should be emphasised here is related to the ‘mediation model’ as a research approach in a general sense. As mentioned above, what the ‘mediation model’ stresses are those outcomes formally processed through established institutions which have clear institutional boundaries, such as policy outcomes from the state and news outcomes from the media. However, while applauding this turn to the institutionalist analysis of social movement outcomes, it is also important to note that such an accentuation of the formal institutional process is highly likely to narrow the research focus down to the investigation of *isolated* outcomes produced through a *single* institutional process and thus overlooks the possible outcomes emerging in the *inter*-institutional areas. To be more specific, this thesis argues that social contention is not only able to impact certain established institutional processes but also influential to reshape the interactions between different institutional actors across their established boundaries. Moving beyond a conventional understanding of the mediation model that the outcomes achieved by social contentions are formally produced through certain institutional processes, the consequential changes promoted by challengers can also be understood as either the joint responses collaboratively from multiple institutions or the institutional outcomes that suggest how a certain institution interacts with others. For example, Lei’s (2018) book, *The Contentious Public Sphere: Law, Media, and Authoritarian Rule in China* emphasises ‘the connection between multiple institutional processes’ (4), i.e., the development of a legal system and the marketisation of media in particular, and thus shows how legal-media collaborative responses

to social contention eventually facilitate the rise of the contentious public sphere. Taking Marquis and Bird's (2018) study as another example, they show how different types of social contention can influence governments' regulation of business differently and thus sheds light on how economic actors and the state intersect with each other through the formal regulation of business activities. According to a conventional understanding of the mediation model, the environmental penalties imposed by the states on Chinese publicly listed firms, in Marquis and Birds' study, is a typical political outcome led by social contention, but what should be stressed here is that this certain type outcome also implies a directed interactive relationship established between the state and companies based on the issue of administrative punishment, as a result of the occurrence of social contention. Therefore, again, social contention can not only lead to institutionally processed outcomes, but also result in institutionally-spanning outcomes. Such an emphasis on blurred boundaries of established institutions rather than clear boundaries is even more appropriate for those studies focusing on social contention in China, since it is simply known that all institutions and sectors (e.g., the market, the media, and the civil society) are all in the shadow of the state and can be reached by the state (Mattingly, 2020).

In order to address the aforementioned limitations of existing research on social movement outcomes in general and those focusing on the specific context of China, i.e., the narrow focus on the state, the neglect of media coverage as a cultural outcome, and the potential relationships established between different actors getting involved in social contention, this thesis proposes a *relational* approach to examining social movement outcomes and assessing their impacts. It is argued here that, compared to other traditional approaches, such a relational approach enjoys unparalleled analytical advantages in capturing the complexity of social movement outcomes. According to conventional wisdoms in social movement outcome studies, the changes brought about by social contention are normally approached in three different ways. First, it can be

viewed as a ‘whether’ question of whether specific demands claimed by challengers have been met. Second, it can be viewed as a ‘what’ question of what diverse attainments have been achieved by challengers. Third, it can be viewed as a ‘degree’ question of to what degree the subsequent outcomes brought about by social contentions differ from the initial state. By contrast, a relational approach offers an opportunity to answer a ‘structural’ question of how observable outcomes interact with each other and emerge together as a whole outcome of social contentions.

Such a relational understanding of social movement outcomes is not a brand-new idea. As early as 1997, Diani offers ‘a network perspective on movement outcomes’ which focuses on the challengers’ capacity to produce ‘social capital’ and argues that ‘the impact of a given movement or movement sector will be assessed in the light of changes in its components’ relative centrality in various social networks’ (1997: 129). Tindall et all’s (2012) study further provides empirical evidence to ensure social capital is a crucial outcome of social movement mobilisation and show that ‘those who are more active in the environmental movement develop a greater diversity of occupational ties to other environmentalists’ (ibid.: 387). However, it is a great shame that such a relational approach to examining social movement outcomes has not attracted too much attention from subsequent researchers. Nevertheless, what should be emphasised here is that, compared with these pioneering advocates of a relational analysis of social movement outcomes which merely highlight the change in social capital led by social contention at the individual, collective, or organisational level, this thesis advances such a relational understanding of social movement outcomes in a more general and broader way and refers it to the changing pattern of interactive relationships established between relevant actors as a result of social contention.

To be more specific, turning to the research questions of this thesis, this thesis will adopt a relational approach to studying how the state interacts with social contention mediately through the media coverage published in the party press. Indeed, in the context of China, the relationship between the state and social contention is important. As Cai stated, 'collective resistance has also had an important indirect impact on China-the influence on state-citizen relations' (2010: 17-18). Unfortunately, there is no empirical study devoted to capturing the overall picture of complex state-contention relationships in China. This thesis argues that the establishment of mediated relationships between the state and social contention through the party press is a political-cultural outcome led by social contention across the media and political institutions which needs 'to be explained rather than a state of affairs to be assumed' (Steensland and Smith: 2012: 230). Last but not least, regarding the questions about what a kind of this mediated relationship is and how it is built in the public sphere, the next chapter will answer both questions in detail and present how the state and social contention can be *informationally* linked to each other through the party press and eventually constitute a complex pattern of interactive relationships built between both.

CHAPTER 4

LIMITED ATTENTION AND MULTIPLE SIGNALS: The Informational Relationships between the State and Social Contention

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this thesis is devoted to illustrating what social contention can *informationally* bring to China and thus aims to adopt a relational approach to examining the reshaping of state-contention relationship as an *informational* type of outcome achieved by the challengers in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. As indicated by this chapter, the emerging complexity of informational relationships established between the state and social contention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere is mediated through and driven by the *tension* between the limited amount of the state attention and the multiple signals sent from social contentions. To illustrate the mechanism through which the interactive relationships can be informationally established between the party-state as the information-processing institution and social contention as the informational carrier, this thesis begins with a conceptual discussion about what information means in social theories and political sociological theories and how the idea of information can be beneficial to the understanding of the mediated relationships between the state and social contention in China. Then, this chapter, turning to the specific context of China, introduces, on the one hand, the state's changing strategies of intervening in the construction of the information environment in the public, or public sphere in another term, from a historical perspective, and, on the other hand, the various signalling ways through which the challengers informationally contribute to the reshaping of the information environment in China. Finally, this chapter emphasises that the emergence of

the mediated relationship between the state and social contention is based on the *selectiveness* of institutional responses to the signals sent non-institutionally from the grassroots and argues that such *informational* outcomes brought by social contention should be considered as *combinatory* and *connective* political-cultural outcomes through a relational lens.

4.1 Understanding of Information in Social Theories

The focus on information is fundamental to a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary world, especially considering the discontinuity in society, in other words, modernity in general, as stressed by many researchers. However, not all scholars agreed on the revolutionary transformation of society towards post-industrialism (Bell, 1973; Kumar, 2009), post-modernism (see discussion on Baudrillardian theories in Kellner, 1989), post-Fordism (Amin, 2011), post-structuralism (Poster, 1990), or networked society and the information age (Castells, 2011). Many others prefer to conceptualise the changing society as 'the informatisation of established relationships' rather than radical changes in long-held principles (see discussion in Webster, 2014). Nevertheless, generally speaking, despite the disagreement briefly addressed here and various terminologies applied, what is difficult to be doubted is the so-called 'cultural turn' in social theories and also the reality in the past decades. Researchers begin to put focus on knowledge, identity, language, symbol, value, service sectors, new social movements, and other types of information-originated resources, resourcefulness, structure, and cultural process rather than material underpinnings of society (Inglehart, 1997; Melluci, 1996; Urry, 2000; Beck, 1992; Lyotard, 1984). With such divergent analytical approaches, research interests, and theoretical positions, pioneering researchers share the common ground of viewing information as the increasingly important transforming agent of social development. The ongoing information explosion in the current society is obviously and deeply rooted in the development of 'novel methods of acquiring, processing and distributing information' (Kumar,

2009: 31). To be more specific, it can be traced back to the birth of the computer. Just as Naisbitt said, 'computer technology is to the information age what mechanization was to the industrial revolution' (1984: 28 cited from Webster, 2014: 13). Kumar gave a detailed historical investigation of how information-processing technologies emerged during World War II and how the impact of advanced information-processing technologies eventually moved beyond the military-industrial-scientific complex and has been shaping almost all aspects of the contemporary world (e.g.,biographical, psychological, economic, political, cultural, spatial, and indeed societal) (Toffler, 1980). Also, as Mol (2008) stated, '[a]dvances in information, informational processes, and information and communication technologies as axial developments around which a fundamental transformation of modern society takes place' (53-54).

Kumar's (2009) historical investigation shows that the term 'the information society' (Johoka shakai) was coined in Japan in the late 1960s and occurred earlier than its presence and wide use in the West. Nevertheless, Western theorists do make the most significant contributions to the advancement of social theories about information. In his thorough review of previous studies in this academic area, Webster (2014), in the first place, differentiated a semantically interpretable approach from a mathematically tractable one and stressed the coming of the information society can be reflected in both qualification and quantification of information-driven changes. Then, he further identified five domains in which the current society is different from the previous one and can be defined as informational. First, ICTs are one of the most visible indicators of the coming information society. Indeed, just as mentioned above, the invention of technology is the major driving force behind social transformation. Nevertheless, it is risky to merely use the presence of ICTs in daily life to identify the coming of the information society, because of the tendency to technological determinism and measure-related

problems, like whether an information society is one in which everyone has a PC. Second, another dramatic change marking information society originates in the economic worth of information activities. Researchers not only stressed the increasing importance of information activities within traditional established sectors (e.g., the research and development sections of a business), but also identified a wide range of statistical numbers to show the booming new information-originated sectors (e.g., the media industry and nowadays influencer economics) and the declining position of the traditional sectors (the manufacturing industry). Third, the information-fuelled change in the economic domain in general inevitably leads to the occupational transformation in society. The changing patterns of the occupational structure have been captured by the replacement of manual jobs with white-collar work. After reviewing the influential works of prominent pioneers (e.g., Drucker, 1993; Castells, 1996; Perkin, 1990), Webster stated that 'the economy today is led and energised by people whose major characteristic is the capacity to manipulate information', although their 'preferred terms vary, from "symbolic analysts", to "knowledge experts", to "informational labour"' (Webster, 2014: 17). Fourth, information society can be understood through the geographical and spatial lens as well. In brief, thanks to unprecedentedly speeding information flows and exchanges facilitated by ICTs, a new social layer emerges. Nowadays, various actors have been connected across different locations and beyond temporal constraints. The space of flows starts to challenge the dominant position of traditional space of place in this network society. As a result, the re-organisation of the time-space relation fundamentally reshapes the social form of organisation and activity. Fifth, Webster placed 'an extraordinary increase in the information in social circulation' (ibid.: 21), i.e., the information environment in general, on the central position of cultural investigation of the information society. According to him, the conclusion that people nowadays inhabit an 'information-laden' and 'media-saturated' environment was drawn from the ongoing truth that there are increasingly various media surrounding us,

thoroughly penetrating our daily life, and feeding us with messages. However, Webster also refused a kind of the information environment determinism and highlighted that 'the informational environment is a great deal more intimate, more constitutive of us' (ibid.: 22), suggesting that individual behaviours and collective actions can reshape the information environment as well.

Following the demonstration of the information society above, the term 'information' should be illustrated in depth. However, information is notoriously difficult to be conceptualised and there is indeed a wide range of its various definitions (Lash, 2002; Fuchs, 2008; 2011; also see review in Capurro and Hjørland, 2003). Given this fact, this section will not be dedicated to a thorough examination of what information conceptually is. Instead, several basic rules of understanding information in a sociological term will be discussed. In the first place, similar to qualitative and quantitative delineations of the coming information society, the concept of information should also be understood through both perspectives. For the essential attributes of information, it is noteworthy that information is semantic and byte-like (Webster, 2014). The former characteristic highlights that information is meaningful and the latter refers that information is measurable. Accordingly, the foremost point about information is that a comprehensive understanding is dependent on both qualitative and quantitative examination. In addition, based on previous studies, there are two general forms of information addressed by researchers. One is viewing information as a static 'thing' which can be possessed and applied. Thus, there must be a subject, which can be individuals, organisations, and other actors, having information and being able to creatively use them. The best example of such a kind of understanding is the prioritisation of knowledge as the most fundamental form of information in the information society. Another perspective, starting from a refusal of reducing information to either informational resource or resourcefulness, is treating information as a dynamic flow

that links various actors. Thus, in line with this logic, it is hard to say one certain actor entirely possesses a whole informational network, as the former perspective implies. Conversely, all actors are embedded in a network and it is the relations established among them that matter**.** Such an emphasis on flows also advances, at least partially, a philosophical transformation towards relationalism and methodological innovation in social science research (Emirbayer, 1997; Crossley, 2010; Borgatti et al., 2009). Above all, nowadays, given the reality of advanced technological infrastructure, ongoing information explosion, and connected everything, information not only characterises today's society but also offers a feasible relational approach to studying it.

4.2 Understanding of Information in Political Sociology

In line with social theories of information, the academic understanding of the crucial position occupied by information in the area of politics has also been developed. An increasing number of pioneering social scientists and seminal books explore the interactions between society and state from an informational perspective (Bimber, 2003; Keck and Sikkink, 2014; Hollyer et al., 2015; 2018; 2019; Manion, 2015; Treisman, 2018; Guriev and Treisman, 2019; Wallace, 2015). For these scholars who adopt an informational approach to examining the state-society relations, information, generally speaking, 'is simply something that can be known or communicated' and also 'can exist independently of its perception and understanding by any particular political actor' (Bimber, 2003: 11). Similar to the aforementioned social theorists, this group of researchers has identified a diverse range of information forms, such as technical expertise and knowledge (Weible, 2008; Weible and Sabatier, 2009), attention allocated to new social issues (Baumgartner and Jones, 2015; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005), frames for understanding an issue (Baumgartner and Jones, 2010), facts disclosed and misinformation

disseminated (Huang, 2017; Wallace, 2016; Guriev and Treisman, 2019), and so forth. Furthermore, focusing on state-society relations, researchers have prioritised two main research questions on the agenda. The first one refers to the relationship between a democratic regime and a transparent, abundant, pluralistic, and dynamic information environment and how states adapt to it and evolve. Another strand of studies focuses on the relationships between non-democratic regimes and an opaque, restricted, unitary, and inactive information environment and how states intervene in it and survive.

In the context of democratic states, Bimber took the historical evolvement of American democracy as an example of an 'information regime' and argued that the expanding information environment promoted by technological development facilitates the transformation of political structure and process from '[a] centralised, simple system of political organisations (parties) serving as the dominant influence on policy-making and collective action' (2003: 23) in the 1820s and the 1830s to the current political situation that 'involves chiefly private political institutions and organisations … [and] a diminished role on many fronts for traditional organisations in politics' (ibid.: 22). Briefly, nowadays, increasing actors get involved in the arena of politics through informational channels of production, processing, and circulation. Besides the structural changes of democratic states promoted by the growing information environment, other researchers stress the evolving capability of traditional political organisations and institutional processes to navigate the information environment in terms of detecting public concerns, prioritising pressing issues, finding appropriate solutions, and finally resolving social problems (Workman, 2015; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Baumgartner and Jones, 2010; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). Given the abundance of supplying in a democratic information environment, in terms of information sources, contents, and diverse effective institutional channels connecting the state to such an

external rich information environment, which are designed either purposively to gather information intentionally (e.g., intelligence services, and congressional hearing), or to collect public concerns as side consequence (e.g., general elections), these researchers further highlighted that the real challenge facing the democratic states is neither to seek out additional information nor detect social problems but the tension between the plethora of information outside the state and the limit of attention and processing capability of the state. Above all, despite different research perspectives, the common ground shared by scholars is viewing different actors involved in the arena of politics, particularly the state, as information-processing institutions and stressing their different relations with such a rich information environment.

Compared with the informational situation in democratic regimes, what non-democratic states face is much more complicated. According to conventional wisdom, the information environment in a non-democratic state is normally labelled as a poor information environment due to the state's serious concern for regime survival and its ambitious effort to monopolise the access, production, and dissemination of information in the public (Mol, 2008). As a result, the information environment is significantly influenced, or controlled in other words, by non-democratic states. Information that is considered the threats to state stability or the fuel for popular resistance is strictly censored, except for the publicity of good governance and the popularity of the ruling class (Guriev and Treisman, 2019; Chen and Xu, 2017b). Nevertheless, another serious governance problem for ruling elites in non-democratic states emerges. Because of such a dominant position of the state and its intrusive strategies of information governance, the supply of information relating to social grievance and latent challenges either within or outside the state is also limited. The lack of information supply inevitably results in the difficulty of the state to detect problems and accordingly adjust its governance. Notably,

the informational efforts made by the non-democratic state to ensure its survival is a two-edged sword and researchers call this unpleasant informational situation in non-democratic contexts the dictator's information dilemma (Chen, 2016; Göbel, 2013; Malesky and Schuler, 2011). What makes the informational situation even worse in non-democratic contexts is the poorly designed structure and ineffectiveness of information-processing institutions (Huang, 1994; Mol, 2008). In a poor information environment, the costly and asymmetric transmission of limited collectable information across either hierarchical levels within the state or horizontal institutional boundaries is further filled with deliberative informational misbehaviours like distortion and camouflage, due to divergent interests, pursuits, and priorities of various actors at different levels (Wallace, 2015; 2016; Jiang and Wallace, 2017; Pan and Chen, 2018; Tsai, 2008). Accordingly, unlike the tension between sufficient information and limited attention and capability facing democratic states, the main challenge for non-democratic states is the insufficiency of reliable and accurate information in the process of problem identification. Therefore, non-democratic states are eager to seek more additional information and the strategies for addressing this informational problem vary across non-democratic countries. Some of them rely on advanced technologies-supported intervene and inspection institutions (Göbel, 2013); some advance the institutionalisation of information exchange and communication either within or beyond the state (Oksenberg, 1974; Tsai and Liao, 2017; 2018; Gao, 2016; Svolik, 2012; Tsai, 2015; Grant, 1988; Lu and Ma, 2019; Dimitrov, 2017); some take advantage of existed non-information gathering institutions like a general election to achieve 'controlled collection' (Malesky and Schuler, 2011; Chen, 2017; Manion 2015; Truex 2016); some take the benefit from the emergence of social contention and view grassroots mobilisation staged by challengers as fire alarm and watchdog (Lorentzen, 2013; Wang, 2015). Despite the variation in their informational efforts to maintain stability, the consensus shared by researchers is that, to survive longer, the non-democratic state has to adopt increasing

sophisticated strategies and tools to construct an information environment favouring the supply of 'useful' information and the control of 'bad' information at the same time, rather than a traditional poor information environment merely shaped by strict censorship and inspection.

However, all the aforementioned literature has explored the political position of information from a state-centred perspective. For democratic states, they need to enhance their information-structuring and processing capabilities to take advantage of overwhelming information outside of them. Non-democratic states, with sophisticated strategies, prefer to shape a non-threatening information environment favouring their rulings. Nevertheless, just as Bimber argued, in the case of American democracy, increasing non-state actors, rather than formal governmental institutions, thanks to the accelerated information explosion since the 1990s, 'involve the collection, management, or distribution of information under circumstances where information has been costly and asymmetrically distributed … [and] the structure of group politics is organised around not interests or issues, but rather events and the intensive flow of information surrounding them.' (2003: 21-22). Accordingly, besides the informational efforts made by states, the relationship between non-state actors and the information environment is another key to a comprehensive sociological understanding of information in the arena of politics. Simply speaking, like state actors, non-state actors can also make informational efforts to structure the information environment, especially through the channel of information supply. Such a shift of focus from a state stance is beneficial to studies in both democratic and non-democratic contexts. In democratic contexts, as Workman and Shafran (2015) stated, information generated by various non-state actors constitutes a competitive information environment in which information is not held privately but provided freely in the competition for the limited attention of receivers. The situation in non-democratic contexts is much more complicated, not only because of the same limited attention of governments that non-state

actors should catch, but also the barriers set and the whole information environment dominated by the state that non-state actors have to challenge.

Among various kinds of non-state actors functioning as informational players (e.g., media, social organisation, and business company) **(**Egorov et al., 2009; Sevenans, 2017; Froissart, 2019; Teets, 2018; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2016; Glaser and Saunders, 2002; Huang et al., 2019; Miller, 2018), social contention have also been depicted by many researchers in recent years as a very crucial force through which grassroots voices can be channelled to enrich the information environment and as a useful tools potentially used by the state to collect reliable information from the outside environment (Lorentzen, 2013; Heurlin, 2016; Marquis and Bird, 2018; Wouters and Walgrave, 2017; Fassiotto and Soule, 2017). On the one hand, the groups of people directly convey the information relating to their preferences or attitudes publicly and non-institutionally. On the other hand, the states, as receivers and interpreters of the message sent from the ruled, have the chance to detect and resolve social problems and public concerns by realising and responding to the demands informationally raised by the challengers. Notably, it is a kind of 'common sense' knowledge in democratic contexts due to the pressure to win the election and democratic responsiveness, as many studies suggested (Baumgartner and Jones, 2015; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Besides, it is also the case in non-democratic contexts. According to conventional wisdom, the emergence of social contention is a particular signal of the state weakness and regime instability which non-democratic states are inclined to avoid and suppress. Nevertheless, given the aforementioned dictator's dilemma and easily identifiable informational misbehaviours within the state, increasing studies reveal the fact that non-democratic rulers are more tolerant of small-scale contention and even, to a certain extent, encourage deprived people to voice their discontents with limited freedom (Lorentzen, 2013; 2017; Chen and Xu, 2017b) since they are desperate for additional reliable information supply

directly from the ruled. In addition, from the perspective of challengers, although the information environment is significantly shaped by non-democratic rulers' direct intervention and strict regulation, there is still a chance for them to proactively and innovatively circumvent the obstacles and voice their claims publicly. Accordingly, for some non-democratic regimes, the information environment is mutually, and indeed unequally, shaped by state and non-state actors (Stern and Hassid, 2012). Social contention is a crucial channel through which the challengers can provide reliable information and thus enrich the information environment monopolised by states.

Exploring the interactive linkages between social contention and information in the field of social movement outcome studies, the informational outcomes of social contention can be understood in two ways. First, stressing information outcomes as a thing, some books and articles (Earl, 2004; Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Rochon, 2000; Van Dyke and Taylor, 2018; Amenta and Polletta, 2019) implied it to a sheer variety of outcomes (e.g., media coverage, knowledge production, memories, and languages construction), whereas there is no single theory of informational outcomes properly applied to various potential arenas where challengers can make cultural changes. Second, turning to the flow-based nature of the concept of 'information', the theoretical understanding of informational outcomes led by social contention is particularly limited. In 1997, Diani suggested a view of 'networks as a product as well as a precondition of action' (1997: 143), expanding the range of possible movement outcomes. Tindall et al. further argued that '[i]n order to fully explore the social consequences of social movement activity, … it might be useful to consider a reverse causal logic between social networks and movement mobilisation, and treat social networks and network ties as outcomes of movement mobilisation, rather than as solely as facilitators of the latter' (2012: 388). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the call for a relational approach to social movement

outcome studies does not catch too many political sociologists' attention. Therefore, this thesis is dedicated to highlighting the role of social contention as an information supply and exploring the pattern of complex informational interactions established between the challengers, the media, and the state in China by bridging the areas of information politics and social movement outcome studies. To be more specific, an informational approach to the understanding of the mediated relationships between the state and social contention in the public sphere as an informational type of social movement outcomes will be offered in the following section by viewing the information environment, or public sphere in other words, as an arena of informational interactions between the state and non-state actors, i.e., social contention in particular, and stressing the constitutive informational efforts made by the challengers and the selective informational responses from the state.

4.3 Information, State and Social Contention in China

In line with the aforementioned discussion on social, and particularly politically sociological, theories of information, this section is devoted to a detailed illustration of complicated relationships between authoritarian states, protesting challengers, and the information environment, particularly in the context of China. The unpredictable long-term survival and, to some degree, successful development of China has been a big puzzle in both China studies and social science research in general. Over the past few years, increasing studies have addressed the political position of information in China and offered an informational explanation of the authoritarian stability in China (Lorentzen, 2013; 2017; Chen and Xu, 2017a; 2017b; Jiang and Wallace, 2017; Wallace, 2015). It is a truth that China has a long history and a worldwide notorious reputation for its harsh intervention-based information regulation policies. Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, like other emerging communist regimes, the Chinese ruling class has never been entirely giving up the informational efforts to directly control, or indirectly

but massively affect, the construction of the information environment both within the state and in the public. The rationale behind the state's informational move is simply to structure an 'ideal' information environment favouring the CCP's ruling. Nevertheless, an informational observation and interpretation of the authoritarian long-term survival and successful development in China cannot be simply and informationally reduced to censorship or another one-dimensional top-down strategy of controlling everything. Even facing the censorship-focused condemnation raised by Western news media, Lu Wei, the former director of the Chinese Information Office, also refuted and said, 'censorship is not the correct word choice [to describe the Chinese government's administration of information]. Besides, no censorship does not mean there is no management' (cited from Roberts, 2018: 1). By information 'management' conducted by the Chinese government, first, it refers to a set of various institutions, techniques, and norms that can be applied by the state to informationally govern and rule; second, from a historical perspective, the toolkit of the state and the awareness of informational dilemma are always evolving and adapting to the changing situation. Therefore, to depict the intricate pattern of interrelations among the state, social contention, and the information environment in China, this section starts with a brief history of informational efforts made by the Chinese government to maintain its stability and then turns to the challenger's role of playing alternative sources of information supply from the bottom.

4.3.1 Information 'Management' with Chinese Characteristics

Enhancing the state capacity of processing information and institutionalising the control of information sources, production, and dissemination were the early concerns of the Chinese ruling elites since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. Mao Zedong and his revolutionary comrades entirely embraced the traditional Leninist approach and the strict information 'management' in Mao's China is threefold. First, as Andrew Nathan stated, 'the Chinese

Communist Party obsessively collects its documents and with equal obsessiveness keeps them secret' (2008: ix, in Gao, 2008). By collecting and documenting party-state-related information, maintaining any information considered potentially inappropriate for the public as classified, and denying the people's right to access the information archived by the states, Mao's China set a clear institutional barrier between informational access and secrecy across various sectors and at different levels (Moss, 1996; Tang, 2012). Second, in line with Leninism, Chinese early leadership insisted on the long tradition of 'thought reform' which can be traced back to the revolutionary age before the establishment of the PRC. The collective brainwashing of individuals conducted by the Chinese authority can be achieved through physical violence, coercive persuasion, and the ubiquitous supply of correct ideas, i.e., the orthodox Marxist and Maoist orthodoxy in this case, channelled through state-controlled information-processing institutions (e.g., propaganda apparatus and educational curriculum) (Lifton, 2012; Brady, 2008: 95). Third, the state also made great efforts to structure a favourable unitary information environment by monitoring and then eliminating the alternative and opposite sources and voices within it. As the only agency authorised to deploy secret agents for intelligence gathering purposes (Schoenhals, 2013: 15-17), the Ministry of Public Security carried out nationwide covert surveillance to detect any traitors both within and outside the party-state Security (Tanner and Green, 2007). As Dutton reported, '[e]very village was to have at least one or two detectives and every season they would undertake comprehensive checks of all work unit and departmental cadres (2005: 97). Besides, secret agents were also positioned in 'what was simply called urban "society" – a term broad enough to cover almost any public space but normally understood to encompass the world outside the archetypal PRC danwei' (Schoenhals, 2013: 58). Needless to say, the fear-based omnipresent monitoring also consists of spontaneous neighbourhood watch and emerging self-censorship (ibid.: 51; Roberts, 2018: 95).

Through employing the aforementioned Leninist style of information management, the authority in Mao's China did not place the regime stability based on collectible information supply and problem identification as illustrated in previous sections. Instead, the consolidation of the authoritarian ruling was achieved by constructing and maintaining a 'useless' poor information environment, in which information sources, production, and channels of information exchange were entirely controlled by the state, the alternative supply of information was eliminated, and the barriers to information access and exchange were built within governments, among citizens, and between the state and society (Xiao, 2013). In other words, the leadership in Mao's China didn't realise the informational risk and problem potentially emerging from this 'useless' poor information environment, i.e., the dictator's dilemma. Indeed, the dictator's dilemma triggered serious social problems in Mao's China. The nationwide famine in the period of the Great Leap Forward in the era of Mao's China is the best example of serious consequence caused by this ineffective interaction between the state and the information environment. The Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen (1981) linked food supply to information supply and thus stated it was the lack of reliable information received by the state that caused the deaths of thirty million Chinese people from 1959 to 1962. Kung and Chen (2011) also attributed this great famine partially to the inflated number of grain production reported by the fearful local officials to the centre. Notably, the strategy of information management in Mao's China was flawed, and the ruling elites also started to rethink the new way to structure a more 'useful' information environment. After the death of Mao Zedong and the return of Deng Xiaoping, the central government set up an ambitious developing agenda of 'reform and opening'. As a result, an informational 'reform and opening' was also promoted in Deng's China.

Since the launch of the 'reform and opening' in 1978, the new generation of Chinese reformist leaderships took control of the power. They changed the focus of governing from ideological thought reform to pragmatic economic reform and set the ultimate goals of modernisation. Accordingly, for the state's informational moves, many adaptive strategies for structuring the information environment and addressing information problems facing authoritarian leaders were adopted in line with the general state rebuilding and the state retreat for revitalising the dynamics of society and facilitating the marketisation after the ten-year chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution. In brief, instead of maintaining a useless poor information environment to mute contentious voices and eliminate problems, the state began to construct and tolerate, intentionally or unintentionally, a richer and more 'meaningful' information environment with many contending voices expressing different ideas, individually or collectively, through either established institutional channels, like letters and visit and petition system, or in the emerging public sphere outside the state.

The departure from the Leninist style of information management under Mao's ruling doesn't mean that Chinese ruling elites entirely abandoned its control and impact on the construction of the information environment in Deng's China. Conversely, the central state re-established the Central Propaganda Department in 1977 and since then the powers of the Central Propaganda Department have increased significantly. The Central Propaganda Department's leadership and guidance cover almost all sectors of the cultural industry and, from 1982, it and its provincial branches partially took over responsibility from the CCP Organisation Department in cadre appointment and removal in the cultural industry (Brady, 2008: 19). As Brady summarised, '[t]he Central Propaganda Department … greatly extends its powers to manage the flow of information in China. In this way, every means of communication and form of organised social interaction in China is ultimately under the supervision of the Central

Propaganda Department and its minions' (ibid.: 18). However, besides the state rebuilding of information management capability, what had changed in Deng's China is the strategies and focus of information management. In contrast with the former Leninist intrusive and omnipresent state's control of the information environment in Mao's China, the re-established Central Propaganda Department was dependent on multi-channelled and sophisticated ways of information management, including those indirect, remote, and even informal channels of 'guidance'. Additionally, Brady suggested that in the post-Mao era, there were no more attempts to remould the thinking of Chinese people along revolutionary lines, but more attempts to encourage a more creative society (ibid.: 40). As a result, although there were indeed conservative leaders appointed as the head of the Central Propaganda Department in Deng's China, 'throughout the 1980s, the thought work activities of the Central Propaganda Department were undermined and discredited' (ibid.) and 'in this public sphere outside of official control, new forms of literature, art, pop music, and even cultural preservation evolve' (ibid.: 41).

Besides the changing administrative structure and strategies of shaping the information environment, the transformation of the information environment promoted by Chinese rulers in Deng's China also shows two more general trends, i.e., the increasing social capability of information production and improving the institutional design of information exchange. In the period of reform and opening, marketisation requires the actual loosening of control on almost all sectors in general. Accordingly, the retreat of the state, both financially and ideologically, left a space for diverse actors (e.g., mass media and social organisation) to enjoy greater autonomy than that in the preceding era, get involved in the process of information supply publicly, and thus substantively reshape the information environment outside the state (Mok, 2000; Zhao, 1998; Wang, 2010; Stockmann, 2013; Saich, 2000). Indeed, it doesn't mean that

full autonomy, or unrestricted, freedom of information circulation in the public. However, thanks to the marketisation of information-related industries and the commercialisation of their informational products (e.g., media and advertisement), in the period of 'reform and opening', non-state actors were able and did make their efforts to make the information environment richer by voicing more diverse and even critical opinions and ideas in Deng's China.

In addition, the state under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping also created opportunities and adopt multiple institutional tools to facilitate information exchange. For the information gaps within the state, a cadre evaluation system was introduced to address the vertical information asymmetry resulting from the difficulties of monitoring local officials and collecting information from the bottom shortly after the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee in 1978 (Edin, 2003a; 2003b; Manion, 1985; Whiting, 2017). Xia's (1997; 2000; 2007) series of studies stressed that the provincial congress, which was resumed in 1977 and constantly empowered since 1979, acted as an 'information broker' or 'information exchange centre' between the central and local levels by building complex networks with other institutions within the state. Other researchers also identified the diversification of textual and oral communication channels established formally or informally between various institutions within the state to guarantee an efficient communication and information exchange (Oksenberg, 1974; Brady, 2008; Tsai, 2015; Tsai and Liao, 2017; 2018). A great effort was also made by the state to accelerate the information exchange between the state and society as well. On the one hand, Tang (2012) systematically and historically examined the institutionalisation of the practice of 'open village affairs' which was introduced spontaneously by grassroots villages to request the local government to periodically publicise the village's budgets and expenditures. On the other hand, the Chinese reformist governments began to intentionally listen to public opinion in the policy-making and cadre-evaluating process since 1984 by applying public

questionnaires and opinion polls at a local level (Edin, 2003a; 2003b; Tang, 2005: 36-37; Rosen, 1989; 1991). Just as Rosen (1991:n+5) stated, '[o]pinion surveys in communist systems … provide practical information for decision makers-particularly about 'negative phenomena; … facilitate the identification of citizen preferences … provide information about the level of 'mass consciousness'; reveal citizen reactions to specific government policies; expose the mistakes and malfeasances of government officials;... and provide citizens with a legitimate channel for expressing grievances and opinions'. Needless to say, there is an emerging public debate on pressing cultural, social, and political issues and the increasing number of social organisations getting involved in the nationwide discussion on the future of China in general (Gu, 1999; Wang, 1996; Zhao, 1997; Li, 2015). Clearly, after nearly 30 years of virtually informational blackout set by the state under Mao's ruling, the information exchange across various boundaries was astoundingly accelerated and also, in many researchers' views, inevitably led to the accumulation of empowering social forces claiming for democratisation in China in the late 1980s.

The failure of the 1989 Tiananmen Movement is clearly a remarkable watershed in the re-structuring process of the information environment made by the state in Deng's China. However, just as Roberts (2018: 101-102) stated, '[o]ne might think that after an event as consequential as the 1989 protests in the Tiananmen Square, the government might return in definitely to tight control and thought work that had existed under Mao, as many leaders thought that loosened control had culminated in a direct threat to the regime. Yet a return to complete restriction of information and pervasive fear to control private and public communication between citizens was also not consistent with continued expansion and internationalisation of the market economy on which the regime sought to base its legitimacy … [so] Deng did not return to the version of pre-reform information control that

relied on fear-based control of individuals' everyday lives and instead quickly reversed the post-Tiananmen crackdown on speech.' Since the mid-1990, the state returned to an apparent loosening of informational control and further commercialization of social information-processing institutions, but with an adaptive agenda of information management. The sophisticated Chinese ruling elites have been developing new governing techniques and adjusting their strategies to avoid any popular threats and social instability resulting from a rich information environment limitedly influenced by the state.

First, information management in the post-Tiananmen era becomes increasingly *selective*. Some researchers challenged the conventional wisdom that the goal of the Chinese information management is to entirely suppress popular discontent and criticism. They argued that the Chinese government's punishment of informational dissent is selective (Liu, 2019) and 'the target of censorship is people who join together to express themselves collectively, stimulated by someone other than the government, and seem to have the potential to generate collective action' (King et al., 2013: 327). Shao and Wang's (2017) study shows censors are inclined to block political challenges and tolerate criticism of the government's performance of public goods provisions. Gueorguiev and Malesky (2019) proposed the term 'selective censorship' and further stressed that only public criticism expressed through 'solicited' channels serves the interests of the regime and unsolicited criticism emerging outside the regime's preferred information-gathering channels is more likely to be censored. The fundamental rationale behind the 'selectiveness' of information management in contemporary China is 'this "loosening" up on the constraints on public expression may … be an effective governmental tool in learning how to satisfy and ultimately mollify the masses' (King et al., 2013: 339). Besides, other researchers distinguished vertical and horizontal information flows, representing the information transferred from ordinary citizens to higher officials and that transferred among

citizens, respectively, and showed Chinese ruling elites' different attitudes to different types of information flows. Lorentzen's (2013; 2014; 2017) series of studies simply argued that the state prefers to facilitate a vertical information flow and strictly control the horizontal information flows. Chen and Xu (2017b) stressed the discouragement effect of horizontal information flows which can promote public heterogeneity and split over policies. They suggested that the state allows the horizontal exchange of information, or public communication in their words, 'if and only if it perceives sufficient preference heterogeneity among citizens' (ibid.: 792). Gallagher and Miller's (2021) recent article argued the selectiveness of information control efforts is often reflected on who is voicing rather than on what they are voicing.

Second, compared with the informational control and the deletion of all information potentially threatening the regime, another feature of information management strategies applied by the Chinese government in the post-Tiananmen era is *indirectness*. By increasing the costs of access to potentially sensitive information, or decreasing the relative costs of official information production and distribution, the state can re-structure the information environment without directly intervening in the autonomous production and dissemination of independent information, i.e., the supply of alternative information, since '[t]he public's basic problem is they have far more information than they could consume in the time that they have-they are overwhelmed with available information and have only limited attention to focus on particular pieces of information (Roberts, 2018: 27). According to Roberts, this goal can be achieved through both informational frictions diverting individuals away from sensitive issues and informational flood distracting public attention from serious issues. Additionally, adjusting the cost of information access also offers a chance for the state to promote the image of its 'good' governance and even to depict the situation more popularly supported than it actually is. As a result, it is believed that an information environment that is filled with a positive and favourable

image of the state ensures the public to love the ruling rather than fear (Guriev and Treisman, 2019; Chen and Xu, 2017a). Thanks to the advancement of the internet, mobile phones and other ICTs since the mid-1990s, Chinese government can make good use of and take full advantage of this innovative strategy and its information management just becomes more efficient and successful in the post-Tiananmen era. Just as Göbel said, '[Chinese] governments can employ ICT not only to eavesdrop on the population, but also to strengthen their capabilities for surveillance, organisation, and persuasion. The illustration of how the Chinese government uses ICT to prop up state power suggests that these measures serve to increase legitimacy-relevant outputs as well as to increase the capability of regime elites to monitor the performance of its agents, to aggregate and process popular demands, and to persuade people to support the regime' (2013: 399-400).

In summary, there are three stages of the evolvement of the information environment in the context of China and the state undoubtedly occupies the central and determining position of structuring the information environment, but with various strategies in different historical phases. In Mao's China, the ruling elites adopted a traditional Leninist approach to construct a fear-based, unitary, stagnant, and useless environment with extremely limited production and exchange of alternative and independent information outside of the state. After realising the informational dilemma and setting 'reform and opening' as the central developing policy, Chinese government began to loosen its strict control of the information environment and turns to the marketisation to revitalise the dynamic of the information environment. As a result, with the retreat of the state and economic driving force, the information environment became richer, more diverse, communicable, and even useful, in terms of the number of (semi-)independent sources, the amount of alternative information production, and the possibility of both vertical and horizontal information exchange. However, on the other hand, the informational 'reform

and opening' also inevitably facilitated the accumulation of public dissatisfaction and opposition to authoritarian ruling and finally fuelled the nationwide movement claiming for democratisation in the late 1980s. Therefore, after the 1989 Tiananmen Movement, Chinese ruling elite changes its strategies of information management and is dedicated to building a filtered, segmented, but useful information environment (Woodman, 2015; Shao and Wang, 2017; Rauchfleisch and Schäfer, 2015; Kuang, 2018; Lorentzen, 2014), which ensures the state's governance based on informational 'divide and rule', the public's access to 'more information about less', and the public presence of alternative sources of reliable information supply. In short, the state deliberately, sophistically, and strategically intervenes in the construction of the information environment, or the public sphere in other words, to take benefit of it and maintain regime stability.

4.3.2 Informational Insurgency with Multiple Messages

In the previous section, Chinese state's evolving strategies of information management and the transformation of the information environment led by the state in China since the 1949 have been illustrated briefly from a historical perspective. Turning to emerging social forces which also make proactive informational efforts to reshape information environment especially in post-Mao era, researchers have identified a wide range of non-state actors from grassroots organisation (Teets, 2014), think tanks (Zhu, 2009; 2016), mass media (Tong, 2011), to personal and transnational networks (Teets, 2018), who act as unofficial and alternative sources of information supply and can provide additional information that can be collected and processed by the state to deal with the dictator's dilemma. In line with this strand of studies emphasising the informational efforts made by non-state actors, a growing body of very recent studies conceptualise the rise of social contention in China as a kind of 'fire alarm' which strongly signals public preference, discontent, and pressing social problems (Cai, 2010;

Lorentz, 2013; 2017; Chen, 2016; Dimirtov, 2015). As the carriers of messages, the challengers not only contribute to the richness of the information environment but also offer a chance for the state to view and use them as a reliable 'information gathering tool' to detect social problems. In brief, grassroots mobilisation staged by the challengers is a non-institutional form of collective expression through which different types of messages can be conveyed and signalled to the public and potentially captured by the state.

Signalling theory, originated in broader theories of democratic representation, accountability, and responsiveness (see discussion in Heurlin, 2016), intersects with social movement theories, especially movement outcome studies, very closely. Such a signalling perspective can be adopted to explore either the *signal-attention* relationship between challengers and state in agenda-setting process or *demand-response* relation in decision-making process. By assuming the incumbent officials in democratic states always seek first and foremost to win re-election and thus need to pay attention and respond to protesting grassroots timely and rationally, researchers used the signals sent from street contentious politics as independent variable to explain the variation in institutional outcomes achieved by different challengers and examined whether the strength, clarity, intensity, level, magnitude, and other attributive indicators of challenging signals have the observable impacts on the institutional outcomes achieved by social contention (Fassiotto and Soule, 2017; Wouters and Walgrave, 2017). However, researchers maybe paid too much attention to operationalisation and measurement of the *attributes* of signals sent from the grassroots and neglected what exactly signal is. In other words, the question about what *type* of signal the challengers can send to the public is overlooked. In most previous studies, the type of challenging signal is commonly reduced to the *issues* claimed. It might be the case in democratic states. Due to the legal right to stage protest and freedom of expression, street politics is just a form of political participation

collectively expressing popular preferences or attitudes. Such a narrow focus on the challengers' issues can also be logically traced back to the classic 'informational' definition of social movement as 'a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences', proposed by McCarthy and Zald in 1977 (1217). Nevertheless, the reduction of protesting signals merely to the preferences and attitudes over certain issues might not the case in the context of China, simply because the issue claimed by the challengers is not the only source of signals conveyed to the public and, instead, there are multiple messages sent from social contention that have the potential to be captured and interpreted by other actors in different ways.

In contrast to their counterparts who focus on democratic contexts, researchers have only very recently begun to apply such a signalling approach to the study of social contention in China. However, instead of examining the signals sent from the challengers, pioneering researchers on this topic began their studies with the focus on the signals from the state. In 2003, Stern and O'Brien published the first article which adopts a signalling approach to explore the interactive relationships between the state and social contention (also see recent studies Weiss, 2013; Huang, 2015), and stressed the *mix* of signals sent from the state. Although their study emphasises on a state stance, more importantly, they did also call for that '[a] fully interactive account of signalling will also require special attention to moments at which bottom-up initiative induces the state to respond' (Stern and O'Brien, 2012: 16). After that and over the past few years, there is also a growing body of literature that highlight the effects of social contention on the supply of additional information about social problems in the context of China and, particularly, link the signals sent by the challengers to the survival of authoritarian regimes in China (Chen and Xu, 2017b; Lorentzen, 2013; 2017; Lu and Tsai, 2017). This strand of research suggested that the regime stability can be attributed to the constructive interactions

between the signalling social contention and the effective institutional responses. The above-mentioned researchers have challenged the traditional wisdom that the grassroots mobilisation staged by the angry, deprived, and unsatisfied people is the symbol of weak ruling in authoritarian regimes and the threat to the stability of authoritarian regimes, such that it must be suppressed by the state. Instead, they show how social contention can informationally benefit the resilient ruling of CCP in China. Indeed, social contention is a two-edged sword in authoritarian regimes and the rulers must carefully keep a good balance between taking advantage of the challengers and taking control of them. On the one hand, social contention, as a non-institutional channel of signalling in the public, can circumvent the ineffective and misbehaved institutional channels of information collection and problem detection within the state. As a result, the occurrence of social contention does make the contribution to the supply of reliable information about public preference and pressing social concerns. On the other hand, social contention, as a form of grassroots mobilisation and non-institutional political participation, signals the potential power of popular protest which is absolutely undesirable in authoritarian regime. Therefore, for the signals that the challengers convey to the public, this chapter refuses to narrowly reduce the signals sent from the challengers to the issue they claim but highlight the categorical multiplicity of the signals either intentionally or unintentionally sent from the grassroots. In short, besides the issue claimed, there must be other types of signals that need to be taken into account.

To advance the signalling studies of social contention in China and address the multiplicity of challenging signals sent from the grassroots, this chapter suggests that the very first step is to get a more comprehensive understanding of the sources of protesting signals. By reminding the minimalist definition and the ‘A Triplet’ model of social contention illustrated in the previous chapter, this chapter suggests that the essential components of social contention, i.e., *actor*,

action, and *appeal*, function as the independent sources of signals sent from the challengers. To be more specific, first, any contentious activities are publicly staged by a certain group of people. Therefore, what a type of information that social contention can convey to the public is the rich descriptive message about the grassroots actors, such that the state can be potentially enabled to locate and collect diagnostic information regarding the discontented people and unrest communities under its ruling. Second, to catch the public and institutional attention through the process of signalling, the actions of challengers certainly, ranging from moderate to radical strategies, matter. In fact, compared with democratic regimes, authoritarian states are more sensitive to this type of signals sent from the grassroots, because the ruling elites are much more worried about the physical presence of challengers gathering and acting together in the public and the potential large-scale social unrest caused by the accessible signals in the public. Third, the emphasis of actor and action functioning as two independent sources of challenging signals does not mean the demands and claims that challengers non-institutionally prioritise are not important anymore. Besides the signals relating to either actors or actions of social contention that can be received, interpreted, and responded to by the state, the appeal of social contention still plays as a fundamental source of signals sent from the challengers. Thanks to the rise of social contention, a wide range of collective preferences and social concerns can be channelled through the challengers to the public and hopefully catch the state's attention to not only identified but also address pressing problems facing the authorities. To conclude, there are three different types of signals simultaneously sent from the grassroots to the public, such that what the challengers informationally offer to the information environment in China can be also considered the mixed messages regarding the actors, actions, and appeals of social contention.

The last point that should be stressed is that the categorisation of protesting signals is not a brand-new thing in social movement studies and the research field of Chinese contentious politics. For example, following Tilly's WUNC model of social contention, which stands for worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, Wouters and Walgrave (2017) argued that 'WUNC signals that protestors are credible (worthy), are a large group (numbers), agree among themselves about what they want (unity), and strongly care about the issue and will not give up easily (commitment). These four elements form an implicit scorecard against which observers assess demonstrators' strength' (ibid.: 366). Thus, the level of violence, the clarity of demands, the number of participants, and the frequency of protest events were selected in Woutersa and Walgrave's study to indicate the strength of signals sent from the challengers. Another example is Heurlin's (2016) study on responsive authoritarianism in rural China. In his work, Heurlin highlights three types of information that the challengers can publicly convey to the state, i.e., the message about the misbehaved local officials, the group of unsatisfied people, and the popular attitudes to the implementation of certain policies. Obviously, the examination of protesting signals in these two studies more or less involve the multiple messages relating to actor, action, or appeal of social contention. Besides, the main issue shown in both studies and other studies emphasising the signals sent from the grassroots (Cai, 2010; Lorentzen, 2013; Fassiotto and Soule, 2017) is that they fail to clearly distinguish the *type* of protesting signals from the *attribute* of protesting signals. In other words, this section of the chapter argues that the understanding of protesting signals sent from the challengers is twofold. First, it is the actor, action, and appeal of social contention that serve as the independent sources of signals and thus constitute different types of signals. Second, there is a rich variety of variables, such as strength, clarity, level of targets, and so on, that can be used to indicate the measurable attributes of signals sent by the challengers. The emphasis of such a long-neglected boundary between the types and attributes of protesting signals should not be misinterpreted as

that both are analytically irrelevant. On the contrary, the types and attributes of protesting signals are closely intertwined with each other simply because each type of signal sent from the challengers has measurable attributes. Such a combinatory understanding of protesting signals sent from the challengers is referred to as 'informational insurgency'. Notably, the use of the term 'informational insurgency' is not intended to conceptualise a new form of grassroots mobilisation or to imply the changing nature of social contention in China. Instead, it is just a metaphor used to indicate the complexity and multiplicity of protesting signals and to highlight the richness of mixed messages channelled through the challengers to the information environment in China. To conclude this section, social contention indeed serves as the alternative supply of reliable information, because the grassroots challengers can provide rich information for the information environment by sending multiple and mixed signals, and thus eventually contribute to the reshaping of the information environment In China.

4.4 Mediation: The Interactions between Limited Attention and Multiple Signals

The previous section introduces how the state and social contention get involved in the reshaping of the information environment in China, respectively. This section, following the aforementioned mediation model, is devoted to illustrating how the state and social contention can informationally interact with each other through information-processing institutions in the information environment, or public sphere in other words. First, this section will argue that the informational interactions between the state and social contention is deeply rooted in the 'selectiveness' of institutional responses emerging from the tension between the limited attention of the state and the multiple signals sent from the challengers. Then, this section will turn to the idea of 'information-processing institutions', in particular the non-state information-processing institutions, through which the mediated relationship between the state and social contention can be established. Finally, this section will end with an introduction to a holistic

view of informational outcomes produced by established institutions but triggered by social contention.

4.4.1 The 'Selectiveness' of Institutional Responses

According to the mediation model illustrated in the previous chapter, social contention makes changes by impacting the established institutional process, especially the state, and eventually 'forcing' them to produce outcomes as institutional responses to the challengers. In line with such a 'mediation thinking', previous studies explore the interactive relationships between social contention and established institutions by tracing the institutional responses at different stages, such as the initial signal-detecting, problem-identifying, agenda-setting, solution-seeking, decision-making, and the final implementation-evaluating process (Baumgartner and Jones, 2010; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Jones, 1994; also see review in Amenta et al., 2010; Amenta and Polletta, 2019). All findings agree on significant *variation* in institutional responses to the signals sent by social contention, or 'institutional attentions disproportionately allocated' in Baumgartner and Jones's words (2005: 171). As revealed by this thesis, the *variation* in institutional responses essentially indicates the responsive *selectiveness* of institutional actors in the informational interactions with the signals sent from the non-institutional challengers.

Such a selectiveness of institutional responses to protesting signals is an even more serious issue in non-democratic contexts, simply because the ruling officials in non-democratic states, compared with their counterparts who desperately need to win the re-election in democratic states, do not have strong drives to respond to challengers positively and favourably. According to traditional wisdom, the increasingly social unrest is normally considered a symbol of the

weakness of the states, so the suppression is seemingly always an effective option for the leadership in non-democratic contexts (Cai, 2008b; Deng and O'Brien, 2013; Wright, 1999; Gueorguiev, 2017). However, as illustrated above, Chinese ruling leaders have moved far beyond the simple strategy of direct suppression and become increasingly sophisticated in 'good governance'. As they use mixed strategies of information management to maintain a selectively allowed and useful information environment, Chinese ruling leaders, facing complex and multiple protesting signals sent non-institutionally, also follow a similar rationale of governance to *selectively* tolerate and respond to the challengers.

To be more specific, the 'selectiveness' of institutional responses to protesting signals implies that, 1) not all challenging actions can receive any responses from established institutions; 2) not all signals sent from challengers can be responded to by established institutions; 3) not all established institutions need to respond to social contention; 4) not all institutional responses to challenging actions need to be the same. In short, although many researchers have shown the transformation of the Chinese regime to 'adaptive authoritarianism' (Chen, 2010), 'consultative authoritarianism' (Teets, 2013; 2014), 'responsive authoritarianism' (Heurlin, 2016), 'contentious authoritarianism' (Chen, 2012), and 'bargained authoritarianism' (Lee and Zhang, 2013), accepting authoritarianism (2010) and thus highlight the not-uncommon positive interactions between the state and social contention in China, this thesis argues that the understanding of such an informational interaction between the state attention and protesting signals must be based on the idea of 'selectivity'.

Besides, another point that should be noted and stressed here is that the potential established institutions capable of formally responding to social contention include not only state actors

but also non-state actors. As illustrated in the previous chapter, existing studies devoted to examining the impact of social contention in China paid too much attention to the states at different levels**.** As Cai argued in his seminal book *Collective Resistance in China: Why Popular Protests Succeed or Fail* for example, for Chinese challengers, 'outcomes in China are often directly affected or determined by the response of the government at the local or central level' (2010: 4). As a result, a particular emphasis on the state actors inevitably leads to overlook neglect of how non-state actors respond to social contention in China.

Indeed, it is understandable that the states have been positioned in the central place of the investigation into the impact of social contention in China, because, in many researchers' views, all established institutions are controlled, or at least significantly influenced, by the states in China. Besides, it is also undeniable that thanks to the 'reform and opening' and the turn to the market economy, non-state actors, such as mass media and social organisation, have become progressively autonomous and capable in China, especially in the harmonious society-building era in the early 21st century. In addition, as Heurlin (2016) stated, the fact that social contention is highly scattered and cellular in China not only enhances the difficulty of grassroots challengers pursuing and catching the state's attention but also, to some extent, leads researchers to the overwhelming focus on localised and contextual studies with limited generalisation. Therefore, what is called for here is that, besides the interaction between the state and individual instance of social contention, the interaction between social contention as a collectivity and non-state institutional actors also deserves scholarly attention.

4.4.2 Mediated through Information-processing Institutions

To study the impact of social contention on established institutions in China and explore the informational interactions between the signals sent from challengers and the attention of either state or non-state actors, the concept of information, information-processing, and social information-processing institutions, need to be fully understood in the first place. Regarding the information sent from the outside of established institutions, Baumgartner and Jones refer it to 'a signal [that] is simply some detectable change in what is happening "out there."' In other words, 'something in the [information] environment has changed' (Workman et al., 2009: 76). Given that 'information itself is an elusive concept' (2015: 14), Baumgartner and Jones thus suggest thinking about it with taking institutional actors, i.e., the potential receivers of information in the arena of politics, and how they process information into account. Initially, information processing is a cognition-based mechanism proposed to address the interactions between limited attention and abundant information at the individual level. To be more specific, information processing is a process through which the receiver determines whether a certain signal deserves attention in responses (Baumgartner and Jones, 2015; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Workman, 2015). Since information supply is not a kind of scarce resource anymore especially nowadays and far more beyond the cognitive capacity of receivers, researchers emphasised the limit of the receiver's information-processing capacity of 'collecting, assembling, interpreting, and prioritising signals from the environment' (Jones and Baumgartner 2005: 7). The researchers then turned to established institutions and conceptualise them as information receivers, institutionally structured to enhance the information-processing capacity at the aggregate level but still facing the same problem of limited attention as individual decision makers (see review in Bark, 2019). As a result of such a tension between limited attention and abundant information, information-processing institutions must be considered the actors with the 'bottleneck of attention' which means that they are not able to

simultaneously attend to all the issues facing them and only respond to certain signals sent from the outside, selectively.

Next, state and non-state actors should be further considered the established information-processing institutions. By exploring how state actors process messages sent from non-institutional challengers and then lead to major political changes, researchers identified a wide range of established political institutions (e.g., election, bureaucracy, judiciary, party, congress, and parliament) as the receivers of protesting signals (see review in the previous chapter). Besides state actors, a variety of non-state have also been considered information-processing institutions that receive and respond to the signals sent from the challengers, such as mass media, think tanks, social organisations, epistemic communities, interest groups, business companies, and so forth (also see review in the previous chapter). Bimber further distinguished the two types of actors as the information-processing institutions by arguing that state actors can be considered 'information generalists' and non-state actors as 'information specialists' (2003: 19) who are 'better able to communicate what they know than are parties or the public at large' (2003: 87). Researchers focusing on the informational interactions between social contention and established institutions suggested that there is a clear boundary between state and non-state actors.

The significant distinction between state and non-state actors might be the case in the context of democratic states. Besides, for the impact of social contention on established institutions in China, the relationships between both are slightly different and must be noted. As mentioned earlier, according to conventional wisdom, due to the state's strict control and arbitrary intrusion into almost all established institutions in China, the boundaries between state and

social actors are normally considered blurred or flexible. Since both types of actors are intertwined with each other, as a result, on the one hand, state and non-state actors, facing the signals sent from the same incident, might either intentionally collaborate or unintentionally act together to process the information from the outside and then respond to them. Workman et al. (2009) once coined the term 'interinstitutional signalling' to stress the cross-institutional efforts on promoting issue salience within the state. However, it is a shame that the idea of inter-institutional works has not yet been seriously applied in social movement outcome studies.

On the other hand, since most incidents staged by non-institutional challengers are small-scale, localised, and atomised in China nowadays, the signals publicly channelled through them might be quite weak and thus really hard to be directly captured by the state actors, especially the central state. Therefore, it is a feasible shortcut for Chinese challengers to gain substantive informational support from non-state actors who can amply the challenging signals and further promote significant changes in the information environment to attract the state's attention. Accordingly, non-state actors may not be considered the destination of signals sent from social contention, but it indeed offers a good site for observing how social contention can be bridged to the state through non-state actors. In short, the interactions between state actors and non-institutional challengers can be mediated through non-state actors who serve as information-processing institutions and implied by the institutional outcomes formally produced by non-state actors.

4.4.3 The Informationalisation of Institutional Outcomes: Combinatory and Connective

As illustrated above, information-processing institutions, as responsive receivers of protesting signals, occupy crucial positions in examining the impact of social contention in the information environment. According to the mediation model, the changes triggered by the non-institutional challengers are mediated through the outcomes produced through certain information-processing institutions. Therefore, the institutional outcomes need to be fully understood from an informational perspective. In line with the aforementioned conceptualisation of information as either 'things' or flows, the understanding of informational outcomes directly produced through information-processing institutions is also twofold.

First, informational outcomes refer to the independent products yielded through the institutional process to directly respond to the signals sent from the non-institutional challengers. For the forms of this type of informational outcomes as a 'thing', Baumgartner and Jones who focus on political institutions have identified a rich variety of formal products ranging from 'statistical evidence about the state of the world (such as the unemployment rate), qualitative information about the severity of a problem or the effectiveness of a solution, anecdotes and personal stories that motivate professionals or that mobilise the public, and indicators of how constituents are viewing the emerging situation'(2015: 15). Indeed, this list can be continued, and it simply suggests that the forms of informational outcomes produced by institutional processes do not need to be the same type of 'things'.

Second, another dimension of informational outcomes can be considered the emergence of information flows as a whole and what information flows indicate can be anything relevant to the types or attributes of protesting signals themselves. In brief, what non-institutional challengers can informationally lead to is not only independent 'things' but also the changing

pattern of complex relationships constituted by informational flows. Such a relational understanding of informational outcomes highlights the informational co-presence that emerges among the senders of protesting signals, among the receivers of protesting signals, or between both types of relevant actors. In short, the informational co-presence triggered by the challengers implies the informational transmission and sharing between various actors getting involved in social contention. Obviously, this type of informational outcomes is better to be understood in the form of networks.

In summary, given the multiplicity of signals, the limitation of attention, and the selectiveness of response, this thesis argues that the essential features of informational outcomes produced by information-processing institutions as affected by the challengers are *combinatory* and *connective.* As illustrated above, there is a diverse range of outcomes that can be potentially produced by various established institutions as responses to social contention. It is noteworthy that these different outcomes can be not only combined but also connected and thus constitute a complex *whole* of outcomes triggered by social contention. In other words, the assessment of the informational impact of social contention on established institutions must be based on the exploration of the *complexity* of as many identifiable outcomes as possible. The next chapter will introduce how this thesis systematically approaches the informational impact of social contention on the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere in China in the harmonious society-building era and methodologically addresses the complexity of institutional outcomes triggered by the challengers as well.

CHAPTER 5

A MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH DESIGN

The previous chapter illustrates a relational approach to understanding and assessing the impact of social contention on the information environment and especially emphasises the complexity of informational relationships established between social contention and established institutions in China. In line with this, this chapter turns back to the research objectives of this thesis, i.e., a systematic exploration of the state-initiated contentious public sphere, and fully presents the logic of a multimethod research design of this thesis. There are three main topics covered in this chapter. First, this chapter beings with a brief introduction to critical realism with rich methodological implications and sets it as the philosophical foundation of the thesis. Then, for the procedures of data collection, this chapter justifies the choice of *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, two leading Chinese party newspapers, as data sources, by specifically elaborating on the methodological implications of '*media bias*'. Finally, this chapter introduces three main research methods for data analysis in this thesis, i.e., cluster analysis, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), and network analysis, and demonstrates how the use of each method collaboratively contributes to a multifaceted and multileveled understanding of the state-initiated contentious public sphere in terms of the mediated relationships between the state and social contention through the party press. To conclude, this chapter shows how this thesis addresses, philosophically, methodologically, and empirically, the issue of *complexity* in exploring the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere as an informational outcome achieved by Chinese challengers.

5.1 Philosophical Foundation of the Thesis

In this section, critical realism will be introduced as the philosophical worldview of this research project. Strongly influenced by his supervisor, Rom Harré, British Philosopher Roy Bhaskar originally introduced the idea of 'critical realism' as an alternative philosophy of natural science in *A Realist Philosophy of Science* (2013 [1975]) and further elaborately advanced it as a philosophical foundation of social science in *The Possibility of Naturalism* later (2014 [1979]). During the 1980s and 1990s, the field of social science had been witnessing the booming growth of seminal critical realist literature written by numerous prominent researchers like Margaret Archer (1995), Andrew Collier (1994), Tony Lawson (1997), Peter Manicas (1987), William Outhwaite (1987) and Andrew Sayer (1992, 2000), as Danermark et al. (2002) noted at the turn of the century.

Thanks to all these social scientists and philosophers' pioneering works, critical realism, unlike pragmatism which sets the philosophical debate aside, directly tackles the contradiction between the positivist and interpretivist traditions of social science in a real middle way, simply speaking, by integrating a realist ontology with a constructivist epistemology sophistically. It redefines ontological and epistemological issues of scientific research and explores the nature of research objectives and the possible objects for scientific knowledge in the philosophical domain. As Danermark et a (2002: 5) summarised, '[w]ithin philosophy, critical realism involves a switch from epistemology to ontology, and within ontology a switch from events to mechanisms.' Of course, this section is not expected to demonstrate a thorough review of critical realism but to situate this research project in a more solid philosophical framework. Therefore, based on previous works, the key features of critical realism and the methodological implications will be illustrated.

5.1.1 Key Features of Critical Realism

The starting point of critical realism is to stress the independence of the world from our concepts and knowledge. To be more specific, this world is much more *complex* than native realists delineate. Bhaskar (2013 [1975]) differentiated three ontological domains of the world. First, *the real* is 'whatever exists' (Sayer, 2000: 11), but refuses any types of observation. The real consists of the structure and power of internal related objects. By power, it specifically means causal power, or *generative mechanism*, which is the capacity of objects to behave in a particular way. In other words, causal power not only has the potential to be activated but also may exist unexercised in the real domain. *The actual* is the second domain enacted by the real and refers to all events generated by the exercised causal powers in the real, whereas it does not mean that the actual domain can be fully experienced by human beings. All happenings exist in the actual domain no matter whether or not they can be necessarily observed. Thus, this leads to the third domain, *the empirical*. As Fletcher (2017) implied, there is no filter of human experience in the actual domain, whereas the empirical domain is always mediated through the filter of human beings. In this sense, the empirical is the whole world that researchers can observe either directly or indirectly. In Sayer's simple words, 'what has happened or been known to have happened does not exhaust what could happen or have happened' (2000: 12).

In line with this 'differentiated' ontological programme, critical realists stressed that researchers need to avoid 'the epistemic fallacy' (Bhaskar, 2008: 5) which arbitrarily simplifies the complex world as a singular one and reduces what ontologically is to what can be epistemologically known. As Danermark et al. claimed, scientific research is 'to investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what happens in practice, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world

(2002: 21). To achieve the goal of revealing generative mechanism deeply rooted in the real domain, critical realist researchers have to fully recognise the stratification of mechanism (Collier, 1994: 108) and, accordingly, the *emergent* nature of the physical process and social phenomenon. According to critical realists, the world is not only ontologically differentiated but also ontologically stratified. 'The mechanisms belong in separate hierarchically arranged strata of reality' (Danermark et al., 2002: 70), and 'the higher strata … [is] dependent upon other strata for their existence' (Cruickshank, 2003: 100). Therefore, the occurrences in the higher strata are emergent properties from the lower strata and the *emergence* is 'situations in which the conjunction of two or more features or aspects gives rise to new phenomena, which have properties which are irreducible to those of their constituents, even though the latter are necessary for their existence' (Sayer, 2000: 12).

To be more concrete, the core of the critical realist idea of 'emergence' is a strong anti-secessionist and a strong anti-reductionist view of causation. Critical realists reject the standard Humean 'successionist' view of causality as a pattern of observed constant conjunctions and argue '[w]hat causes something to happen has nothing to do with the number of times we have observed it happening' (Sayer, 2000: 14). Instead, causation 'must be analysed as tendencies, [i.e., causal power], not as universal empirical regularities' (Danermark et al., 2002: 203). However, the shift of the view of causation from the emphasis on repeated occurrences to a generative mechanism does not mean the reduction of happenings to one particular 'thing'. The anti-reductionist understanding of causation held by critical realists is twofold. First, it is the exercise of causal power rather than the objects who possess the power activates emergent properties, so the cause-searching cannot be reduced to the causal constituent. Second, the exercise of causal power is always contextually conditional, so the occurrence of events cannot be reduced to the identification of one particular causal power. The alternative 'interventionist'

model of causation offered by critical realism distinguishes causes from conditions. As Collier argued, ‘there is nothing that is ‘‘the cause’’, only causes. And these include ‘‘conditions’’’ (1994: 125). As a result, it is the ‘contingent’ combination of cause and conditions that constitutes the complexity of causation. In other words, under specified conditions, different generative mechanisms may lead to the same outcome, and the same mechanism may result in different outcomes.

Facing the ontological differentiated and stratified world, researchers have been ‘deepening knowledge’ (Collier, 1994: 49-50) by tracing the emergent properties and occurrences from the observable empirical, through the inexhaustible actual, and back to the inaccessible real. Regarding the obtaining of knowledge, or theories, critical realists embrace the possibility of gaining ‘transitive’ knowledge about generative mechanisms on the one hand, and address the inevitability of its evident fallibility of inaccurately mirroring the ‘intransitive’ object of scientific research, i.e., the reality, on the other hand. According to Bhaskar, the existence of both transitive and intransitive dimensions of knowledge is the ‘central paradox of science’ (2008: 11). Because scientific research is viewed by critical realists as a kind of social practice, the production of knowledge is always mediated by language, meaning, experience, and thus socially constructed in general. Given such a constant tension between the social attempt to contextually capture the truth independently existing in the world and the unobservable and theory-dependent nature of the real (Danermark et al., 2002: 15), all knowledge obtained through scientific research is fallible ‘knowledge in context’ (Sayer, 2000) and are constantly open to adjustment. In line with this, two more points need to be noted. First, as Danermark et al. stated, knowledge is not equally fallible (2002: 15), so, critical realism does not reject the effort to achieve a ‘better’, or ‘deeper’, understanding of social phenomenon at some point. Second, critical realists reject the fallible knowledge-based prediction and particularly stress

non-predictive explanation in social science (Danemark et al., 2002: 66-70; Sayer, 2000: 130-138), because ‘at any instant, the future is open, things can happen differently’ (Sayer, 2000: 15), particularly the exercise of causal power enacted by contextual conditions.

5.1.2 From Ontological Considerations to Methodological Implications

If there is no actual methodological implication of critical realism, philosophical innovation means nothing to scientific social research. In line with the aforementioned key features of critical realism, the proponents of critical realism further offer *retroduction* as an alternative research strategy in social science and view it as ‘the core methodological principle of critical realism’ (Zachariadis et al., 2013: 856). Research strategy can be understood as ‘the logic of enquiry’ (Blaikie, 2000: 9), ‘a mode of inference’ (Danermark et al., 2002: 113), or ‘the relationship between theory and research’ (Bryman, 2012: 19). Regarding traditional research strategies, Blaikie concisely summarised, ‘[t]he inductive strategy explains using well-confirmed generalisations that can be expected to hold across space and time. The deductive strategy explains using well-tested theories that represent the current state of knowledge’ (2000: 121). However, in the views of critical realists, ‘[d]eductive inference … says nothing new about reality. According to induction, the general inference is a generalisation of properties already given in particular, observed data (Danermark et al., 2002: 89).

Unfortunately, neither approach enable researchers to reveal *deep* generative mechanisms that are activated by contextual conditions and not directly given in empirical data. Bryne distinguished the cause (generative mechanism in the real) from the effect (observable changes in the empirical), and suggested that researchers ‘necessarily start from the effect - from what is, and go backward to the best explanation which seems to fit the facts’ (2011: 81). Danermark

et al. also similarly asserted '[r]etroduction is about advancing from one thing (empirical observation of events) and arriving at something different (a conceptualisation of trans-factual conditions)' (2002: 96). Taking the practice of hunting, or an example of detective in Collier's study (1994: 122-123), as a metaphor for retroductive reasoning, Ginzburg (1990) believed researchers pursuing the causality rooted in the real are just like hunters who track down their prey, by 'look[ing] for clues (e.g., broken branches, hoof marks, tufts of hair and odours) and ask[ing] themselves, ''[w]hat does it indicate?''' (cited from McEvoy and Richard, 2006: 71). In general, '[a] researcher may have some idea of the direction to go in this exploration but no clear idea of what to expect' (Blaikie, 2000: 109).

In addition, retroduction is not just a research strategy but also a concrete research process. As Roy Bhaskar (2014 [1979]) noted the lack of texts on applied critical realism and stated that, 'if CR [critical realism] is to be "serious," it must be applicable' (2014: p. v). Bhaskar offered the 'RRRE methodology', which consists of the *resolution* of a complex event into its causal components, the *redescription* of component causes into the perspective deployed, the *retrodiction* of possible antecedent causes, and the *elimination* of alternative possible causes of components, as the four main stages of research guided by critical realism (Bhaskar, 1997: 125; see more in Collier, 1994: 122-123; Cruickshank, 2003: 101). A more sophisticated design was proposed later in 2002. In accordance with Danermark et al., the research process based on critical realism can be divided into six stages, which serve as 'as a way from the concrete (stage 1) to the abstract (stages 2-5) and then back to the concrete (stage 6)' (2002: 109-111). To be more specific, the goal of stage 1, *description*, is to capture 'the often complex and composite event or situation we intend to study'. The second stage is *analytical resolution*, in which researchers need to 'separate or dissolve the composite and the complex by distinguishing the various components, aspects or dimensions'. Subsequently, in research

practice, stage 3, *theoretical redescription*, and stage 4, *retroduction*, are closely related. Researchers are expected to not only 'interpret and redescribe the different components/aspects from hypothetical conceptual frameworks and theories about structures and relationships' but also explore the emerging mechanisms behind the structures and relationships established at stage 3. At stage 5, the *comparison between different theories and abstractions* is to 'estimates the relative explanatory power of the mechanisms' revealed at previous stages. At the final stage, the generative mechanisms need to be reexamined through *concretisation and contextualisation* in different situations. Zachariadis et al's study is an excellent example and explicitly sets the applicable procedures of a critical realist empirical study. According to the authors, the retroductive methodology 'focuses on research and intervention not as a discrete event but as a creative process with different phases that involve different types of activities' and 'the main objective is to link the structures and causal powers of the objects under study to the events we want to explain through the notion of causal mechanisms' (2013: 866). They conducted their study in four main phases. The first phase involves the description of the research situation and focuses on the identification of the composite events or phenomena under study. The second phase, that of the actual retroductive analysis of the data, involves theoretically hypothesising and identifying the possible mechanisms or structures capable of generating the phenomena that have been observed, measured, or experienced. The third phase focuses on the critical assessment and elimination of the alternative explanations that have been produced. Finally, the authors stressed the re-appliance of causal explanations uncovered in different contexts to see if they are so far satisfactory.

Above all, there are two main characteristics of critical realist research design, first, the 'unidentified mechanisms may be hypothesised' (Sayer, 2010: 72). However, noted, the use of existing theories as hypotheses cannot be simply regarded as traditional 'hypothetico-deductive'

logic of enquiry (Danermark et al., 2002: 113). As Bhaskar argued, '[o]nce a hypothesis about a generative structure has been produced in social science it can be tested quite empirically, although not necessarily quantitatively' (2014 [1979]: 62). Instead, the major value of the hypothetical model is that it gives direction to the research and identifies there are 'something to look for (Blaikie, 2000: 109). The second notable characteristic of critical realist research design is the acceptance of all research methods. In fact, the community in the field widely embraces the idea that critical realism as a philosophical orientation is not associated with any particular set of methods and both quantitative and qualitative approaches can make a contribution to a deep understanding of the world (Fletcher, 2016). As Bergene argued, critical realists 'do not necessarily propose the development of a new method, but rather advocate the use of already existing methods within social science in a critical realist inspired practice' (2007: 6). But, according to the proponents of critical realism, quantitative and qualitative methods do play different roles in the exploration of generative mechanisms (Zachariadis et al., 2013; Fletcher, 2016; McEvoy and Richards, 2006; also see Sayer, 2010). In critical realist studies, the strength of quantitative methods is to develop reliable descriptions of social phenomena, the object of research, rather than correlation-building. The core of the quantitative approach, quantification, as Sayer stressed, 'is not just a tool of analysis but part of the object of study' (Sayer, 2010: 120). By contrast, the qualitative approach, thanks to its 'open-ended' nature, is much more profound and can be applied to identify structures and interactions between complex mechanisms hidden in the real. In short, quantitative methods are applied to describe the phenomenon, and qualitative methods are for causal inference hidden behind the scenes.

5.2 A Multimethod Research

A multimethod research design is adopted in this thesis to explore the complexity of mediated relationships established between the state and social contention as an outcome brought about by Chinese challengers during the harmonious society-building period. According to Brewer and Hunter, multimethod research can be broadly defined as 'the practice of employing two or more different methods or styles of research within the same study or research program rather than confining the research to the use of a single method' (2015: 187). Researchers are attracted to using multiple methods as they view it as 'a way of finding out more about the subject that they wish to understand' (David and Sutton, 2011: 295). To be more specific, there are essentially three broad approaches to implementing multiple research methods in social inquiry: 'as a sequencing of methods, qualitative-quantitative or quantitative-qualitative; the use of different methods to explore different aspects of the research question; and the use of different methods to corroborate the research findings of each, also referred to as triangulation' (Williams, 2003: 182, cited from ibid.). In this thesis, it is the second general approach that is mainly adopted. Just as Schutz and his co-authors suggested, given the fact that 'the nature of reality is complex and layered, …… the usefulness of multimethod research emerges in the potential to investigate different aspects of the phenomena under study' (Schutz et al., 2004: 276).

The most straightforward advantages of following such a multimethod research approach to a comprehensive understanding of the state-initiated contentious public sphere arising in China between 2004 and 2020 lie in the methodological emphases of *expansion* and *complementarity* as two main purposes of combining different methods. First, as suggested in Greene and her co-authors' pioneering an insightful works, it is the studies using different methods for the purpose of expansion that 'seeks to extend the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components' (1989: 259). More importantly, in order to increase

the scope of the inquiry, they argued, the methods most appropriate for multiple inquiry components need to be carefully selected. Therefore, David and Sutton (2011: 297) suggest that 'this approach enables researchers to build a broad research project that has multiple aspects, each of which is explored using an appropriate method'. Second, by complementarity, it simply means that different methods are used as a way of complementing each other, where data collected are used to gain in more detail a multilevel understanding of the social phenomenon by exploring the different dimensions of knowing about it. In this sense, the focus of multimethod research is still on studying different aspects of a social phenomenon but the goal is shifted to the elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification of the results from one method using the results from another method. As David and Sutton (2011: 297) further stated, the use of multiple methods in such a complementary way is seen as 'building strength into the research and balancing out the weaknesses in individual methods', in order to increase interpretability and meaningfulness of inquiry results.

In summary, a multimethod research design is adopted in this thesis to facilitate a more complete and accurate understanding of such a multifaceted and multileveled state-initiated contentious public sphere. Given no single research approach can tap into the complexity of mediated relationships established between the state and social contention, this thesis believes that combining different research methods and analytical techniques can enable important new insights that are both theoretically and practically valuable. Besides, the terminological issue needs to be further clarified. The phrase 'mixed methods research' has become the most popular term that has been extensively used by researchers to label the alternative third way between quantitative and qualitative studies in social science and has been proudly praised as 'the Third Methodological Movement' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). However, this thesis still prefers to use the term 'multimethod'

rather than ‘mixed methods’, which strictly insists on the integrated combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches at different stages of scientific research, for two good general reasons.

First, according to Bergman, the methodological division between quantitative and qualitative research is a ‘taken-for-granted presumption’ (2008: 3) of seeking the alternative third way and needs to be questioned seriously. In his view, it is the so-called Paradigm War and those influential textbooks of mixed methods research published in the late 1980s and 1990s that ‘structure our “there-are-two-kinds-of-research-methods” perspective today’ (ibid.: 13). However, for those researchers who are ambitious to overcome this methodological gap, they are usually and inevitably stuck in a very strange dilemma. ‘On the one hand, they must accept and emphasise the divergent qualities attributed to each approach, which on ontological, epistemological, and axiological grounds are incompatible. On the other, they put forward the proposal that the strengths of each paradigm can be combined fruitfully within one single research design’ (2020: 442). Furthermore, Bergman wondered if the methodological distinction is just an ‘uneasy truce between two highly specialised, politicised factions’, rather than ‘a fair representation of the actual possibilities and limits of different research approaches’ (ibid.: 442). Thus, Bergman strongly argued that the methodological divide in social science is ‘driven by ideological, political, and strategic positions. … (and) [i]ronically, the underpinnings of the obsession in methods debates on truth and knowledge is premised by specific strategic, political, and ideological foundations’ (ibid.: 441).

Second, the practice of mixed methods research, which is deeply rooted in the methodological division between quantitative and qualitative research methods, has also been challenged by

emphasising the 'blurred nature' of the boundaries between quantitative and qualitative approaches. A group of 'anti-conflationist' methodologists (Bryman, 2012; Hammersley, 1992) argued that the general differences between both cannot be considered an all-embracing dichotomy and it is risky to exaggerate the divide unlimitedly. As McEvoy and Richards summarised, anti-conflationists, by differentiating the logic of justification from the specific method employed, suggested that 'a methodology should not be conflated with the technical aspects of a method since the same method can be used by researchers who come from different ontological and epistemological starting positions' (2006: 68-69). In brief, 'research methods are much more free-floating than is sometimes supposed' (Bryman, 2012: 619). Moreover, just as Blaikie stated, the methodological boundary between quantitative and qualitative approaches is fundamentally blurred at a level of data since 'almost all data used by social researchers begin in a qualitative form. It is only after work has been done on it, to transpose words into numbers, that quantitative data come into being' (2000: 244).

This thesis agrees with this standpoint against the terminological use of 'mixed methods research' in general, but given the fact that the phrases, i.e., 'multimethod research' and 'mixed methods research', have been used by many researchers interchangeably and thus generated much confusion (Seawright, 2016; Anguera et al., 2018), a brief conceptual clarification of the similarities and differences between these two research approaches is still very needed here. First, undoubtedly, multimethod research and mixed methods research do share many fundamental elements in common. Like mixed methods research, multimethod research can be used to achieve a wide range of purposes and research objectives like concept formation and refinement, descriptive analysis, causal inference, and policy evaluation, as Seawright (2016: 1) argued. The simple rationale behind the multimethod approach, i.e., the more methods used the better understanding of the research object achieved (Hesse-Biber and Johnson, 2015: xxxix)

and the requirement for researchers to consider multimethod at different stages of the research process (Hunter and Brewer, 2015: 618) are also identical to the emphases made by mixed methods researchers. Even 'the spirit of multimethod research', which refers to 'an openness to serendipity and humble recognition that all methods have strengths and weaknesses, and that one has compensating strengths by combining different methods, leading to more credible results in the face of a series of skeptics' questions' (Brewer and Hunter, 2015: 183), can be easily found in research literature regarding mixed methods as well.

But, on the other hand, based on previous works devoted to differentiating two research approaches (Creswell and Clark, 2007; 2011; Anguera et al., 2018), the most distinctive characteristic of multimethod research is that the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches is not a requirement of a multimethod research design. Unlike mixed methods research which assures at least one quantitative and one qualitative method used in any given research project, multimethod research 'is not restricted to combining qualitative and quantitative methods but rather is open to the full variety of possible methodological combinations' (Brewer and Hunter: 2015: 187). In line with this, multimethod researchers are not necessarily dedicated to the achievement of mixing or integration of methods either (Hesse-Biber, 2015: xxxix; Anguera et al., 2018: 60). As Goertz further argued, '[q]ualitative]' and 'quantitative' are not very useful in describing or analysing multimethod research (2017: 5). Or in Anguera et al's view, 'this focus on qualitative or quantitative obscures the defining features of multimethod studies' (2018: 2765). Thus, in short, multimethod research is 'to attack a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have nonoverlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths' (Brewer and Hunter, 2006: 3), and 'mixed method is a subset of multimethod' (Brewer and Hunter: 2015: 187).

Above all, the emphasis on ‘multimethod’ research rather than ‘mixed method’ research enables this thesis not only to avoid getting involved in a trap-like debate over the methodological divide between quantitative and qualitative research in social science but also to embrace the ‘way to engage more fully with the scope and complexity of social phenomena’ (Greene, 2016: 607). In this thesis, multiple techniques and methods will be applied for data collection, data analysis, and eventually addressing different aspects of the inquiry into the complexity of mediated relationships between state and social contention emerging from the information environment, or public sphere, in China. As a result, a comprehensive understanding of the rise of the multileveled and multifaceted state-initiated contentious public sphere in the harmonious society-building era can be achieved. In the following sections, the sources and procedures of data collection and the specific research methods for data analysis will be introduced in detail.

5.3 Process of Data Collection

5.3.1 Newspapers as Data Sources

Although the social movement study is well known as a ‘methodologically pluralist field’ (Della Porta, 2014: 1), data collected from a diverse variety of media sources ranging from newspapers, international news wires, television transcripts, Google search, posts on social media (Almeida and Lichbach 2003; Earl and Kimport 2008; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; McCarthy et al., 1996; Zhang and Pan, 2019; Chen, 2020) still play pivotal roles in the inquiries into the contention staged publicly on the ground. The general research rationale behind the wide use of media as the sources of data collection in social movement study is quite straightforward, that is media provide rich actual information for researchers to identify the

contention and establish the landscape of contention as the empirical. But, facing such a wide range of media forms serving as the carriers of contention-related messages, Hutter stated that 'newspapers more specifically, are still the primary source for PEA [protest event analysis]' (2014: 348). Earl et al. also indicated that, '[s]cholarship in collective action and social movements has developed a rich research tradition that uses data culled from newspaper reports of these events, among other sources. Subsequent research using a variety of sources has largely validated the central findings of many projects that initially relied on newspaper data. (2004: 65).

Compared to other ways of retrieving contention-related information from different forms of media (e.g., posts on social media and televised programmes), the use of newspapers, a traditional research approach that has a long history in social movement study, at least shows four methodological advantages. First, thanks to the rich diversity of newspapers, they not only are workable for conducting research on the contentions at different levels, in different situations, and across different places but also enable researchers to purposively choose the data sources most suitable for their research interests specifically. Second, the professionalisation of journalism sets a high-level standard of information affordance which ensures the richness and seriousness of factual information about the contention on the ground in a specific context, although the journalistic practices might vary across the agencies and regions. Third, from a very technical perspective, another major advantage of newspapers is its continuity, because newspapers report regularly. Thus, newspapers offer a good site for historically situating the contention to either trace long-term changes or make comparisons. As Earl et al. strongly argued, 'for many historical and comparative research designs, newspapers remain the only source of data on protest events' (2004: 66). Fourth, what needs to be stressed is the particularly close relationship between newspapers and social movement outcome study.

On the one hand, indeed, the news articles published in newspapers provide rich and credible information about the contention on the ground, but, on the other hand, this contention-related information affordance, or media coverage of contention in other words, is also a crucial type of cultural outcomes brought about by reported social contention (see review Amenta and Polletta, 2019). Moreover, due to the limited amount of space available daily for news in a newspaper, i.e., the news hole, being featured in the articles published in newspapers can be considered scarcer resources than having access to other forms of media, especially social media. As a result, compared to other media forms, newspapers do not cover the widest range of social contention for sure but only those that most deserve wide publicising based on the professional judgement of journalists. In this sense, what newspapers capture is a landscape of high-profile contention filtered through the news articles during a certain period. For the challengers failing to be covered in newspapers, it not only shows that they do not exert any effect on the media, but also suggests that they cannot further make a greater 'mediated' impact through the newspapers.

Besides, the methodological limitations of using newspapers as data sources in social movement study also should be highlighted. There has been a heated debate over the research problems caused by *media bias* and how they can be methodologically addressed by researchers or not (Earl et al, 2004; Ortiz et al., 2005; Hutter, 2014; Demarest and Langer, 2022). Some critics argued that newspaper data suffer from selection bias because news agencies simply do not report on all contentious activities that occur on the street and the decision to cover them or not is fundamentally based on the characteristics of challengers, the position of news agencies, and the issue preference in the public (Earl et al., 2004; Hutter, 2014). The advocates of newspaper data of course offer various solutions (e.g., the use of multiple sources and more systematic sampling techniques) to mitigate the methodological

errors rooted in selection bias. Earl et al. also strongly argued that 'in historical context, this concern over selection bias is ironic' and 'the debate should revolve around how much event analysis and newspaper data represent relative improvements over prior research strategies' (2004: 69). But, they do also admit that 'there is no standard solution to the selection of sources' (Hutter, 2014: 352), and, to some extent, do share the common ground with the opposition that the landscape of social contention captured by newspapers cannot be viewed the representative sample to a whole population of social contention in a given context. In addition, some other researchers also highlight the description bias which refers to the intentional omission, distortion, and prioritisation of certain information in media coverage of social contention. Thus, in brief, the portrait of challengers is all socially constructed and the so-called 'factual information' about social contention provided in newspapers must be carefully questioned. Above all, given a clear acknowledgment of the methodological advantages and disadvantages of using newspaper data, it is clear that the 'mediated' overview of social contention established as the empirical in social movement studies is entirely dependent on which newspapers are chosen as the source of data collection. The bottom line that researchers firmly hold is the fit between their research objectives and the selection of specific newspapers as data sources.

The last point suggested here in this section is that reexamining the relationship between newspapers and social contention from a perspective of social movement outcome sheds new light on the understanding of 'media bias' in using newspaper data. As mentioned above, newspaper data enables researchers not only to capture a 'snapshot' of social contention in reality but also to explore media coverage as an important cultural type of social movement outcome. Thus, whilst acknowledging the methodological dilemma rooted in media bias in general, this thesis still appreciates the methodological potential of 'biased coverage'. Shifting from a perspective of viewing media coverage as a tool-like channel through which the biased

reality of social contention can be mapped out to a perspective of viewing it as an institutional response to the challengers, biased coverage can be something important that needs to be detected and explained carefully rather than something erroneous that need to be avoided and mitigated. To this end, a series of research questions relating to 'media bias' need to be taken into account. For example, do newspapers report disproportionately on the issue of social contention across different incidents or different regions? Can the variations in media coverage on social contention be attributed to a systematic 'media bias' of certain newspapers? In short, as a study devoted to assessing the cultural impact of social contention in China, this thesis methodologically embraces media biases and argues that the biased coverage of social contention is the research interest of this thesis.

5.3.2 Chinese Party Press as Data Sources?

Turning to the context of China in which this study is situated, the very first good news is that many empirical studies, including the research report released by *the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (2014), have ensured that Chinese newspapers *do* cover the issue of social contention and offer rich collectible and analysable textual information (Chen, 2009; 2020; Chen, 2012; Cai, 2010; Tong and Lei, 2013), despite the state strict censorship and regulation. In short, what the articles published in Chinese newspapers constitute is not a contention-free sphere. Next, to address the issue of media bias in China, a comprehensive understanding of the Chinese media environment, in particular the newspaper industry, is a very starting point. In brief, the development of Chinese newspaper industry is driven by the tension between the state and the market, especially during the period of reform and opening. On the one hand, as illustrated in the previous chapter on how the state has been changing the strategies but never giving up the intervention in shaping the information environment in China, Chinese newspapers inevitably cannot fully escape from functioning as propaganda apparatus to

disseminate the political messages favouring the CCP's ruling. But, on the other hand, thanks to the marketisation and the expanding advertisement sector in the industry, Chinese newspaper industry has developed its understanding and practice of journalistic professionalism (Simon et al., 2017) and enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy from the state. As a result, more and more social responsibilities of being a watchdog and speaking for the public have been taken by Chinese newspapers as well. In short, Chinese newspapers have been striving for a balanced growth between being propaganda apparatus and being a watchdog through a power struggle between the state and the market.

Besides such a dual nature of being propaganda apparatus and being a watchdog, the most noteworthy feature of China's newspaper industry is the division between party press and commercial press, which also further indicates the complexity of the Chinese newspaper industry. Such a distinction between the two types of newspapers is better to be examined briefly through a lens of their distinctive relationships with the state and the market. The party press, which has been the party organ since the pre-1949 communist revolutionary era, naturally stays a very close relationship with the state rather than the market. Such a tight state-media relationship is also reflected in the so-called journalistic practice of the party press and its form of news-making process. As Zhao stated, '[n]ews in typical Party journalism is about Party and government policies, creative experiences and local adaptation of policies, and the achievements of individual and institutional role models' (1998: 27). Thus, in this sense, Chinese party newspapers 'do not constitute an independent public sphere' but 'serve as an important footnote to the Party's ascendancy to ideological monopoly' (Zhao, 1998, 22). By contrast, since the mid-1990s, the rise of alternatives to the party press has been witnessed in China, thanks to the media reform paralleling economic opening (Huang, 2016). As a market-oriented and profit-pursued business, Chinese commercial newspapers have always maintained

a great distance from the party-state. As indicated by the seminal article *Media Bias in China* published in *American Economic Review*, commercial papers act substantially less than party papers as government mouthpieces in China (Qin et al., 2018). Fully embracing commercialisation not only facilitates the rapid growth of Chinese commercial newspapers but also empowers them to criticise and even challenge the party-state within a certain degree of autonomy (Lei, 2018; Tong, 2011; Wang, 2016).

Such a division certainly also leads to the differences in media bias, or preference, between party press and commercial press in China, because, as mentioned earlier, the characteristic of news agency is one of three factors that determine media bias. Accordingly, prior to the decision of data sources in this thesis, it is necessary to distinguish between how party press and commercial press intend to cover social contention respectively. Again, according to Qin et al's important article that directly tackles the issue of media bias of Chinese newspapers, they found 'a strong pattern of product differentiation among newspapers along the politico-economic dimension' (2018: 15), which simply means '[p]arty papers focus on political goals, whereas commercial papers focus on economic goals' (2018: 30). Thus, they further argued that the CCP can 'produce one highly [politically] biased Party paper that exclusively focuses on political goals and one [politically] less-biased commercial paper that largely focuses on economic goals' (2018: 3). Their extraordinary works on media bias of Chinese newspapers shed light on how party press and commercial press cover social contention differently. Following their arguments, it is safe to claim that the party press, as an affiliated organ within the party-state which thus is more politically sensitive, prefers to make political implications of social contention and narratively situate them within the framework of national policy or propaganda agenda and, by contrast, the market-originated commercial press prefers to pay more attention to those newsworthy incidents and takes social responsibility of prioritising the

pressing issue relating to social contention from a perspective of economic development. In short, thanks to the media bias of Chinese newspapers, there is a potential variation in media coverage of social contention between party press and commercial press. In the following section, the selection of data sources and the procedure of data collection will be justified.

5.3.3 Collecting Data from *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*

This thesis is dedicated to a systematic exploration of the emerging state-initiated contentious public sphere from a perspective of complex state-contention relations in China during the harmonious society-building era. Therefore, the very first methodological decision that needs to be made is to set a clear time frame for observing and investigating Chinese newspapers in this research. In other words, what does 'a harmonious society-building era' mean in this thesis? As illustrated clearly in the first chapter, the concept of 'harmonious society' was formally introduced in 2004 as an institutional response to the increasing social unrest that was deeply rooted in the drastic social transformation since the reform and opening up in China. In 2006, with the official document, *the Resolution on the Major Issues Concerning the Building of a Socialist Harmonious Society*, formally released, the institutionalisation of harmonious society in a form of political discourse was preliminarily articulated. However, unfortunately, the CCP did not offer a clear timetable for delivering such a nationwide political programme of 'building harmonious society'. The only hint predicting the time frame for completing this ambitious project is that, as explicitly stated in the document released in 2006, the main tasks of building harmonious society were expected to be achieved by *2020*.

Therefore, in this thesis, the years of 2004 and 2020 are selected as the starting and ending point of the harmonious society-building era, respectively. Such a sixteen-year time span thus

serves as the site for observing the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere and technically examining all relevant news articles that channel the state's voices on the issue of social contention to the public. However, it is also a fact that during this long sixteen-year period of building a harmonious society, China had also witnessed many major political changes. Undoubtedly, the power transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping that took place in 2012 was the most influential one and cannot be completely ignored. So, the second methodological concern is whether significant changes in Chinese politics, especially considering that Xi officially took the office in 2012, weakens, or even undermines, the rationale of selecting such a long period of time as the historical context of this research.

There are at least two major points that need to be presented here to further justify such a methodological choice. First, as many researchers argued (Ahlers and Schubert, 2009; Zeng, 2020; Karmazin; 2020), in the Chinese context of political discourse, 'harmonious society', or 'building harmonious society', cannot be understood as a concrete policy plan with explicit articulation. Instead, it is more like a grand policy-like slogan which is not completely empty but intentionally vague, in order to serves multiple political functions such as state propaganda, a test of loyalty expression, a call for intellectual support and so on. So, in this sense, it is inappropriate to regard such a long period of time between 2004 and 2020, the timeframe for observation in this thesis, as a strict timetable for programme delivery in the reality. Instead, it should be viewed as an even open-ended historical stage in which the phrase of 'harmonious society', as a political slogan, was actively promoted and continuously present, in theory. Even if 'harmonious society' was not the slogan dominating these sixteen years, what can be ensured is that it was at least visible to the public during this period.

Second, indeed, it is very common to see that the power transition brings new political slogans in the context of Chinese politics. Since Xi Jinping took the office in 2012, many new concepts, or political slogans in other words, such as 'China Dream', 'New Era' and 'one belt one road', were formally introduced to the public in order to strongly signal Xi's distinct leadership vision about China. This thesis agrees Zeng Jinghan's argument that 'the introduction of the concept is not only about communicating the vision but also about its attached power relations' (2020: 2), because '[w]hen a critical slogan is put forward by a top leader, it does not only signal his vision but also expects to establish his personal authority' (ibid.). Just as the poet Ai Qing expressed in his poem, '[t]he new slogan determines the new political direction' (cited from Karmazin, 2020: 412) and it is these new political slogans innovatively proposed by Xi Jinping that empower the incumbent top leadership to walk out from the shadow of his predecessors quickly. However, what needs to be carefully reminded here is that such a slogan shift cannot be viewed as an absolute discontinuity in the CCP's leadership generations over the course of power transition. On the contrary, according to Karmazin, 'slogans serve to demonstrate and uphold a continuity of CCP leadership' (2020: 422), because '[t]hey reinforce the system of one hegemonic party by showing an essential unity of CCP and demonstrating that each generation builds upon the previous one' (ibid.).

Based on the discussion above, this thesis acknowledges that there were major political changes happened during this sixteen-year period but rejects the idea that they would significantly affect the investigation into the dynamics of harmony and contention in China. Furthermore, this thesis decides to select *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* as two sources of data collection and to methodologically embrace the media bias of these two most prestigious party newspapers in China. The very first straightforward reason for choosing party press rather than commercial press as data sources is that the use of the party press perfectly fits the research

objectives of this thesis. As an outcome-centred study, this thesis aims to adopt a relational approach to address the complexity of the state-initiated contentious public sphere brought about by social contention to a harmonious society. Notably, the Chinese party newspapers serve as information-processing institutions which informationally bridge the state and social contention in the information environment, thus offering the best site for observing how the emergence of mediated relationships informationally established between the state and social contention constitutes a multifaceted and multileveled structure of the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

Besides, even more importantly, this thesis argues that media bias makes crucial methodological implications and Chinese party newspapers methodologically benefit the impact assessment of social contention on the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere in China during the harmonious society. Thanks to the party press's close relationship with the state and strong political bias of reporting, only those social contentions that successfully capture the state's attention and are politically influential can be covered in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, and thus can be selected in this thesis to capture the 'mediated' landscape of social contention in China during the harmonious society-building era. Therefore, in other words, this thesis seeks to detect and then explain the variations in those influential challengers' informational relationships with the state established through the party press, or the differences in the salience of those challengers who successfully catch the state's attention in the eyes of the state.

Regarding the choice to select *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* as the main sources of data collection in this thesis, the main rationale of justification is twofold. First, *the People's*

Daily and *the Guangming Daily*, compared to other party and commercial newspapers in China, are undoubtedly the two most influential newspapers in the Chinese media industry and even within the Chinese political system. Both *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, as national newspapers, have huge circulations across the country and, even more importantly, are the only two newspapers not only directly run by the party but also officially recognised as the affiliated organs of the Central Committee of the CCP. Thus, thanks to the authoritative status of functioning as the national newspapers and the party mouthpiece, these two newspapers are institutionally obliged to not only publicise the pressing issues that deserve the state's attention but also channelled to the public strictly the party's viewpoints. In addition, from a practical perspective, these two newspapers have the major methodological advantages of accessibility and continuity over time. Both national newspapers report on a regular basis and are fully kept in public archives,

Another point that needs to be stressed here is the nuance of these two party newspapers. It is known that the establishment of *the People's Daily* was historically and geographically rooted in the CCP-controlled Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region during the period of Chinese Communist revolution. According to Timothy Cheek (1997) and Wenbin Lu (2018), the birth of *the People's Daily* can be traced back to *the Resistance News* (抗敌报), the official publication of the Political Department of the Jin Cha Ji Military District established in 1937. It is clear that, ever since its founding, *the People's Daily* and its predecessor have been under direct control of the CCP's leadership and have represented the voice of the party. By contrast, *the Guangming Daily* originated in *the Guangming Paper* (光明报), which was founded by Chinese prominent philosopher, Liang Shuming, in Hong Kong in 1941, as the official paper of the China Democratic League (CDL), the third Chinese political party besides the CCP and

the Kuomintang (KMT) at that time. Since the newspaper was re-entitled as *the Guangming Daily* and re-established in Beijing in 1949, it had played the role of the mouthpiece of the CDL, one of the eight minor political parties, rather than the CCP. In 1982, the CCP take over *the Guangming Daily* and further formalised it as an institutional organ directly under the control of the Central Committee of the CCP in 1994. Since then, *the Guangming Daily* have been functioning as a mouthpiece of the party.

As illustrated above, the nuances of these two newspapers, especially their distinctive historical backgrounds and political ties with the CCP, are fully acknowledged. What is further argued here is that these two national, capital-based, established mouthpieces of the party are methodologically complementary to each other and thus beneficial to the exploration of the emerging state-initiated contentious public sphere in the harmonious society-building era. The selection of both party newspapers rather than either of them as the sources of data collection in this thesis to some extent constitutes the 'most different' systems design of studying the leading Chinese party newspapers and thus seeks maximal heterogeneity in the selected news articles covering the issue of social contention in the party press. As the result, the mediated landscape of such a multi-faceted and multi-levelled state-initiated contentious public sphere can be depicted and then explored to the greatest extent.

For the procedure of data collection, *China National Knowledge Infrastructure* (CNKI) *Core Newspapers Full-text Database* was used for data collection in this thesis. Full-text searches were conducted for the Chinese keyword 'mass incident' (群体性事件) in *all* news articles published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020, respectively. After reading the title, the first paragraph, and the full text, if necessary, of news reports filtered,

those articles that were obviously irrelevant to the research topic here, i.e., social contention, and those articles that only have focused on online activism, on the incidents taking place outside of mainland China, and on the individual act like self-immolation, were all excluded and removed from the further investigation, as suggested by the 'A Triple' model of understanding social contention. As a result, a total of 1758 articles getting involved in the issue of social contention in two newspapers were selected, termed as 'contentious coverage' in the party press, which constitutes the main dataset for analysis in this thesis.

The basic journalistic attributes of selected articles (e.g., publication date, page number, article length, and authorship) and the frequency of the key term 'mass incident' mentioned in each article were also coded. Besides, a variety of social contention documented in the party press was coded at either individual or provincial levels as well. To be more specific, the information relating to the actor, appeal, and appeal of social contention was collected and coded. For those incidents covered in the party press, they were termed as 'identified incidents', regardless of whether all three essential components of them were explicitly covered in the party press. The information linking specific regions to the reported social contention was also collected and coded. For those places which were journalistically engaged in either commentaries or 'hard news' about social contention in the party press, they were termed as 'reported regions'. More details about data collection and transformation will be presented in the following empirical chapters, accordingly.

5.4 Methods for Data Analysis

In the first chapter, the three main research objectives of this thesis have been clearly stated, but here, they do not mind being re-presented again as follows:

1) *What does the multi- levelled state-initiated contentious public sphere look like?*
2) *How do provinces and events emerge from the multi-faceted state-initiated contentious public sphere?*
3) *Why do some provinces and events occupy more prominent positions in the multi-faceted state-initiated contentious public sphere?*

However, after coming through such a long journey of theoretical elaboration presented in the previous chapters, it is a good time to rephrase, reframe, and rethink these three research objectives again for a deep and better understanding of what they do mean, under the theoretical framework of social movement outcome studies in general, from a relational perspective of informational outcomes, and on such a critical realist philosophical foundation.

In the first place, the question of 'what' implies a holistic view of the state-initiated contentious public sphere as the outcome mediated through the news-making process in the party press and triggered by all signals sent from the challengers as a whole. The emphases on 'multifaceted' and 'multileveled' indicate that the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere can be reflected as 'complex systems which are nested in, have nested within them, and intersect with other complex systems (Byrne, 2005: 105). Besides, according to the question of 'how' and 'why', it is shown that the research objectives of this thesis cover two analytical levels, i.e., social contention studied as the individuality at the level of incident and as the collectivity at the level of province. For the question of 'how', given that complex systems 'are composed internally of bundles of interrelated aspects' (Ragin, 2009: 524), it is designed to grasp the multifaceted structure of the state-initiated contentious public sphere as complex systems. By structure, it is constituted by different types of mediated relationships established between the state and social contention at two analytical levels through the party press. The term 'emerge'

also suggests that such a structure with interrelated aspects is deep, covert, but explorable. The 'why' question highlights the differences in the impact of social contention at the level of either individuality or connectivity. It also implies that those 'politically high-profile' challengers who successfully caught the state's attention in the harmonious society-building era did not make an equal contribution to the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere. Above all, there are two key philosophical concepts, complexity and emergence, that need to be carefully addressed by the use of appropriate research methods over the course of the inquiry into the rise of the state-initiated contentious public sphere in this thesis.

'The world is complex', Just as Byrne and Uprichard stated, '[B]y complex … [it] mean[s] that the social emerges from multiple, multidimensional nonlinear, networks of nested systems' (Byrne and Uprichard 2012b: 109). In line with the rationale of multimethod research design, cluster analysis, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), and network analysis will be applied as the main analytical tools to tackle different parts of research questions. Fortunately, all three research methods not only show consistent integrity at the methodological level but also show their capabilities of collaboratively addressing the complexity of the state-initiated contentious public sphere and exploring the emergence of mediated relationships established between the state and social contention in China during the harmonious society-building era. Regarding the cluster analysis, Byrne argued that 'the pattern of clusters which exists is not a product of individual case conditions but is determined by variable characteristics of the system as a whole' (1998: 80) and '[t]hey are types, qualitative sets, which 'emerge' from the application of computation to large multi-variate data sets' (ibid.: 170). Similarly, social network analysts stated that '[a] relationship is not an intrinsic characteristic of either party taken in isolation, but is an emergent property of the connection or linkage between units of observation' (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1991: 174) and 'this notion of emergent properties is similar to that advanced

by critical realists' (Buch-Hansen, 2013: 315). For QCA, although it seems that Ragin developed QCA theories and techniques in isolation from critical realist tradition, many critical realist researchers still have turned their attentions to QCA and claimed it is particularly suitable for analysing the complexity of reality (Rutten, 2021; Bergene, 2007; Olsen, 2014; Gerrits and Verweij, 2013; Byrne, 2005; 2009; 2011), not only due to its case-based nature but also mainly because it 'develops a conception of causality that leaves room for causal complexity, referred to as "multiple conjunctural causation"' (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009: 6). Thus, the major analytical strength of QCA is to detect different constellations of factors that lead to the same outcome and disclose the generative mechanisms emerging from the complex configurations.

To conclude, cluster analysis, QCA, and network analysis offer different lenses of observation in this thesis and not only collaboratively but also complimentarily contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the state-initiated contentious public sphere and the mediated relationships between the state and social contention in China during the harmonious society-building era. To be more specific, each research method was conducted separately to address different aspects of research questions. In Chapter Six, cluster analysis was used to preliminarily establish the mediated relationships between the state and social contention by identifying the status differentiation of all 31 provinces in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In Chapter Seven, QCA was employed to reveal the mechanisms behind the emerging patterns of different types of mediated relationships between the state and social contention at the *provincial* level. In Chapter Eight, network analysis was applied to map out and explore the complexity of mediated relationships between the state and social contention at the *individual* level. More details about the procedures of data analysis and the use of relevant analytical techniques will be presented in the following chapters accordingly.

CHAPTER 6

SITUATING CONTENTION IN HARMONIOUS SOCIETY:

A Bird's Eye View of Social Unrest in the Eyes of the State

This chapter is dedicated to a preliminary exploration of the state-initiated contentious public sphere and a delineation of the landscape of social contention channelled through the party press in the harmonious society-building era. This chapter comprises five main sections. First, this chapter starts with a clarification of 'contentious' coverage and then situates it in a historical context of 'harmonious' coverage. After a brief historical comparison between contentious and harmonious coverage, this chapter further offers a comprehensive overview of contentious coverage in general from a journalistic perspective. In the third section, the ideas of reported regions and identified incidents in contentious coverage will be introduced, and the discussion will be narrowed down to these two sub-types of contentious coverage. Furthermore, in the fourth section, a variety of local contentions channelled through the party press will be situated in their places and the mediated landscape of contention in the party press will be mapped out according to the focus on reported regions and identified incidents, respectively. In the fifth section, using cluster analysis, all 31 protesting provinces will be placed in positions in the eyes of the party-state during the harmonious society-building era, and the distribution of the party-state's attention on social unrest across the regions will be explored at the provincial level from a wholistic perspective.

6.1 Contentious Coverage in Harmonious Society

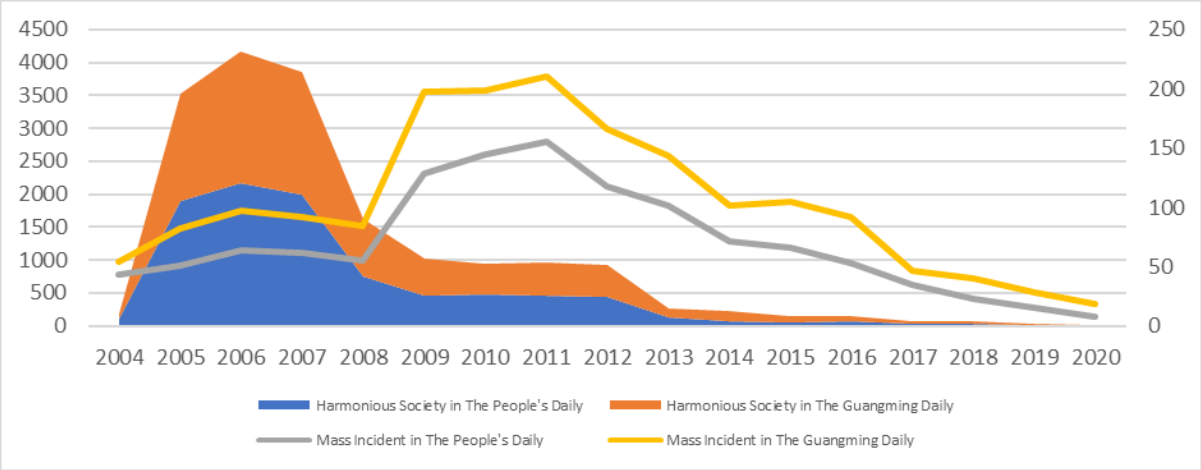
6.1.1 Media Coverage on 'Mass Incident' and 'Harmonious Society'

This section situates contentious coverage within a temporal framework of the harmonious society-building era and makes a comparison between contentious coverage and harmonious coverage published in the party press between 2004 and 2020. Contentious coverage means a news article mentioning the key term 'mass incident' at least once. By contrast, harmonious coverage refers to a news article mentioning the key term 'harmonious society' at least once. The descriptive results of such a comparison between the annual number of harmonious coverage and that of contentious coverage in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* have been presented in the following. In Table 1, Besides, colour scale was applied to the table differently. First, colour scale was used, separately, in the column and row titled Total to specify the notable numbers. In brief, the colouring rule is that the greener the colour, the lower the number will be; the redder the colour, the larger the number will be. In all other cells, colour scale was also used to specify the notable numbers. The colouring rule is even simpler, i.e., the redder the colour, the greater the number will be. Additionally, the stacked areas shown in Figure 1 represent the historical change of harmonious coverage in both newspapers, and the stacked lines represent the changing annual numbers of contentious coverage in the party press. In the following sections, harmonious and contentious coverage will be elucidated separately.

Table 6-1 Contentious Coverage and Harmonious Coverage in the Party Press between 2004 and 2020

Key Term	Newspaper	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Harmonious Society	*The People's Daily*	112	1890	2174	1996	744	451	479	459	437	127	78	60	63	24	23	11	6	9134
	The Guangming Daily	82	1630	1997	1864	872	578	462	499	497	144	147	92	85	45	41	28	13	9076
Total		194	3520	4171	3860	1616	1029	941	958	934	271	225	152	148	69	64	39	19	18210
Mass Incident	*The People's Daily*	43	51	64	62	55	129	145	155	118	102	71	66	53	35	23	15	8	1195
	The Guangming Daily	11	31	33	30	29	69	54	55	48	42	31	39	39	12	17	13	10	563
Total		54	82	97	92	84	198	199	210	166	144	102	105	92	47	40	28	18	1758

Figure 6-1 Historical Change of Contentious Coverage and Harmonious Coverage in the Party Press between 2004 and 2020



6.1.2 Harmonious Coverage in the Party Press

Taking the first look at harmonious coverage in the party press, as depicted in Table 1, the total numbers of news articles mentioning 'harmonious society' published in two newspapers between 2004 and 2020 are very similar. A total of 9134 news reports mentioned the key term harmonious society published in *the People's Daily* and a total of 9076 articles in *the Guangming Daily*. From a historical perspective, the two newspapers shared very similar trajectories of harmonious coverages. As shown in Figure 1, it is clear that the amount of media coverage on harmonious society was pretty low in both newspapers in the very starting year. In 2004, a total of 112 articles were published in *the People's Daily*, and 82 articles were published in *the Guangming Daily*. Since 2005, both numbers increased sharply and reached their maximum in 2006 at the same time, with 2174 articles in *the People's Daily* and 1997 articles in *the Guangming Daily*, respectively. After the notable peaks observed between 2005 and 2007, the numbers of news reports relating to harmonious society in both newspapers experienced the same dramatical drop in 2008 and then remained relatively stable at, approximately, 450 articles per year in the following years. Then, in 2013, the numbers dropped abruptly again. Since then, the annual numbers of news reports on harmonious society in both newspapers decreased steadily and eventually touched the lowest point simultaneously in the

last year. In 2020, there were only six and thirteen articles published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, respectively. Given the fact that the concept of harmonious society was officially introduced to the public in 2004 for the first time, such similar trajectories shared by both newspapers unsurprisingly indicate that *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, as the party mouthpieces, not only were reportedly sensitive to the new agenda of political campaign set by the centre but also acted consistently in the formal news-making process, thanks to their dual natures of being news agency and propaganda apparatus.

Another interesting finding is that, from 2004 to 2020, the historical trajectory of harmonious coverage in both newspapers can be easily divided into four phases. As Figure 1 shows, an abrupt outburst of harmonious coverage can be identified at the very initial stage between 2004 and 2007. Then, the second phase started in 2008 and ended in 2012. During this period, the annual numbers of news reports mentioning the key term harmonious society, as mentioned above, were relatively small but stable. Finally, although the same steady downward trend can be detected in the last two phases, the most significant difference between the third phase (2013-2017) and the fourth phase (2018-2020) is that, at the final stage, all annual numbers of articles relating to harmonious society in the party press were less than 50 and lower than the numbers shown in the third phases. Further examining these four stages through a political lens, such four phases were closely intertwined with major political activities and crucial power transitions in China. For example, all turning points of the four phases (i.e., the year 2008, 2013, and 2018) were either exactly situated in or around the date of a major plenary session held in Beijing. Also, between 2004 and 2012, the concept of harmonious society which was proposed by then-President Hu Jintao unsurprisingly caught a considerable amount of state attention in the party press. Nevertheless, since President Xi Jinping took office in 2012, the visibility of harmonious society, an idea proposed by the former president, decreased dramatically in the

party press. Notably, this indicates that state attention was withdrawn from this outdated concept.

6.1.3 Contentious Coverage in the Party Press

Turning to contentious coverage in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, there were a total of 1758 articles mentioning the key term 'mass incident' in both newspapers. As depicted in Table 1 and Figure 1, with a relatively small amount of contentious coverage in the initial year of 2004 (i.e., 54 articles in total), both newspapers showed a gentle growth of contentious coverage in the following two years and reached the first small peak in 2006, with 97 articles in total. After the above-described moderate increase, a dramatic surge was witnessed in 2009. The total number of news articles relating to the term 'mass incident' in both newspapers reached its maximum in 2011, with a total of 210 articles. Since then, despite another small growth detected in 2015, a general and seemingly irreversible downtrend was observed, with 105 articles in total. Eventually, in 2020, only 18 articles mentioned the term 'mass incident' were published in both newspapers, the lowest number during the harmonious society-building era.

Moreover, taking a close look at the nuanced differences in the amount of contentious coverage between *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, two major points need to be noted here. First, although the amount of contentious coverage in both newspapers stayed at a relatively high level between 2009 and 2013, they reached the peaks differently. It was in 2009 that the amount of contentious coverage in *the Guangming Daily* reached its peak, with 69 articles, while the number of relevant reports in *the People's Daily* did not peak until 2011, with a total of 155 articles. Second, the total number of articles mentioning the term 'mass incident' was

1195 in *the People's Daily* and it was twice the number in *the Guangming Daily*, with 568 articles. This descriptive finding suggests that, compared to *the Guangming Daily*, *the People's Daily* was more 'contention-friendly' and offered the contention more opportunities to catch the state's attention and have access to visibility in the party press. In short, regarding the contentious coverage, *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, even though both are crucial party mouthpieces, functioned differently. It is noteworthy that both newspapers have a similar news-making capacity to produce almost the same amount of harmonious coverage between 2004 and 2020 (i.e., 9134 and 9076 articles in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, respectively), such that the variation in the amount of contentious coverage detected in two newspapers is a very interesting finding.

6.1.4 A Comparison between Contentious Coverage and Harmonious Coverage

Following the discussion on harmonious coverage and contentious coverage above, the relationship between both types of media coverage in the party press between 2004 and 2020 needs to be clarified further. Three points need to be clarified here. First, as depicted in Table 1, the total number of articles mentioning the term 'harmonious society' in both newspapers was much higher than the number of articles mentioning the term 'mass incident'. In other words, it reasonably implies that a policy-like concept of harmonious society, compared to the concern of contention, received a much higher level of visibility in the party press. As for contentious coverage, the findings presented above suggest that it was not entirely invisible to the public, but merely caught a small portion of state attention through the party mouthpieces. Second, another interesting finding is that the amount of harmonious coverage and contentious coverage in the party press did not reach their peaks at the same time. According to Figure 1, the peak of contentious coverage was remarkably later than the peak of harmonious coverage. As the crucial point of temporal intersection, the year 2008 not only marked the upcoming

decline of harmonious coverage but also heralded the surge of contentious coverage. Third, Third, unlike the trajectory of harmonious coverage, which included four clear phases, from a historical perspective, contentious coverage did not show significant signs of identifiable stages, except for moderate growth in the first few years and a surge between 2008 and 2011. After reaching the peak in 2011, the number of articles mentioning the term 'mass incident' dropped gradually. No observable evidence can be easily found between 2012 and 2020 to strongly indicate that the amount of contentious coverage was as heavily influenced by major political activities as harmonious coverage did. In short, the historical trajectories of harmonious coverage and contentious coverage between 2004 and 2020 were not identical. In the following sections, contentious coverage published in the party press will be the focus and the overview will be delineated thoroughly.

6.2 Contentious Coverage with 'Chinese Characteristics'

6.2.1 Basic Journalistic Attributes of Contentious Coverage in the Party Press

This section particularly focuses on contentious coverage identified in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020 and turns to the delineation of journalistic portraits of these articles. To fully understand the whole picture of the state-initiated contentious public sphere that was constructed by a total of 1758 articles mentioning the term 'mass incident' in the party press, the overview of their journalistic attributes was investigated thoroughly and analysed descriptively. In the first place, three basic attributes of these news reports (i.e., the average number of pages, the average length of reports, and the average frequency of the term 'mass incident' mentioned in the articles) need to be introduced. The code of these basic attributes of news articles, as a very first step to understanding the media coverage of either social actors or social actions, is widely adopted by researchers in social

movement studies to capture the quality of contentious coverage received by the targets of reporting, i.e., the term ‘mass incident’ in this case. The average number of pages indicates the prominence of coverage, which enables researchers to understand to what extent one news article relating to the term ‘mass incident’ can be reached by the audience. The average length of reports indicates whether the journalistic presence of the term ‘mass incident’ either successfully initiates or is situated in a broad discussion in the party press. The frequency of the term ‘mass incident’ mentioned in the articles is a classic measure that is commonly used to directly show the degree of public visibility successfully obtained by the target of reporting in the public sphere.

The overview of basic journalistic attributes possessed by contentious coverage in the party press has been presented in Table 2. The colour scale was applied to specify the notable numbers in each column headed by various journalistic attributes. But, in the column of the average number of pages, the lower the number, the greater the prominence enjoyed by contentious coverage. As for the average article length and the average frequency of ‘mass incident’, the higher the number, simply the greater the visibility enjoyed by contentious coverage.

Table 6-2 Journalistic Attributes of Contentious Reports in the People's Daily and the Guangming Daily

Year	Average Number of Pages		Average Length of Reports		Average Frequency of 'Mass Incidents'	
	People's Daily	*Guangming Daily*	*People's Daily*	*Guangming Daily*	*People's Daily*	*Guangming Daily*
2004	6.05	4.36	1290.72	1328.64	1.16	1.00
2005	6.37	6.52	3699.61	3138.74	1.29	1.06
2006	8.16	5.12	2255.86	3104.94	1.53	1.21
2007	7.98	6.00	1791.69	2232.40	1.15	1.23
2008	7.89	6.79	2532.18	2523.83	1.56	2.55
2009	7.21	5.12	2830.12	3003.32	1.39	1.42
2010	10.70	7.06	2782.21	3465.30	1.17	1.80
2011	10.15	7.05	2669.70	3853.04	1.22	1.15
2012	10.63	7.35	2292.94	2233.69	1.19	1.69
2013	8.91	5.76	2149.92	2354.07	1.28	1.07
2014	10.51	8.13	2142.23	2510.61	1.07	1.52
2015	10.61	6.87	2592.91	2956.62	1.26	1.67
2016	9.53	6.31	2061.19	2450.38	1.13	1.10
2017	8.46	5.83	2152.20	2395.75	1.29	1.17
2018	10.91	4.76	2593.13	2195.18	1.13	1.06
2019	8.20	5.77	3062.53	3782.62	1.07	1.38
2020	7.75	6.70	3251.88	2584.80	1.00	1.10
Average	9.15	6.34	2469.02	2836.04	1.25	1.41

First, taking a look at the column of the average page numbers in Table 2, for all contentious coverage in *the People's Daily* between 2004 and 2020, the average number of pages was 9.15. Clearly, the articles relating to the contention did not occupy a very crucial position in *the People's Daily* in terms of prominence and, particularly, the numbers stayed at a pretty low level between 2010 and 2018. By contrast, contentious reports published in *the Guangming Daily* enjoyed a more prominent position, with an average number of pages at 6.34. Second, turning to the average length of the articles, briefly speaking, those articles published in *the Guangming Daily* were longer than those published in *the People's Daily*, on average, with 2836.04 and 2469.02 words per article, respectively. For the trajectory of the numbers, both newspapers had similar slow starts in 2004. Then, the number for *the People's Daily* quickly soared to its highest peak in 2005 and did not reach the second wave of peak until the last two years. Between 2006 and 2017, the average length of contentious coverage fluctuated at a relatively low level and ranges from 1791.69 to 2830.12 words per article. As for *the*

Guangming Daily, there were three identifiable peaks and the average article length exceeded 3000 words per article in 2005, 2006, 2010, 2011, and 2019, respectively. Finally, as for the average frequency of the term 'mass incident' in the party press, the articles published in *the Guangming Daily* mentioned the term 1.41 times per article on average, which was higher than that in the relevant articles published in *the People's Daily* (i.e., 1.25 times per article). Taking a close look at the average frequency numbers of the term 'mass incident' in Table 2, there is only one cell that needs to be noted. In 2008, the average frequency of 'mass incident' was 2.3 in *the Guangming Daily*. Besides, the numbers in the column did not show significant differences and all other average frequency numbers were less than 2.

In summary, as indicated by the results listed in Table 2, the quality of contentious coverage in two newspapers is not completely the same in terms of the prominence, length and frequency of 'mass incident'. From a journalistic perspective, compared to contentious coverage in *the People's Daily*, those articles published in *the Guangming Daily* took a more journalistically advantageous position in general, although the total amount of contentious coverage in *the People's Daily* was significantly larger than that in *the Guangming Daily*, as presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

6.2.2 Authorships of Contentious Coverage in the Party Press

This section focuses on the authorship of contentious coverage in the party press. The emphasis on authorship's importance here recalls the pioneering concept of standing (Gamson, 1998; Ferree et al, 2002). According to Gamson, 'standing is not the same as being covered or mentioned in the news; a group may be in the news in the sense that it is described or criticised but has no opportunity to provide interpretation and meaning to the events in which it is

involved' (1998: 68). Instead, '[s]tanding refers to a group being treated as an actor with voice, not merely as an object being discussed by others' (Ferree et al, 2002: 13). For the authorship, Ferree and her co-authors further elaborated, '[j]ournalists play a dual role in this arena. First, they are gatekeepers. By including quotations and paraphrases from various spokespersons, journalists decide which collective actors should be taken seriously as important players. However, journalists are not merely gatekeepers in this process. They are players who comment on the positions that other actors take, and they participate in framing the issue under discussion. They can interpret and provide their meaning when they choose to, operating within the constraints provided by accepted journalistic practice in their respective countries. Journalists, then, play a double role both as purveyors of meaning in their right and as gatekeepers who grant access or withhold it from other speakers' (Ferree et al, 12). In short, it is the authors who not only set the discursive boundaries of contentious coverage but also fabricate the webs of 'contentious' significance in the party press. Therefore, a detailed examination of the authorship is beneficial to a comprehensive understanding of the contour of contentious coverage in the state-initiated contentious public sphere during the harmonious society-building era.

According to a retrospective rationale of the coding process with a gradually expanding classification of authorships, a total of 1758 articles mentioning the term 'mass incident' in the party press were eventually assigned to seven categories, respectively, as presented in Table 3 and Table 4. In both tables, the colour scale was applied in each row to indicate the notable annual numbers of contentious coverage authored by a specific group of people.

Table 6-3 Authorship of Contentious Coverage in the People's Daily

Year	Local Governor/ Institute	Police Officer/ Millitary Agency	Social Organisation/ Commercial Institute/ Others	Research Institute/ Intellectual	Central Governor/ Institute	Individual/ Commentator	Journalist/ News Agency
2004	5	3	0	0	3	15	20
2005	6	0	1	2	12	8	22
2006	7	0	0	4	7	7	40
2007	9	1	1	2	6	6	40
2008	4	0	2	0	5	12	33
2009	9	0	0	6	19	33	63
2010	14	1	2	8	16	24	83
2011	14	1	1	18	12	39	75
2012	11	0	1	11	4	21	72
2013	5	1	3	13	5	25	53
2014	6	0	2	4	5	21	35
2015	8	0	1	7	6	9	35
2016	5	0	0	5	3	9	31
2017	3	0	0	0	2	4	26
2018	0	0	0	1	0	2	20
2019	0	0	0	0	3	6	6
2020	1	0	0	1	4	1	2
Total	107	7	14	82	112	242	656
Average	6.29	0.41	0.82	4.82	6.59	14.24	38.59

Table 6-4 Authorship of Contentious Coverage in the Guangming Daily

Year	Local Governor/ Institute	Police Officer/ Millitary Agency	Social Organisation/ Commercial Institute/ Others	Research Institute/ Intellectual	Central Governor/ Institute	Individual/ Commentator	Journalist/ News Agency
2004	0	0	0	0	1	0	10
2005	3	0	0	2	7	2	17
2006	7	3	0	5	5	2	14
2007	2	0	0	1	3	2	23
2008	1	0	0	4	1	5	19
2009	3	1	0	5	9	8	45
2010	6	1	1	8	9	5	27
2011	5	2	1	9	7	5	29
2012	6	0	2	8	1	8	24
2013	4	1	0	5	3	10	20
2014	3	3	1	11	0	9	8
2015	1	0	2	14	6	5	13
2016	1	0	0	9	3	4	22
2017	0	0	0	2	2	1	8
2018	1	0	0	4	2	1	11
2019	0	0	0	3	4	1	6
2020	0	0	0	3	2	1	4
Total	43	11	7	93	65	69	300
Average	2.53	0.65	0.41	5.47	3.82	4.06	17.65

First, both newspapers did share two major things in common. The most notable but unsurprising finding is that most articles published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* were authored by journalists. Thus, in this sense, contentious coverage can be still viewed as a formal type of institutional outcome produced through a routine news-making process of journalistic practice, because it was still the group of journalists who made major contributions

to the production of contentious coverage in the party press rather than other groups of authors. To be more specific, the total numbers of articles authored by journalists in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020 were 656 and 300, respectively. Besides, another interesting point is that two groups of authors were consistently the least contributory to the production of contentious coverage in both newspapers. Only 21 articles relating to the term 'mass incident' were written by policing actors and 18 articles were authored by social and business actors in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* during the harmonious society-building era.

For the dissimilarities between the authorship distribution of contentious coverage in *the People's Daily* and that in *the Guangming Daily*, the most notable difference lies in the role played by intellectuals. In *the Guangming Daily*, research institutes and intellectuals constituted the second largest group of authorship during this period and a total of 93 articles fell into this category. Especially in 2014 and 2015, compared to others, the total number of articles written by intellectuals was the largest, even surpassing the number of reports authored by journalists. By contrast, despite a much larger total amount of contentious coverage, the number of articles authored by intellectuals in *the People's Daily* is even smaller than that in *the Guangming Daily*. To be more specific, a total of 82 articles were written by intellectuals in *the People's Daily* and merely ranked the fifth largest group of authorship between 2004 and 2020.

Besides, another difference in the authorship between the two newspapers is the position occupied by central and local agencies. In *the People's Daily*, 112 and 107 articles were falling

into the category of central agencies and local agencies, respectively. Following journalists and individual commentators, central governors constituted the third largest group of authorship and local governors occupied the fourth. Especially in the last year of 2020, the number of articles authored by central agencies accounted for the largest share of contentious coverage in *the People's Daily*. By contrast, the voices of central and local governors relating to the contention in *the Guangming Daily* were weaker, since only 65 and 43 contentious reports were falling into these two categories and ranking fourth and fifth, respectively. However, there was still one cell in Table 4 that needs to be noted. In 2006, a total of seven articles mentioning 'mass incident' were written by local agencies in *the Guangming Daily*, ranking second in that year.

In fact, such a difference in the authorship of contentious coverage between *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* can be attributed to their various journalistic objectives and orientations. As stated in its official website, *the Guangming Daily* views 'intellectuals as its main readers' and is dedicated to serving as 'a bridge between the party-state and intellectuals'. Therefore, '[r]ooted in the intellectual community ……, *the Guangming Daily* …… is popular among Chinese intellectual circles'. By contrast, '*the People's Daily* is responsible for publicising the Party's theory, line, principles, and policies, publicising the major decisions and deployments of the Central Committee, and publicising the Party's propositions', as the press states officially in its website.

Next, to further examine the authorship distribution of contentious coverage in both newspapers, Table 5 shows the annual proportion of contentious coverage authored by various

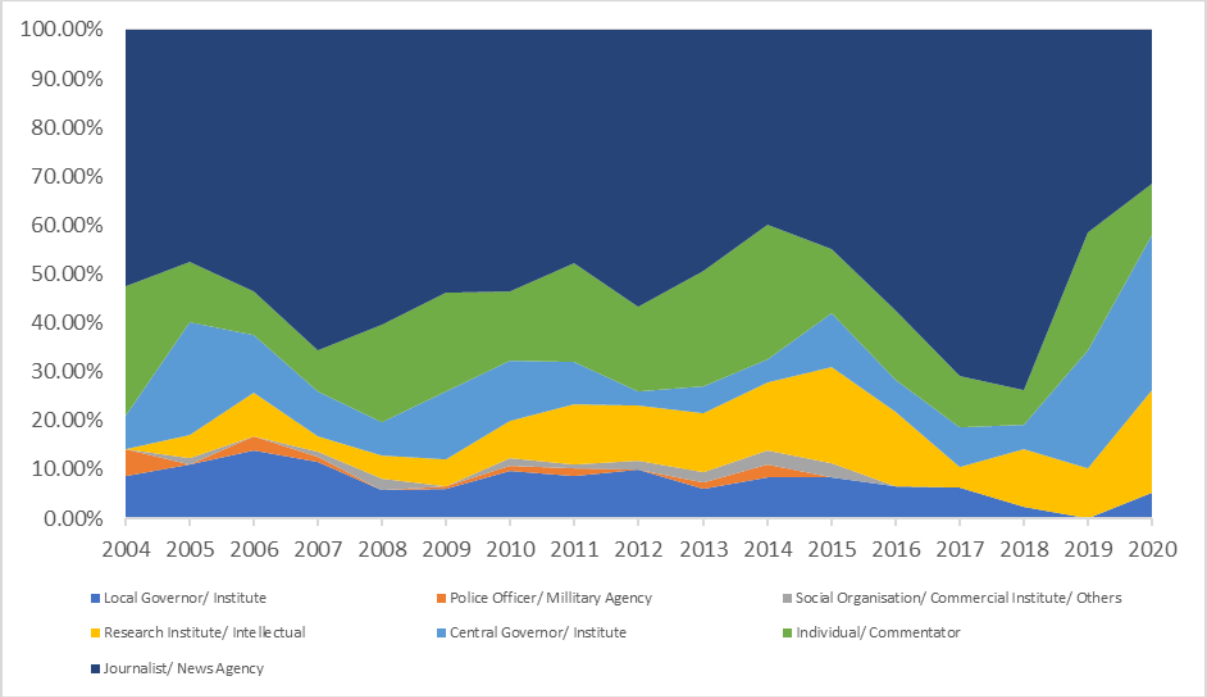
groups of people during the harmonious society-building era. In Table 5, the colour scale was applied in all cells to specify the notable numbers. Furthermore, based on the results listed in Table 5, Figure 2 was drawn to delineate the long-term change of authorship distribution in both newspapers.

Table 6-5 Proportion of Contentious Coverage with Various Authorship in Both Newspapers

Year	Local Governor/ Institute	Police Officer/ Military Agency	Social Organisation/ Commercial Institute/ Others	Research Institute/ Intellectual	Central Governor/ Institute	Individual/ Commentator	Journalist/ News Agency
2004	8.77%	5.26%	0.00%	0.00%	7.02%	26.32%	52.63%
2005	10.98%	0.00%	1.22%	4.88%	23.17%	12.20%	47.56%
2006	13.86%	2.97%	0.00%	8.91%	11.88%	8.91%	53.47%
2007	11.46%	1.04%	1.04%	3.13%	9.38%	8.33%	65.63%
2008	5.81%	0.00%	2.33%	4.65%	6.98%	19.77%	60.47%
2009	5.97%	0.50%	0.00%	5.47%	13.93%	20.40%	53.73%
2010	9.76%	0.98%	1.46%	7.80%	12.20%	14.15%	53.66%
2011	8.72%	1.38%	0.92%	12.39%	8.72%	20.18%	47.71%
2012	10.06%	0.00%	1.78%	11.24%	2.96%	17.16%	56.80%
2013	6.08%	1.35%	2.03%	12.16%	5.41%	23.65%	49.32%
2014	8.33%	2.78%	2.78%	13.89%	4.63%	27.78%	39.81%
2015	8.41%	0.00%	2.80%	19.63%	11.21%	13.08%	44.86%
2016	6.52%	0.00%	0.00%	15.22%	6.52%	14.13%	57.61%
2017	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%	4.17%	8.33%	10.42%	70.83%
2018	2.38%	0.00%	0.00%	11.90%	4.76%	7.14%	73.81%
2019	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10.34%	24.14%	24.14%	41.38%
2020	5.26%	0.00%	0.00%	21.05%	31.58%	10.53%	31.58%
Average	7.57%	0.96%	0.96%	9.81%	11.34%	16.37%	52.99%

As depicted in Table 5, first, the articles written by journalists in both newspapers accounted for the largest share (i.e., 52.99%) of contentious coverage in the party press, followed by those written by individual commentators, with 16.37%. Next, the articles authored by intellectuals made up 9.81% of the total, higher than 7.57% contributed by local officials but lower than 11.34% occupied by central officials. Lastly, only 0.96% of contentious coverage was classified into either the category of policing actors or that of social and business actors.

Figure 6-2 Changing Proportions of Contentious Coverage with Various Authorship in Both Newspapers



From a historical perspective, the group of intellectuals, departing from an initial silence in 2004, gradually became an indispensable source of the voices on ‘mass incident’ in the party press. By contrast, as Figure 2 shows, the contribution of local officials to the production of contentious coverage gradually declined. Particularly, in 2019, the number of articles authored by local governors even dropped to zero. A similar downward trend can also be found in the trajectory of the reports written by individual commentators. Between 2008 and 2014, the articles written by individual commentators still enjoyed a great share of contentious coverage in the party press, but, in the last few years, all numbers kept at a relatively low level, except an ‘outlier’ of 24.14% identified in 2019. Besides, the proportion of articles written by central agencies experienced a decline and stayed at a relatively low level between 2012 and 2017 but rebounded to its initial level in the last few years. Regarding the policing, social and business authors, the number of articles written by them was consistently small during this period, but it is still important to note that these groups of people still made solid contributions to the

diversification of authorship of contentious coverage in the party press. Especially in 2014, more than five percent of articles were classified into these two categories of authorship in total.

6.2.3 A Journalistic Overview of Contentious Coverage in the Party Press

To further explore the complex relationships between journalistic attributes of contentious coverages in the party press, Table 6 was constructed to comparably display the intersection between the aforementioned three basic journalistic attributes and the authorship of contentious coverage in two newspapers. The colour scale was applied to indicate the significant numbers in each row. As mentioned above, for the average number of pages, the lower the number, the more prominence enjoyed by the articles.

Table 6-6 Journalistic Overview of Contentious Coverage in Both Newspapers

Journalistic Attribute	Local Governor/ Institute	Police Officer/ Millitary Agency	Social Organisation/ Commercial Institute/ Others	Research Institute/ Intellectual	Central Governor/ Institute	Individual/ Commentator	Journalist/ News Agency
Average Page of Reports	10.29	8.83	11.48	9.33	4.86	9.63	7.89
Average Length of Reports	2799.05	2834.22	2892.86	3041.85	6789.21	1674.99	2019.67
Average Frequency of Mass Incident	1.61	2.72	1.00	1.52	1.23	1.28	1.23

According to Table 6, it is clear that those articles authored by central governors unsurprisingly occupied the most prominent positions, with an average number of pages at 4.86, much lower than others. By contrast, social and business actors, as a category of authorship, not only had a limited contribution to the visibility of contention in the party press but also took the most disadvantageous position in terms of the prominence of contentious coverage. The articles written by them were published on page 11.48 on average during the harmonious society-building era. Second, regarding the average length of contentious coverage, the articles authored by central leaders enjoyed the largest number of 6789.21 words per article on average. Articles written by intellectuals ranked second with an average word count of 3041.85. Unsurprisingly, the reports with the shortest length (i.e., 1674.99 words per article on average)

were written by individual commentators. The numbers shown in the third row indicate that police officers and military agencies who directly confront the grassroots unrest and face the angry mass mentioned the term 'mass incident' more often than other authors, with an average number of 2.74 times per article. Finally, again, it is social and business actors who mentioned the key term only once in their articles on average.

6.3 Reported Regions, Identified Incidents and Contentious Coverage

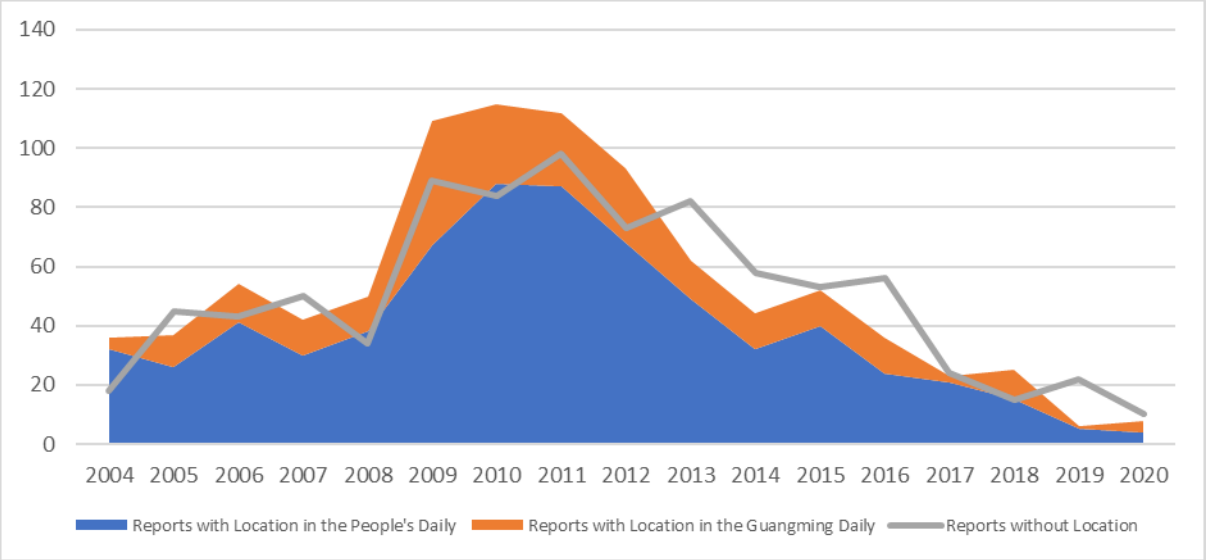
6.3.1 Reported Regions in Contentious Coverage

This section shifts the focus from all contentious coverage identified in two newspapers to those articles simultaneously mentioning the term 'mass incident' and covering at least one specific location. Those articles failing to provide any details about the geographical sites of the contention were excluded. A total of 1758 articles published in *the People's Daily and the Guangming Daily* have been classified into different categories to indicate the distribution of contentious coverage either with or without reported regions in the party press (Table 7). The use of colour scale in all cells is expected to specify the notable numbers. Based on the descriptive findings presented in Table 7, Figure 3 was drawn to show the historical change of contentious coverage across different categories between 2004 and 2020.

Table 6-7 Annual Number of Contentious Coverage with(out) Reported Regions

Contentious Coverage with Reported Regions	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Reports with Location in *the People's Daily*	32	26	41	30	38	67	88	87	68	49	32	40	24	21	15	5	4	667
Reports with Location in *the Guangming Daily*	4	11	13	12	12	42	27	25	25	13	12	12	12	2	10	1	4	237
Reports with Location in Both Newspapers	36	37	54	42	50	109	115	112	93	62	44	52	36	23	25	6	8	904
Reports without Location in Both Newspapers	18	45	43	50	34	89	84	98	73	82	58	53	56	24	15	22	10	854

Figure 6-3 Historical Change of Contentious Coverage with(out) Reported Regions



First, comparing the total number of reports simultaneously mentioning the term 'mass incident' and covering at least one specific location to the amount of contentious coverage failing to mention any locations of the contention, there is no huge difference between both numbers between 2004 and 2020. As Table 7 shows, the total number of contentious reports without mentioning any locations was 854 and that number of contentious reports covering at least one specific location was a bit higher, with a total of 904 articles. In addition, another point that needs to be noted is a similar pattern of historical change shared by both types of contentious coverage. With slow starts in the first few years, the amount of contentious coverage with reported regions and without reported regions reached their peaks between 2009 and 2013. To be more specific, the maximum annual number of contentious reports with specific locations was 115 in 2010, and the number of articles failing to mention any locations was 98 in 2011. Since then, both numbers gradually declined.

Moreover, focusing on contentious coverage with reported regions only, the difference between *the People's Daily* and that in *the Guangming Daily* needs to be pointed out. The first notable

difference is that the number of contentious reports with specific locations in *the People's Daily* was much higher than that in *the Guangming Daily*, with a total of 667 and 237 articles, respectively. Also, the two numbers reached their peaks differently. The number of contentious reports involving at least one specific location in *the Guangming Daily* soared to 42 in 2009. By contrast, it was not until 2010 that the amount of contentious coverage with reported regions in *the People's Daily* climbed to the highest point, with 115 articles. But, noted, in the last few years, both numbers fell wildly and eventually dropped to the same four articles in 2020. All these findings can also be easily detected through an intuitive observation of the graphs shown in Figure 3 as well.

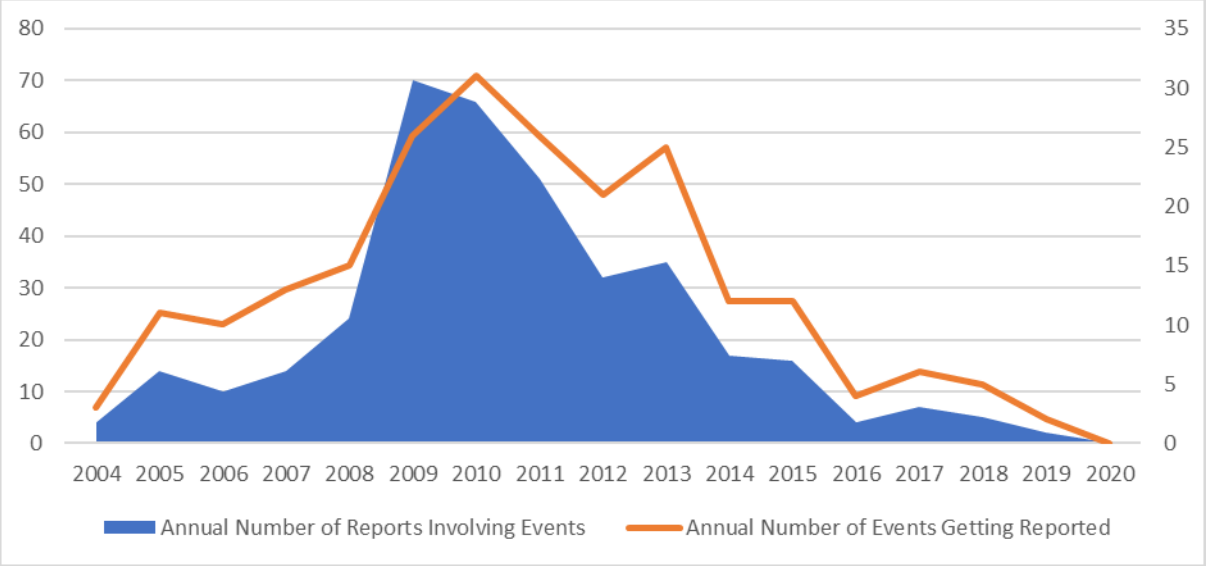
6.3.2 Identified Incidents in Contentious Coverage

Further narrowing the focus from contentious coverage with reported regions down to contentious coverage with identified incidents, this section is expected to delineate the overview of protest events that successfully had access to the party press. By contentious coverage with incident incidents, it refers to those articles not only simultaneously mentioning the term 'mass incident' and specifying at least one location of contention but also clearly covering at least one specific protest event on the ground. As a result, 371 contentious articles reportedly putting the incidents in their places were selected from 904 contentious articles with reported regions in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020. In short, this section addresses identified incidents that happened in reported regions, on the basis of contentious coverage in the party press.

Table 6-8 Annual Number of Contentious Coverage Involving Events and Identified Incidents Getting Reported

Contentious Coverage with Identified Incidents	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Annual Number of Reports Involving Events	4	14	10	14	24	70	66	51	32	35	17	16	4	7	5	2	0	371
Annual Number of Events Getting Reported	3	11	10	13	15	26	31	26	21	25	12	12	4	6	5	2	0	222

Figure 6-4 Historical Change of Contentious Coverage Involving Events and Identified Incidents Getting Reported



The overview of contentious coverage involving specific events on the ground has been delineated from a historical perspective in Figure 4. The area indicates the changing amount of contentious coverage with identified incidents and the line represents the long-term change of identified incidents in the party press. More numerical details have also been presented in Table 8 and the colour scale was applied in each row to specify the notable numbers. According to Figure 4 and Table 8, the starting point for both values was quite low. In 2004, there were only four articles covering a total of three local protest events. In the next few years, both numbers experienced significant growth, especially between 2008 and 2009. The amount of contentious coverage with identified incidents reached its peak in 2009, with a total of 70 articles. Following this, the number of specific local incidents getting reported in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* also peaked in 2010, with a total of 31 identified incidents in the party press. However, since then, both numbers dropped dramatically. After a moderate

rebounding increase in 2012, the numbers witnessed a very consistent downward trend and eventually dropped to zero in 2020.

Lastly, for the read of numbers regarding identified incidents shown above, one more point needs to be stressed here. The annual numbers of identified incidents shown in Figure 4 and Table 8 are based on the date of the reporting of the event in the party press rather than the date of the event's actual occurrence. So, given the fact that the same protest event might be covered multiple times in different years, the total number of events getting reported in the party press (i.e., 222 incidents as listed in Table 8) cannot be viewed as the same as the actual number of independent protest events which were covered in the party press and staged on the ground. Likewise, the historical trajectory suggested by the line in Figure 4 cannot be interpreted according to the traditional rationale of protest event analysis either. It does not indicate the historical change of protest events that happened during the harmonious society-building era but simply refers to how many protest events successfully caught the party-state's attention, annually. In fact, a total of 180 independent protest events can be retrieved from contentious coverage with identified incidents, and clearly it is a bit reasonably smaller than the aforementioned total number listed in Table 8.

6.4 Mapping Out the Landscape of Contention in the Party Press

6.4.1 Putting Reported Regions in their Places

In this section, a total of 904 contentious articles with reported regions published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* during the harmonious society-building era were assigned to 31 provinces, accordingly, based on whether the province was mentioned specifically in the article. Table 9 was constructed to show the distribution of state attention

across various provinces in terms of provincial reception of contentious coverage between 2004 and 2020. As depicted in Table 9, the number in each cell indicates an annual amount of contentious coverage with a specific reported region in the party press, and the use of colour scale was to identify the notable numbers in all cells. Besides, it is also important to note that multiple provinces can be mentioned in the same article simultaneously. In such a case, the article was classified into various provinces accordingly. Therefore, the total number listed in Table 9 (i.e., 1058) is higher than the total number of contentious articles covering at least one specific location (i.e., 904), as presented in Table 7.

Table 6-9 Annual Number of Contentious Coverage with Reported Regions in Both Newspapers

Province	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Anhui	1	3	1	4	1	3	1	2	1	0	3	1	2	0	1	0	0	24
Beijing	2	2	5	1	6	5	6	2	2	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	36
Chongqing	1	1	0	1	1	5	5	5	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	26
Fujian	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	3	3	5	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	22
Gansu	0	0	0	1	2	3	5	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	15
Guangdong	1	0	15	2	4	8	15	16	13	6	7	3	0	4	3	0	0	97
Guangxi	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	1	1	4	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	17
Guizhou	0	0	0	0	4	19	10	13	7	3	3	3	0	3	1	0	0	66
Hainan	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	0	4	0	1	7	3	1	1	0	0	29
Hebei	2	2	4	4	3	2	3	2	3	2	1	0	2	0	3	0	1	34
Heilongjiang	0	3	3	0	0	2	3	2	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	18
Henan	2	1	1	7	3	4	4	2	6	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	35
Hubei	3	1	2	1	0	14	9	3	4	2	4	2	2	3	1	1	0	52
Hunan	0	0	1	2	2	3	2	4	3	1	1	4	2	1	2	0	0	28
Inner Mongolia	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Jiangsu	3	2	4	6	2	7	7	9	11	6	0	1	3	2	0	2	0	65
Jiangxi	2	1	1	4	1	5	9	4	5	10	1	3	2	1	0	0	0	49
Jilin	0	0	0	1	0	3	4	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	11
Liaoning	1	0	3	0	2	5	2	3	5	3	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	29
Ningxia	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Qinghai	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	7
Shaanxi	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	1	3	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	16
Shandong	8	9	5	4	4	5	4	9	3	2	3	2	2	3	1	0	0	64
Shanghai	0	0	1	3	2	5	2	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	19
Shanxi	1	0	1	2	2	3	1	0	1	2	0	0	4	0	2	0	2	21
Sichuan	0	2	2	3	5	7	10	7	6	9	3	5	2	1	1	0	1	64
Tianjin	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	11
Tibet	0	0	0	0	4	6	5	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	18
Xinjiang	1	3	1	0	0	7	7	2	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	27
Yunnan	0	3	2	0	3	10	17	10	7	7	4	5	2	0	1	0	1	72
Zhejiang	3	3	5	2	2	6	7	16	9	4	4	3	3	2	3	1	2	75
Total	37	40	66	51	57	144	147	127	105	78	50	54	36	25	26	7	8	1058

First, taking a close look at the total numbers in chronological order, it is clear that the most substantial presence of reported regions combined with identified 'incident' in the party press was detected between 2009 and 2011, with 144, 147, and 127 contentious articles, respectively. To be more specific, in 2009, the most important contributor of contentious coverage with reported regions was Guizhou Province with 19 articles, followed by Hubei Province with 14 articles. In 2010, it was Yunnan Province who enjoyed the highest visibility regarding the contention in the party press with 17 articles and Guangdong Province ranked second with 15

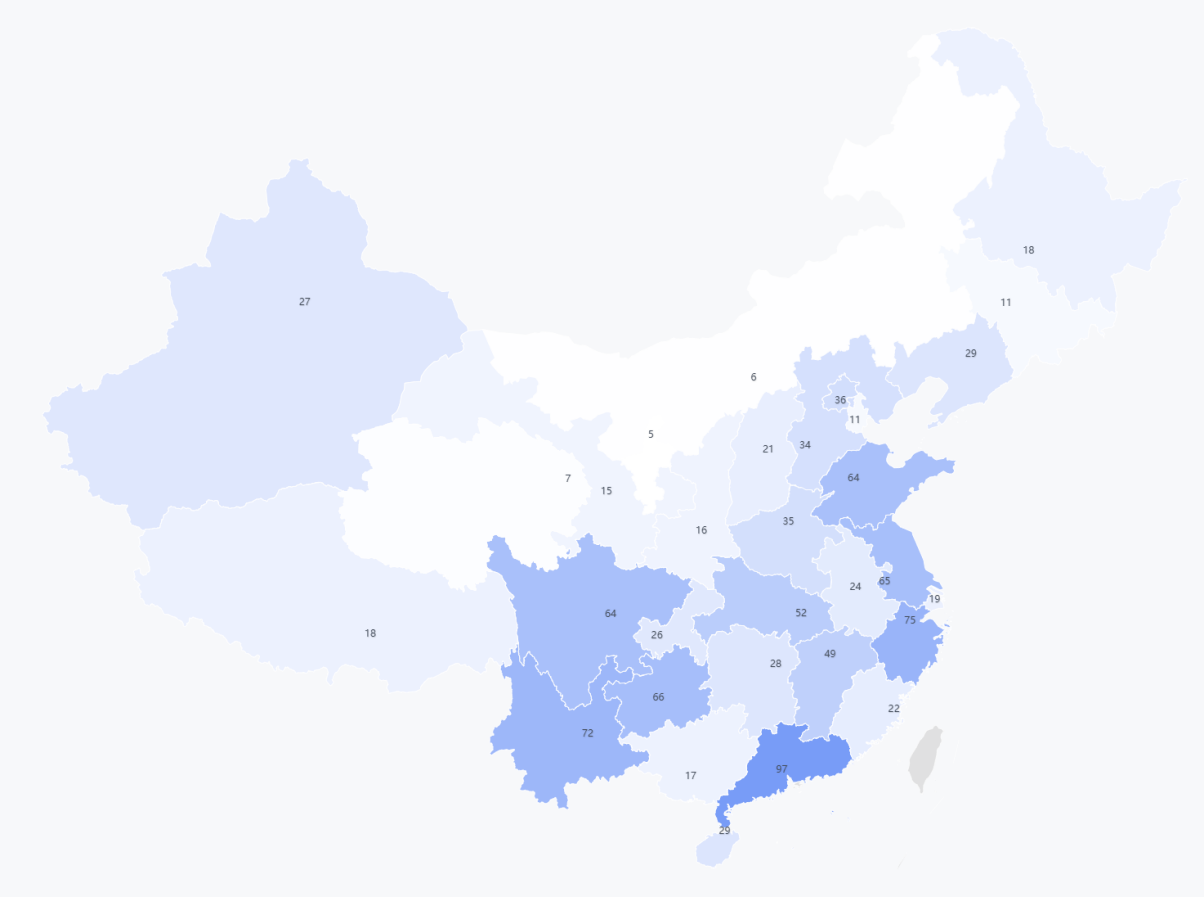
articles. In 2011, three provinces need to be noted. The most notable position was occupied by Guangdong Province and Zhejiang Province simultaneously with the same 16 articles and the third place belonged to Guizhou Province, with 13 articles. Besides, in the last few years of the harmonious society-building era, fewer and fewer provinces were mentioned in the state-initiated contentious public sphere constructed by *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*. There were only 7 and 9 articles journalistically linking specific provinces to the term 'mass incident' in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

Second, the distribution of state attention channelled through the party mouthpieces in terms of the provincial reception of contentious coverage can be also observed vertically. Clearly, Guangdong Province enjoyed the most remarkable position in the eyes of the state and showed the most 'contentious' visibility in the party press, with 97 articles in total. The annual number of contentious reports covering Guangdong Province exceeded ten in 2006, 2010, 2011, and 2012 respectively. Following Guangdong Province, Zhejiang Province, and Yunnan Province had regularly access to the party press and took second and third places with a total of 75 and 72 appearances in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, separately. In contrast, Ningxia Province, Inner Mongolia Province, and Qinghai Province caught the least amount of state attention regarding the contention through the party mouthpieces. There were only 5, 6, and 7 contentious articles reporting these three provinces, separately, during the harmonious society-building era.

Besides the numerical demonstration of provincial receptions of contentious coverage discussed above, the distribution of contentious coverage across various provinces can be

presented in a more visualised way. To do so, the state-initiated contentious public sphere constructed in the party press during the harmonious society-building era can be viewed as a continuous discursive site of observation. The distribution of state attention in terms of contentious coverage relating to specific provinces was thus graphically captured, by situating a total of 1058 contentious articles with reported regions in place. As shown in Figure 5, the darker the colour, the greater the amount of contentious coverage involving the specific region between 2004 and 2020.

Figure 6-5 Geographic Distribution of Contentious Coverage with Reported Regions



According to Figure 5, the first notable finding is that the contentious presence of the eastern coastal region of China in the party press was at a comparably higher level and the numbers of reports journalistically linking the provinces like Shandong Province, Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province, and Guangdong Province to 'mass incident' were all higher than 60 articles

in total. Second, the southwest region of China represented by Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province, and Sichuan Province constituted another important geographical source of contentious coverage with reported regions in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*. Similar to those prominent eastern provinces mentioned above, Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province, and Sichuan Province did catch a great amount of contention-focused state attention through the party mouthpieces and received more than 60 articles for each in the party press. Finally, compared to eastern and southern regions of China, the west, the north, and the northeast China witnessed the less amount of contention-focused state attention in general. Particularly, the large area from Qinghai Province in the west, via Ningxia Province and Inner Mongolia Province in the north, to Jilin in the northeast received the least amount of contentious coverage during the harmonious society-building era, with only 7, 5, 6 and 11 articles in total, respectively.

6.4.2 Putting Identified Incidents in Their Places

Next, this section shifts the focus from reported regions to identified incidents to situate all independent protest events, which were covered in the party press, in harmonious China. As mentioned above, a total of 180 independent protest events were identified and selected from 371 articles that simultaneously mentioned the term ‘mass incident’ and at least one specific location. Then, all these identified incidents were accordingly assigned to the reported site of incident’s occurrence, one by one. As a result, Table 10 was constructed to show the temporal and spatial distribution of 180 identified incidents in the party press in detail. The number in each cell indicates the number of identified incidents that reportedly happened within a specific temporal and spatial framework in two newspapers. The use of colour scale in all cells was to identify the notable numbers. Finally, two more points should be noted. First, the date listed in

Table 10 is not the publication date of the incident getting reported in the party press but the reported date of the incident's actual occurrence. Second, the gap between media representation and reality needs to be emphasised again here. Especially in authoritarian China, the distribution of 180 identified incidents illustrated below cannot be simply viewed as a mirror image of local contentions in harmonious society-building era, but a reported, or mediated in other words, snapshot of the contentious landscape in the eyes of the state.

Table 6-10 Annual Number of Identified Incidents in Contentious Coverage in Both Newspapers

Provinces	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Not Mentioned	Total
Anhui	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Beijing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Chongqing	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Fujian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Gansu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Guangdong	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	3	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	17
Guangxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Guizhou	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Hainan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	11
Hebei	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8
Heilongjiang	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Henan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Hubei	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	6
Hunan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	7
Inner Mongolia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Jiangsu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	12
Jiangxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Jilin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Liaoning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	6
Ningxia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Qinghai	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Shaanxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Shandong	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5
Shanghai	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Shanxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Sichuan	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	15
Tianjin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tibet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Xinjiang	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Yunnan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	9
Zhejiang	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	3	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	14
Total	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	6	4	4	9	9	12	14	20	13	18	11	7	8	4	3	1	2	0	0	27	180

According to Table 10, in the state-initiated contentious public sphere constructed by *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* during the harmonious society-building era, 27 identified incidents did not have a reportedly explicit date of actual occurrence. From a chronological perspective, it is worth noting that a total of 18 identified incidents actually took place earlier than 2004, the very starting year of harmonious society-building era. It was in 1992 that the earliest identified incident in the party press was staged on the ground. Since 2004, the number of identified incidents increased steadily and climbed to the peak in 2009, with a total of 20 independent protest events getting reported in the party press. After reaching

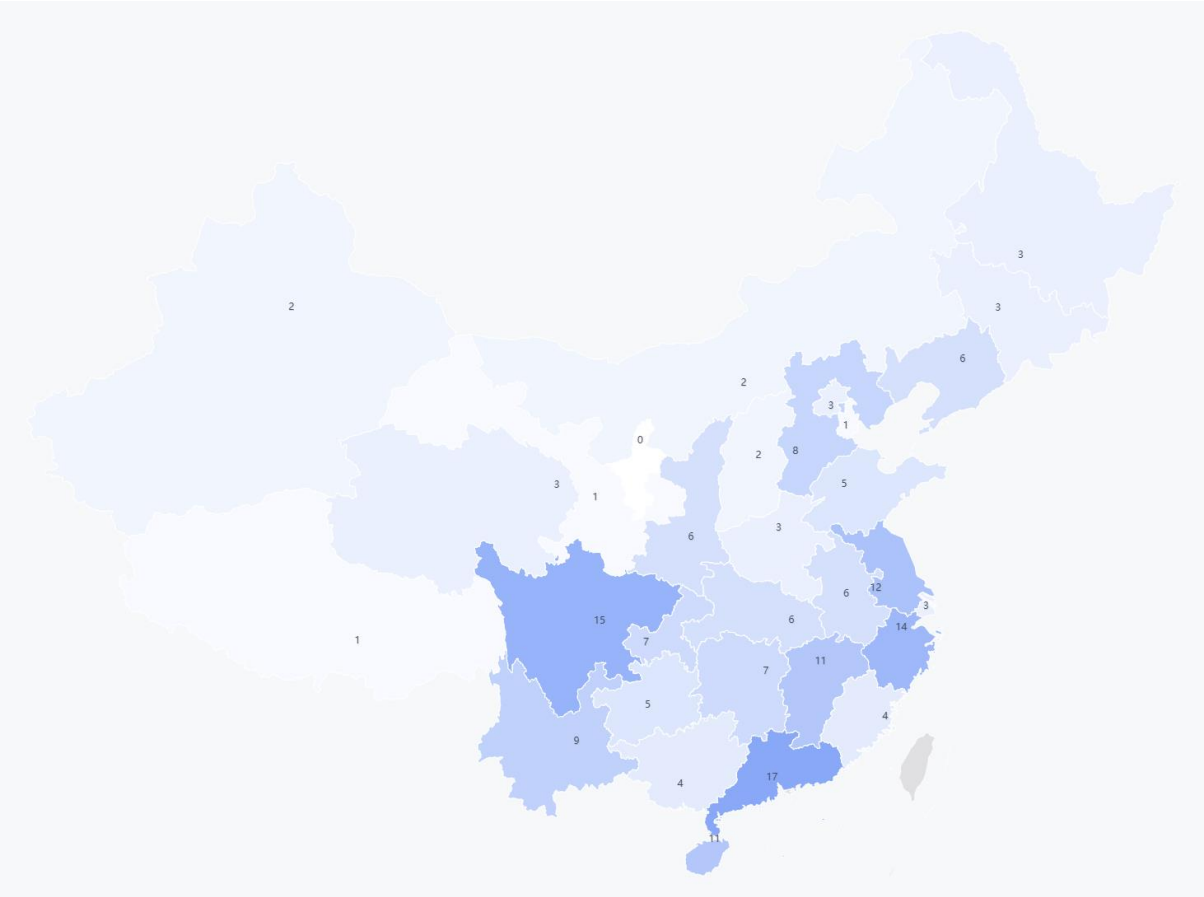
the second peak in 2011 with 18 identified incidents, the journalistic presence of local contention gradually declined and finally dropped to zero in the last two years.

Further observing the numbers of identified incidents, vertically, across different provinces, Sichuan Province, followed by Hebei Province, Hunan Province, and Yunnan Province, possessed the largest number of identified incidents without explicitly reported dates of the occurrence, i.e., four incidents in total. Next, as revealed by the results listed in Table 10, Guangdong Province and Sichuan Province reportedly had 17 and 15 identified incidents, respectively, the highest two annual numbers observed in the party press. On the contrary, Ningxia Province did not receive any contentious coverage on specific local protest events and there was only one protest event that successfully caught the party-state's attention in Gansu, Tianjin and Tibet. In this sense, these four regions can be viewed the least contentious provinces in the eyes of the state during the harmonious society-building era. Nevertheless, the above finding cannot be interpreted as no protest events occurring on the ground in these regions. Instead, it means that, from the perspective of the state, no serious and strong protest signals were sent from the grassroot in these regions that deserved institutional responses in the form of contentious coverage in the party press.

It is significant that most cells have a value of 0. In addition, a few crucial cells need to be highlighted here. It is clear that Guangdong Province had most notable annual numbers of identified incident in the party press. Particularly, a total of five protest events that reportedly happened in Guangdong in 2009 were identified in the party press and this is the largest annual number of identified incidents received by one specific province in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* during the harmonious society-building era. Moreover, the results listed in

Table 10 suggest that three independent protest events, the second largest annual number of identified incidents held by one specific province in the party press, can be located in the cell of Guangdong-2011, Guangdong-2013, Jiangsu-2012, Jiangxi-2011 and Zhejiang-2011.

Figure 6-6 Geographical Distribution of Identified Incidents in Contentious Coverage



Based on the results listed in Table 10, all identified incidents were situated in their places and the geographical distribution of 180 identified incidents was visually presented in Figure 6. Generally speaking, in such a state-initiated contentious public sphere constructed by all contentious coverage in the party press, the total numbers of identified incidents that occurred in eastern and southern China were clearly higher than the numbers of identified incidents in the western and northern regions. As mentioned above, the intuitive observation of Figure 6 also suggests that Guangdong Province was the province with the most protest incidents in the eyes of the state during the harmonious society-building era, due to a total of 17 independent

protest events covered in the party press. Such a finding not only empirically supports and agrees with previous studies which prioritise Guangdong as the most contentious place in China as well but also implies that, facing the well-known contentious province in China, *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, as the mouthpieces of the party, did not mute the dissatisfied mass or ignore the local unrest at all but journalistically captured and responded to the signals sent from the grassroots, at least in terms of the documented number of identified incidents between 2004 and 2020 in the party press. Next, Sichuan Province, a province located in the southwest inland region of China, was another important protesting province reportedly endorsed by the party press, thanks to the second largest number of identified incidents with 15 in total. Besides, there were three other provinces in East China that had more than ten identified incidents covered in the party press (i.e., Zhejiang Province with 14, Jiangsu Province with 12, and Jiangxi Province with 11 protest events). Last but not least, what needs to be noted is that Ningxia Province located in north-central China was the only province that did not receive any contentious coverage regarding specific local contentions between 2004 and 2020 and it was arguably the most 'harmonious' region in the eyes of the state during the period of harmonious society-building era.

6.5 Exploring the Mediated Distribution of State Attention

6.5.1 Clustering Protesting Provinces in the Eyes of the State

In the previous sections, contentious coverage in the party press was examined from either a perspective of reported regions or a perspective of identified incidents. The first analytical dimension of contentious coverage refers to the total amount of state attention across protesting provinces in general and the second dimension addresses the number of protest events reportedly situated by the party-state in protesting provinces. The overview of various combinations of contention-focused state attention received by a total of 31 protesting

provinces has been presented in Table 11. Clearly, the descriptive findings show that protesting provinces covered in the party press differ significantly in terms of the provincial reception of state attention. Such results also suggest that the contour of the state-initiated contentious public sphere constructed in the party press during the harmonious society-building era, as the contested sphere of public discourse described by researchers in the west, is not 'like the flat, orderly, and well-marked field [but] is full of hills and valleys, sinkholes, promontories, and impenetrable jungles' (Ferree et al, 2002: 12). In short, the landscape of contention in the eyes of the state, or the geographical distribution of contention-focused state attention mediated through the party press in other words, is unequal and disproportionate across the regions.

The findings listed in Table 11 lay an empirical foundation for a further deep examination of mediated distribution of state attention on local contentions at the provincial level. Furthermore, the results were obtained and presented based on independent examinations of either contentious coverage with reported regions or contentious coverage with identified incidents, separately. Thus, it lacks a holistic view that reflects the complex relationships between both types of mediated state attention on contention. As a result, the investigations illustrated above do not directly tackle questions such as whether a protesting province with the largest numbers of identified incidents in the party press also received the largest amount of contentious coverage in the eyes of the state; or whether there was a group of protesting provinces sharing a similar receptive pattern of contention-focused state attention. In this section the landscape of contention in harmonious society-building era is further explored by detecting the variation in the status occupied by protesting provinces in the eyes of the state from a holistic perspective. In plain language, an unequal distribution of state attention on local contentions channelled through the party mouthpiece between 2004 and 2020 means that the state party received and then responded to the protesting signals differently across various regions. Such a status

differentiation of protesting provinces in the eyes of the state needs to be systematically answered.

Table 6-11 Overview of Protesting Provinces with Various Receptions of State Attention

Province	Contentious Coverage	Identified Incidents
Anhui	24	6
Beijing	36	3
Chongqing	26	7
Fujian	22	4
Gansu	15	1
Guangdong	97	17
Guangxi	17	4
Guizhou	66	5
Hainan	29	11
Hebei	34	8
Heilongjiang	18	3
Henan	35	3
Hubei	52	6
Hunan	28	7
Inner Mongolia	6	2
Jiangsu	65	12
Jiangxi	49	11
Jilin	11	3
Liaoning	29	6
Ningxia	5	0
Qinghai	7	3
Shaanxi	16	6
Shandong	64	5
Shanghai	19	3
Shanxi	21	2
Sichuan	64	15
Tianjin	11	1
Tibet	18	1
Xinjiang	27	2
Yunnan	72	9
Zhejiang	75	14

Cluster analysis is an ideal methodological tool for researchers to tackle such questions. One particularly appealing feature of cluster analysis is that it is a case-based rather than a variable-based approach; that is to say, it treats each case as an integral whole instead of dealing in disembodied variables (Byrne and Uprichard, 2012a). Therefore, the use of cluster analysis here is expected to assign cases, i.e., protesting provinces covered in the party press between 2004 and 2020, to discrete categories of similar cases considering all case attributes, i.e., two dimensions of the mediated distribution of contention-focused state attention discussed above.

In other words, cluster analysis enables researchers to view status differentiation of protesting provinces in the eyes of the state as a two-faceted complex and to disclose the latent grouping patterns emerging from the state-initiated contentious public sphere. To be more specific, it is the combination of two types of state attention (i.e., the amount of contentious coverage and the number of identified incidents) that determines the status of protesting provinces in the eyes of the state. The provinces which occupy a similar status position in the eyes of the state share a specific receptive pattern of mediated distribution of state attention on local contentions and can be operationally understood as a group of cases displaying a high degree of within-cluster similarity and a high degree of between-cluster dissimilarity.

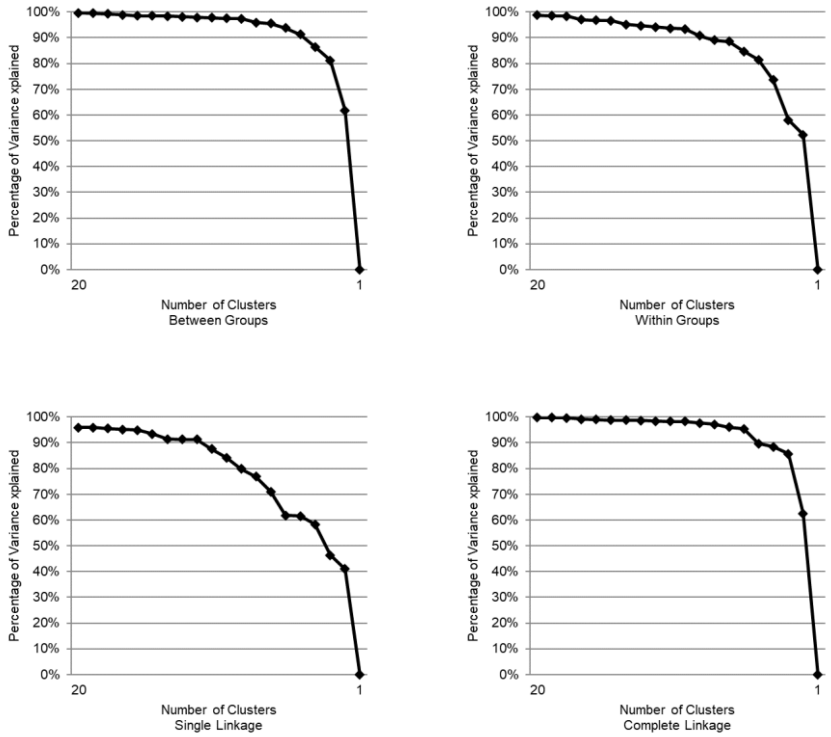
6.5.2 Results of Cluster Analysis

The status differentiation of a total of 31 protesting provinces in the eyes of the state was explored from a clustering perspective by measuring the similarity and dissimilarity shared by the cases with two attributes (i.e., the amount of contentious coverage received and the number of identified incidents covered). To be more specific, agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted to discover how many clusters of protesting provinces in the eyes of the state and how they are composed. Methodologically speaking, the agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis involves progressively fusing together similar cases, with the similarity of cases captured in this case by the squared Euclidean distance between them. Prior to the employment of cluster analysis, the measures of two attributes for each case had been transformed into z-scores so that each variable has a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. In addition, it is known that cluster solutions tend to be sensitive to the specific clustering algorithm used, so a total of four different hierarchical clustering algorithms were adopted. First, the between-groups average method is used which merges clusters that have the smallest mean distance between their respective cases. Second, the within-groups average method is

used which prioritises the minimisation of the dissimilarity of cases within the resulting cluster. Third, the method of the single linkage (i.e., the nearest neighbour) is used, which joins clusters with the minimum distance between their most proximate members. Fourth, the complete linkage, the furthest neighbour in other words, method is used, which fuses clusters with the smallest distance between their least proximate members. Last but not least, it is noteworthy that cluster analysis is an exploratory and iterative process in which no single cluster solution is necessarily 'correct' (Kantardzic, 2011; Byrne and Uprichard, 2012a; 2012b). Instead, cluster solutions can be judged to be better or worse than others on criteria such as a good balance between the number of informative clusters and the amount of between-case dissimilarity explained.

Cluster analyses driven by aforementioned four hierarchical clustering algorithms were conducted to cluster a total of 31 protesting provinces. Four elbow plots produced by the analyses are presented in Figure 7 to show how much of the dissimilarity between cases is accounted for, respectively. To determine the optimal number of clusters, the 'elbow point' in the plot needs to be located and, to be clear, that is the point at which a further decrease in the number of clusters brings about a sharp and sustained fall in the percentage of dissimilarity between cases accounted for by the clusters. Any further reduction in the number of clusters after the 'elbow point' results in a marked increase in within-cluster dissimilarities between cases. Thus, according to Figure 7, there are two plots with clear-cut elbow points that need to be highlighted.

Figure 6-7 Elbow Plots Illustrating Cluster Solutions

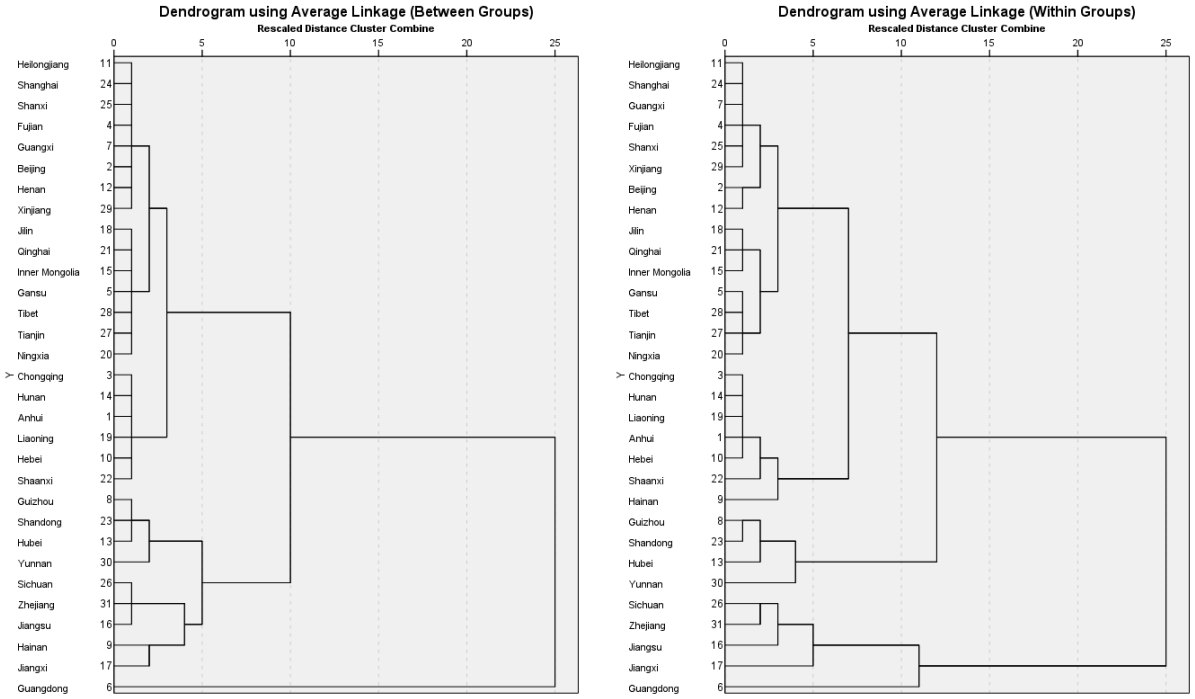


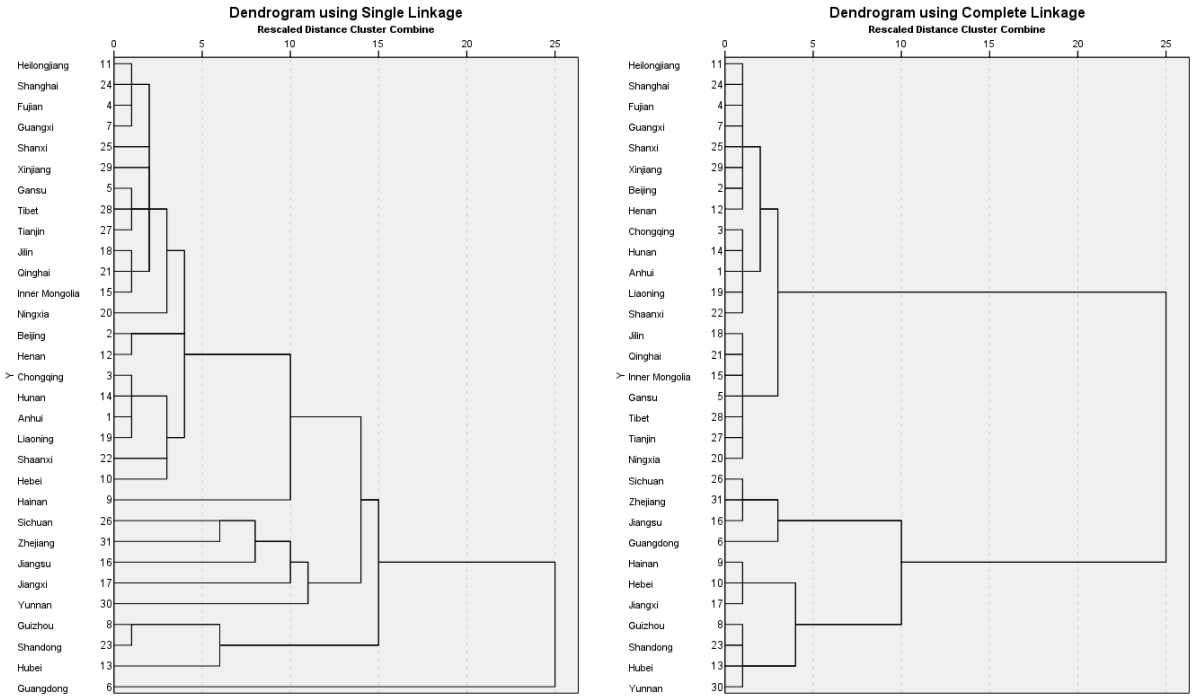
First, taking a look at the elbow plot on bottom right**,** for the complete linkage clustering algorithm, it shows that there is a sharp decline in the percentage of dissimilarity between cases accounted for as the number of clusters decreases from three to two, suggesting that there are three distinctive clusters of protesting provinces in the eyes of the state, which collectively account for 88% of the dissimilarity between cases. Second, the elbow plot on top left for the between-groups average method of clustering cases suggests a relatively clear elbow point at three clusters as well, accounting for 81% of the dissimilarity between cases. The remaining two elbow plots for the within-groups average and the single linkage clustering algorithm neither show clear-cut elbow points nor display satisfactory levels of the dissimilarity between cases explained. As mentioned above, it is known that all sorting algorithms have their strengths and weaknesses depending partly on the data they are applied to and there is no 'correct' but only better cluster solutions. Based on the elbow plots shown in Figure 7, the results obtained through the between-groups and the complete linkage algorithm are clearly better than others. Both cluster solutions explain a large percentage of the dissimilarity between

cases with an acceptable number of clusters. On the contrary, the single linkage algorithm undoubtedly performs worst and the percentage of the dissimilarity between cases accounted for by the within-groups average algorithm is also comparatively low.

Turning to the dendrograms generated by cluster analyses, the tree-like structure of the dendrogram shows how smaller clusters have been fused together to form larger clusters, to the point of forming one large cluster at the top of the dendrogram. Longer vertical lines indicate more distinctive clusters. All dendrograms produced by four aforementioned algorithms have been presented in Figure 8, but, based on the discussion of elbow plots above, this section only focuses on the cluster solutions offered by the between-group and complete linkage algorithms.

Figure 6-8 Dendrograms Illustrating Cluster Solutions





The Dendrogram on top left illustrates the composition of the clusters identified by the between-groups average algorithms: there is one cluster that contains only one province (i.e., Guangdong); the second cluster contains nine provinces (i.e., Guizhou, Shandong, Hubei, Yunnan, Sichuan, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Hainan and Jiangxi); the third cluster is the largest cluster, comprising the remaining 21 provinces. The dendrogram on bottom right reports the membership of the three clusters identified by the complete linkage algorithms: the first cluster contains Guangdong, Sichuan, Zhejiang and Jiangsu; the second cluster contains Hainan, Hebei, Jiangxi, Guizhou, Shandong, Hubei and Yunnan; the third cluster covers the remaining 20 provinces.

In comparison with the results generated by two different clustering methods to each other, two notable differences need to be highlighted. The first difference between both lies on the status position occupied by Guangdong Province, the most contentious region in China, with the largest amount of contentious coverage and the largest number of identified incidents in the

party press (Table 11). According to the between-groups algorithm, Guangdong Province is the most distinctive protesting province in the eyes of the state. However, on the other hand, the clustering results obtained through the complete linkage algorithm do not endorse the most unique status of Guangdong Province but put it at the same level with three other contentious provinces (i.e., Sichuan, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu). Second, another difference between the two cluster solutions is about the status position of Hebei Province in the eyes of the state. According to the between-groups algorithm, Hebei Province was positioned in the cluster of 'the great non-contentious majority'. By contrast, the results generated by the complete linkage algorithm suggest Hebei as a constituent of the cluster in the middle and put it at the same level with six other cases.

Table 6-12 Clusters of Protesting Provinces offered by Two Best Solutions

Between Groups Clusters		
Province	Coverage	Incident
Cluster 1		
Guangdong	97	17
Average	97	17
Cluster 2		
Guizhou	66	5
Shandong	64	5
Hubei	52	6
Yunnan	72	9
Sichuan	64	15
Zhejiang	75	14
Jiangsu	65	12
Hainan	29	11
Jiangxi	49	11
Average	59.56	9.78
Cluster 3		
Heilongjiang	18	3
Shanghai	19	3
Shanxi	21	2
Fujian	22	4
Guangxi	17	4
Beijing	36	3
Henan	35	3
Xinjiang	27	2
Jilin	11	3
Qinghai	7	3
Inner Mongolia	6	2
Gansu	15	1
Tibet	18	1
Tianjin	11	1
Ningxia	5	0
Chongqing	26	7
Hunan	28	7
Anhui	24	6
Liaoning	29	6
Hebei	34	8
Shaanxi	16	6
Average	20.24	3.57

Complete Linkage Clusters		
Province	Coverage	Incident
Cluster 1		
Sichuan	64	15
Zhejiang	75	14
Jiangsu	65	12
Guangdong	97	17
Average	75.25	14.50
Cluster 2		
Hainan	29	11
Hebei	34	8
Jiangxi	49	11
Guizhou	66	5
Shandong	64	5
Hubei	52	6
Yunnan	72	9
Average	52.29	7.86
Cluster 3		
Heilongjiang	18	3
Shanghai	19	3
Fujian	22	4
Guangxi	17	4
Shanxi	21	2
Xinjiang	27	2
Beijing	36	3
Henan	35	3
Chongqing	26	7
Hunan	28	7
Anhui	24	6
Liaoning	29	6
Shaanxi	16	6
Jilin	11	3
Qinghai	7	3
Inner Mongolia	6	2
Gansu	15	1
Tibet	18	1
Tianjin	11	1
Ningxia	5	0
Average	19.55	3.35

To gain more insights into the rationale for the results produced by hierarchical cluster analyses and figure out how protesting provinces were assigned to different status positions in the eyes of the state, more informative details about the cluster solutions offered by between-groups and complete linkage algorithms have been listed in Table 12. The thick bottom border was applied in Table 12 to indicate the boundaries of all identifiable clusters suggested by two cluster solutions and the employment of colour scale was to specify the notable numbers in the respective column. First, for those provinces assigned to cluster 3 with the largest size, both solutions suggest that they received a comparably smaller portion of contention-centred state attention, in terms of the amount of contentious coverage and the number of identified incidents in the party press. In this largest cluster of 'the great non-contentious majority', both cluster solutions fully agree with it is the same seven protesting provinces that formed a sub-cluster of the least contentious places in the eyes of the state, which contains Jilin, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Tibet, Tianjin, and Ningxia. On the contrary, a total of ten protesting provinces were unanimously placed by two cluster solutions in comparably important status positions in the eyes of the state. These most remarkably contentious places consist of Guangdong, Sichuan, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guizhou, Shandong, Hubei, Yunnan, Hainan and Jiangxi. Finally, the results listed in Table 12 also clearly indicate the major disagreements between the two cluster solutions. As mentioned above, despite the leading positions of Guangdong Province in the measures of both attributes, the cluster solutions were divided over the dominant position occupied by Guangdong in the eyes of the state. In addition, Hebei Province was another ambiguous case. Two cluster solutions disagree on whether to put it in the largest cluster of 'the great non-contentious majority', or the cluster 2 in the middle instead.

6.6 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter is dedicated to a preliminary exploration of the state-initiated contentious public sphere constructed in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* during the harmonious society-building era in China. By distinguishing a perspective of identified incidents from a perspective of reported regions, this chapter examines contentious coverage in the two newspapers thoroughly and offers a comprehensive understanding of the journalistic relationships between the party press and local contentions. More importantly, this chapter argues that the relationships between the state and local contentions can be also captured through such a lens of contentious coverage in the party press. Contentious coverage offers an interesting site of observation, which enables researchers to link protesting signals to discursive responses from the party-state, culturally and politically. As a result, from a bird's eye view, this chapter situates the contentions which were channelled through the party press in their places, and accordingly maps out the geographical distribution of state attention on local contentions at the provincial level. Such a mediated landscape of contention in harmonious society not only stresses both collectivity and individuality of local contention as the sources of protesting signals on the ground but also refers to the complexity of multi-faceted relationships built between the party-state and social unrest.

Through delineating the contour of such a landscape of contention on the basis of a variety of contentious coverage relating to social unrest in the party press, this chapter reveals the unequal and disproportionate distribution of state attention on local contentions across different regions in China. This main finding of the chapter suggests that the party-state viewed and responded to the protesting signals sent from the grassroots differently. In other words, the protesting provinces can be placed in different positions in the eyes of the state. Thanks to the cluster analysis, a total of three clusters of protesting provinces were identified and introduced in this chapter. Briefly speaking, there was a small group of protesting provinces led by Guangdong

taking the most important position in the eyes of the state. On the contrary, the largest cluster was detected on the fringes and thus can be termed as 'the great non-contentious majority' from the state's perspective.

Additionally, the findings shown in this chapter also endorse the journalistic nature of the party press, at least to some degree, because the most well-known contentious place in China, Guangdong Province, was not ignored by the party-state and no evidence was found to directly suggest that the party press tried to cover up or wipe it out from the state-initiated contentious public sphere. Instead, compared to other protesting provinces, Guangdong was prioritised as the most important place in the eyes of the state, in terms of its overwhelming reception of contention-focused state attention. Therefore, at least in the case of Guangdong, the most contentious place in China, the party press shows its journalistic capacity of reflecting the reality of contention on the ground and channelling the protesting signals from the grassroots to the public. On the other hand, doubtlessly the political nature of the party press in China cannot be overlooked. As stressed repeatedly in this chapter, despite the journalistic nature of the party press, contentious coverage in the party press cannot be interpreted as a truthful representation of the reality of local contentions, but as an institutional product of the news-making process and political forces. Therefore, contentious coverage in the party press has to be understood as the party-state's reception, interpretation, and, more importantly, response to protesting signals sent from the grassroots.

The final point that needs to be stressed is that contentious coverage was generally found to rise and then fall on a number of fronts in the party press between 2004 and 2020. Despite the lack of a deep dive into the historical roots, it is still safe to say that the long-term trajectory of

contentious coverage observed in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, as elaborated earlier in the chapter, is clearly associated with major power transitions in China. This chapter finds that the overall visibility of contentious coverage in the party press reached its peak, in terms of the measures of both annual amount and certain journalistic features, between 2008 and 2012, the last four years of Hu Jintao's second term as General Secretary of the CCP. Since President Xi Jinping took office in 2012, the state attention distributed to the issue of social contention through the mouthpiece of the party had very steadily declined. So, in this sense, the party press undoubtedly shows its political nature as a propaganda apparatus. In the following chapters, the emergence of contentious coverage and the political rationales behind the scenes will be systematically examined at different analytical levels. But, given such a significant shift of state attention on social contention, this chapter still calls for more in-depth explorations of why and how Chinese newspapers cover social contention with a particular focus on casual explanations for the expansion and the contraction of state-initiated contentious public sphere over the past decades.

In summary, this chapter sets a solid empirical foundation for further investigation in the state-initiated contentious public sphere during harmonious society-building era in China. The next two chapters are expected to further advance the understanding of the mediated relationship between the state and local contention through a lens of contentious coverage in the party press. In the next chapter, the complexity of the reported region and identified incidents in contentious coverage will be addressed, separately, to not only further indicate the unequal and disproportionate distribution of state attention on local contentions but also demonstrate how the party-state responds to a variety of protesting signals, selectively and differently. More importantly, the rationales and deep mechanisms of the choices and actions of the state will be examined and eventually disclosed from a wholistic perspective.

CHAPTER 7

WHAT A TYPE OF NEWS!

Mediated Distribution of State Attention on Reported Regions

In the previous chapter, the landscape of the state-initiated contentious public sphere has been preliminarily captured using two ways, i.e., by specifying contentious coverage with either reported regions or identified incidents in the party press and situating them in their place to detect the status differentiation of protesting provinces in the eyes of the state. Based on an emphasis on the collectivity of protesting signals at a provincial level, this chapter is dedicated to thoroughly investigating contentious coverage with regions particularly reported in the party press during the harmonious society-building era and demonstrating the complexity of mediated relations between the state and local contentions through the mouthpiece of the party. With an emphasis on the idea of 'complexity', this chapter aims to not only address the diversification of journalistic links between the state attention and protesting signals but also reveal the multiple causal pathways leading the provinces to various positions in the eyes of the state.

To achieve the above-mentioned aim, a traditional single-dimensional view of journalistic relations between news reports and protest events is first rejected in this chapter. Instead, four types of contentious coverage with reported regions are proposed to stress a multi-faceted understanding of mediated relations between the state attention and local contentions in the party press. Next, after the historical trajectory of each type of contentious coverage with reported regions between 2004 and 2020 is delineated, the state-initiated contentious public

sphere is geographically presented in this chapter by situating the reported regions within different types of contentious coverage in their places, respectively. As a result, a multi-dimensional landscape of contention in the party press, or a complicated pattern of the mediated distribution of state attention on reported regions in other words, is constituted in this chapter. Then, the focus is shifted to another important question of 'why'. To determine the conditions under which protesting provinces can successfully capture the attention of the state through a certain type of contentious coverage as the journalistic channel, a set of causal conditions that theoretically and logically contributes to the provincial reception of media coverage and state attention is further introduced in this chapter. Thanks to QCA, complex causal pathways to various positions in the eyes of the state through the party mouthpiece are explored here. Finally, theoretical implications of this part of the research are briefly discussed at the end of this chapter.

7.1 Diversifying Contentious Coverage in the Party Press

7.1.1 No Protest, No News?

The in-depth examination of contentious coverage with reported regions in this chapter begins with a direct challenge to the logical pre-assumption of most previous studies focusing on the interaction between mass media and protest events. Media-protest relation is a very crucial topic in the field of social movement study which originates in the West. Particularly, the journalistic presence of protest events in mass media like newspapers arouses wide attention of scholars. Not only is the content channelled through mass media extremely influential in forming the public's perception of protest events, but also the factual information about protests documented in the news enables researchers to improve the scientific understanding of the happening of local contentions through a historical lens. Thanks to media institutions functioning through a formal news-making process, it is easy to say that the production of news

regarding protests follows a very basic journalistic principle that the occurrence of some protest events is newsworthy. In other words, during the process of news-making, the fact a process event is occurring can be considered newsworthy stories by journalists and editors in the very first place and then these incidents can be covered and channelled to the public. Therefore, the journalistic presence of protest events is based on the actual occurrence of the incident on the ground. Likewise, researchers focusing on the topic of media-protest relations also unsurprisingly accept this pre-assumption of news-making process and thus place their research on the presupposition that media coverage of protest events is representing the actual event on the ground. What is indeed surprising is that, to my knowledge, such a simple pre-assumption of both the news-making process and the research on the media-protest relation have been rarely challenged but embraced unconditionally and unanimously. In short, what needs to be questioned here is neither the idea of 'newsworthiness' nor 'representation', but 'occurrence'. To be more specific, is the saying of 'no protest happening, no news about it' always true, journalistically?

Putting this question into the context of China, the answer is a simple 'No'. Such an easy answer is rooted in the dual natures of mass media, particularly the party press in this case, in the Chinese media environment. On the one hand, the party press is the news agency and enjoys a certain degree of autonomy and independence, such that it exhibits the capability of engaging in the professional production of the news and conveying them to the public. On the other hand, the party press is a powerful propaganda apparatus and functions to serve the political agenda. Therefore, this chapter argues that the journalistic presence of local contentions in the party press is decisively shaped by its dual natures and the production of contentious coverage is thus determined by the intertwined logic of making professional news and political propaganda. As a result, the production of contentious coverage in China does not entirely depend on the actual

happening of either ongoing or historical protest events on the ground. Instead, 'not-happening' and 'almost-happening' protest events should be journalistically considered as well in China, because they can be very newsworthy stories to achieve political and propagandistic goals in the eyes of Chinese editors and journalists. In short, no news about local contentions sounds like really good news that should be publicised to a wide range of audiences in China. To gain insights into the landscape of contention in the party press, the journalistic relationship between the happening of protest events and contentious coverage needs to be carefully explored. In the following section, the diversity of contentious coverage across regions in which protests were reported in the party press will be clarified, and the main question of what kind of news it is will be answered.

7.1.2 A Typology of Contentious Coverage

Since no categorisation of news about protest has ever been truly done, this section aims to address the internal difference of contentious coverage with reported regions in the party press and make scholarly efforts to diversify the journalistic relationships between protest events and news reports. But, before formally introducing a total of four types of contentious coverage observed in the party press, the operational definitions of several key concepts should be clarified in the first place. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the term 'contentious coverage' refers to news articles mentioning the term 'mass incident' in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* during the harmonious society-building era. In addition, the idea of 'contentious coverage with reported regions' represents a logical subset of contentious coverage and refers to those articles that journalistically link the term 'mass incident' to at least one specific place in China. News articles that mention the term 'mass incident' but do not textually place the incident in any geographical place of China, are stories making comments

on the issue of contention in a very general way and thus removed from the discussion in this chapter.

Thanks to the journalistic co-presence of the term ‘mass incident’ and a specific geographical place in China in the same news article, contentious coverage with reported regions in the party press is full of rich information about local contentions in China during the harmonious society-building era. As illustrated above, the classification of contentious coverage is constructed based on the detection of the journalistic relations between the ‘occurrence of local contention and news article. Therefore, the key is to examine the role played by the term ‘mass incident’ within the textual context of news articles and the answers to two main questions determine what type of contentious coverage it is. The first question is whether the news article offers actual information about the local contention that the term ‘mass incident’ indicates. The second question is in which way the actual information offered in news articles is journalistically linked to the happening of local contention that the term ‘mass incident’ indicates. As a result, a total of four types of contentious coverage with reported regions are identified in the party press, i.e., 1) Soft News: Commentary, 2) Hard News: Rise, 3) Hard News: Fall, and 4) Hard News: Governance.

The first category of contentious coverage with reported regions, named *Soft News: Commentary*, refers to news articles that do not cover any factual information regarding local contention but journalistically link the issue to the place in a very general manner. As revealed by the name of this category, these news articles can be considered a type of soft news and are logically irrelevant to the actual happening of local contention. The second category, i.e., *Hard News: Rise*, is the most easily identifiable and most widely acknowledged type of news article regarding the issue of contention. This category contains those news articles that offer factual

information about the happening of local contention and the details about the actual happening of local contention are more or less documented. Accordingly, the construction of this type of news is not only in line with the aforementioned traditional pre-assumption of media-protest relation study but also fully dependent on the journalistic relations directly built between the news report and the happening of local contention. By contrast, news reports that do not cover factual information about the happening of local contention but instead offer factual information about the 'not-happening' of local contention constitute the third category, *Hard News: Fall*, which is the journalistic denial of the actual happening of local contention on the ground. Finally, the fourth category is *Hard News: Governance* and it consists of those news articles that do not offer factual information about the happening of local contention but instead offer factual information about the prevention of 'almost-happening' local contention. To be more specific, for those news articles falling into this particular type of news, the main storyline is generally about how local authorities take tactical steps to effectively de-mobilise, accommodate and eventually handle the potential mobilisation staged by the dissatisfied with documented demands. Therefore, for the journalistic presence of the happening of local contention, the news articles in the category of *Hard News: Governance* neither accept nor negate the actual happening of local contention but view it as a real and pressing risk that needs to be dealt with before the outburst.

Besides the introduction of the operational definitions of these four types of contentious coverage with reported regions, several more points regarding such a classification need to be further clarified. First, the journalistic presence of local contention in the articles can be at the individual and aggregate levels. Therefore, regarding those articles that, reportedly, endorse the happening of local contention, reject it, view it as a risk, or are logically irrelevant to it, what the 'happening of local contention' in the articles means can be either the successful

mobilisation of one specific protest event or the emergence of a group of incidents on the ground. Second, since one news article can cover multiple protest events and offer factual information about their happening from different perspectives, this news article is likely to build multiple journalistic relations with local contentions at the same time and thus to be accordingly assigned to different categories of contentious coverage with reported regions. Third, such a classification of contentious coverage can be considered as the diversified journalistic responses of media institutions, i.e., the party press in this case, to protesting signals sent from the grassroots. Nevertheless, it serves as different journalistic channels through which local contentions successfully catch the state's attention and thus take up various positions in the eyes of the state. Therefore, what such a typology implies is a variety of mediated relations built between the state and local contentions. Fourth, the gap between media coverage and the reality must be considered. Despite the above emphasis on the 'factual' information offered by news articles about local contentions, they are still institutionally manufactured messages channelled through the party mouthpiece. Therefore, no matter what kind of news it is, it cannot be considered the reality of local contention in China, but just the landscape of local contention constructed in the state-initiated contentious public sphere during the harmonious society-building era. In summary, thanks to such a typology of contentious coverage with reported regions, the conceptual range of the term 'contentious coverage' is widened. It not only diversifies media-protest relations but also provides a multi-faceted approach to the understanding of the mediated distribution of state attention on local contention.

7.1.3 Historical Trajectories of Diversified Contentious Coverage

This section will present and compare the historical overviews of all four types of contentious coverage with reported regions published in the party press between 2004 and 2020. A total of

904 news articles that mention the term ‘mass incident’ and at least one specific location simultaneously has been classified into the above-mentioned four categories. The descriptive results of the classification are shown in Table 1. As depicted in the table, the cumulative total number of news articles assigned to all categories, i.e., 1033, is slightly higher than the total number of relevant news reports, i.e., 904, because some articles have been assigned to multiple categories, as a result of a variety of journalistic relations built between the happening of local contention and news reports within the same articles. Besides, colour scale was applied to the table differently. First, in the column and row titled Total, colour scale was used, separately, to specify the notable numbers. The colouring rule, in short, is that the greener the colour, the lower the number and the redder the colour, the larger the number. In addition, in all other cells, colour scale was also used to specify the notable numbers. The colouring rule is even simpler and is that the redder the colour, the greater the number.

Table 7-1 Annual Number of Different Types of Contentious Coverage with Reported Regions

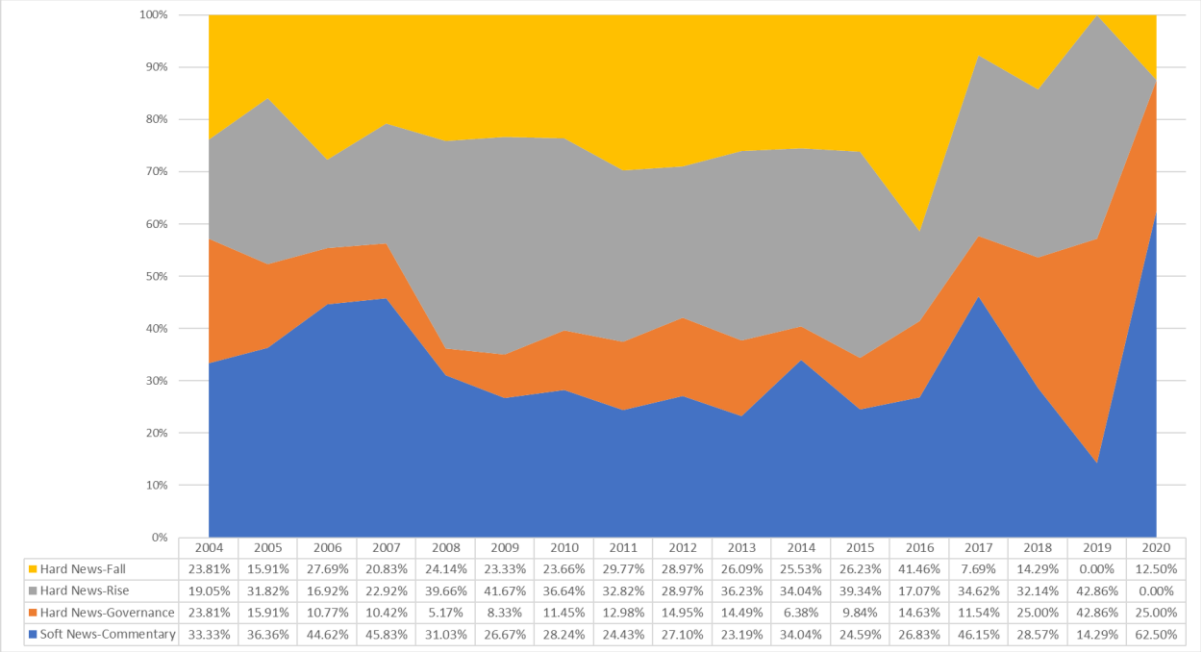
Type of Report	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Soft News-Commentary	14	16	29	22	18	32	37	32	29	16	16	15	11	12	8	1	5	313
Hard News-Governance	10	7	7	5	3	10	15	17	16	10	3	6	6	3	7	3	2	130
Hard News-Rise	8	14	11	11	23	50	48	43	31	25	16	24	7	9	9	3	0	332
Hard News-Fall	10	7	18	10	14	28	31	39	31	18	12	16	17	2	4	0	1	258
Total	42	44	65	48	58	120	131	131	107	69	47	61	41	26	28	7	8	1033

First, as indicated by the total number of news reports falling into each category, *the People’s Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* indeed functioned as news agencies and produced the largest amount of coverage that reportedly documented the occurrence of local contention in China. As depicted in Table 1, some news articles fell into the category of Hard News: Rise. On the contrary, the party press showed the least interest in reporting how potential local contentions were dealt with and prevented by the authorities. Only 130 articles were classified into the category of Hard News: Governance. Besides, the total number of articles assigned to the category of Soft News: Commentary ranked second with 313 articles, whereas the category of Hard News: Fall reports took the third position with a total of 258 articles. This finding mainly

suggests that the party press produced news articles and offered factual evidence to reportedly deny the happening of local contention, whereas what needs to be emphasised is that the production of this kind of news is not its priority.

Second, between 2009 and 2012, all four categories of contentious coverage were experiencing their peaks in terms of the annual number of articles published in both newspapers. To be more specific, the number of articles falling into the category of Hard News: Rise peaked in 2009, with an annual number of 50 articles. The category of Soft News: Commentary was the second to reach its peak, with a total of 37 articles in 2010. Then, in 2011, there were 17 and 39 articles assigned to Hard News: Governance and Hard News: Fall, respectively, the highest annual number for each. Last but not least, there was no article classified into the category of Hard News: Fall in 2019 and no article falling into the category of Hard News: Rise at all in 2020.

Figure 7-1 Annual Proportion of Different Types of Contentious Coverage with Reported Regions



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Hard News-Fall	23.81%	15.91%	27.69%	20.83%	24.14%	23.33%	23.66%	29.77%	28.97%	26.09%	25.53%	26.23%	41.46%	7.69%	14.29%	0.00%	12.50%
Hard News-Rise	19.05%	31.82%	16.92%	22.92%	39.66%	41.67%	36.64%	32.82%	28.97%	36.23%	34.04%	39.34%	17.07%	34.62%	32.14%	42.86%	0.00%
Hard News-Governance	23.81%	15.91%	10.77%	10.42%	5.17%	8.33%	11.45%	12.98%	14.95%	14.49%	6.38%	9.84%	14.63%	11.54%	25.00%	42.86%	25.00%
Soft News-Commentary	33.33%	36.36%	44.62%	45.83%	31.03%	26.67%	28.24%	24.43%	27.10%	23.19%	34.04%	24.59%	26.83%	46.15%	28.57%	14.29%	62.50%

The historical overview of various types of contentious coverage has been delineated in a more visualised way. According to Figure 1, the first notable change lies in the abruptly decreasing share of media coverage rejecting the happening of local contention, particularly in the last few years. The annual number of articles falling into the category of Hard News: Fall even dropped to zero in 2019 from its highest share of 41.46% in 2016. Second, for the category of Hard News: Rise, the figure shows that it had a relatively slow start and then became the most dominant category, particularly between 2008 and 2015. the largest share occupied by this type of news was 41.67% in 2009, but it was in 2020 that the number reached its lowest level at zero. Third, the annual share occupied by the articles falling into the category of Hard News: Governance remained at a relatively stable but low level between 2004 and 2017. In 2008 and 2014, the number of relevant articles merely accounted for 5.17% and 6.38% of the total, respectively. However, there was a notable surge in 2019 with a share of 42.86%. Lastly, the articles classified into the category of Soft News: Commentary had been making relatively consistent and stable proportional contributions to the annual amount of contentious coverage with reported regions between 2004 and 2017. The annual share constituted by them ranged from the lowest 23.19% in 2013 to the largest 46.15% in 2017. But, in the last three years, the proportional numbers fluctuated widely.

7.2 Geographical Distribution of Reported Regions within Contentious Coverage

As discussed above, the classification of contentious coverage with reported regions not only stresses the diversified media-protest relations but also enables researchers to construct a multi-faceted understanding of the mediated relations between the state and local contentions built on the journalistic channels through the party mouthpiece in China. This section will advance the investigation of 'reported region' within contentious coverage in the party press by situating

various types of news articles in their geographical places and then delineating the full landscape of contention in the eyes of the state. To do so, the first step is to understand what each category of contentious coverage with reported regions means particularly through a lens of mediated relation between the state and local contentions. First, the articles classified into the category of Soft News: Commentary do not reportedly involve the happening of local contention at all but mention the issue in a very general way. Accordingly, this category can be considered a journalistic channel for the state to publicly express the general concern about the issue of local contention. Second, the articles in the category of Hard News: Rise reportedly document the details about the happening of local contentions. Therefore, being covered in this type of news simply means that protest events successfully capture the state's attention and directly achieve the state's acknowledgement of their happening. Third, given what the category of Hard News: Fall stresses is local 'harmony' rather than local 'contention', such a journalistic denial of the happening of local contention means the state's intention to publicise and endorse the accomplishment of harmonious society-building on the ground. Fourth, the main storyline of the articles in the category of Hard News: Governance is the handling of the potential happening of local contention. Therefore, from the state's point of view, an image of a 'strong state' with a high capacity of dealing with this pressing issue is journalistically constructed and channelled to the public through such a type of news.

Next, to delineate the multi-faceted landscape of local contentions in China with an emphasis on reported regions in the eyes of the state, the articles in all four categories have been assigned to the corresponding provinces according to the regions reported in the news reports. Table 2 numerically shows the journalistic relationships between protesting provinces and different types of contentious coverage with reported regions between 2004 and 2020. In other words,

the table shows how contentious coverage with reported regions was situated in their geographical places and the numbers indicate the provincial reception of state attention on local contentions channelled through certain types of news. As illustrated above, the term 'contentious coverage with reported regions' is operationally defined as those articles that journalistically link the term 'mass incident' to at least one specific place in China. Since multiple regions might be reported in the same article, one news article is likely to be assigned to multiple categories accordingly. Therefore, the total number shown in Table 2, i.e., 1228, is higher than the total number in Table 1, i.e., 1033. Finally, for the use of colour scale, it was applied to the table differently from Table 1. First, in the column and row titled Total, colour scale was used to specify the notable numbers. It is noteworthy that the deeper the green colour, the lower the number will be, and the deeper the red colour, the larger the number will be. For all other cells, the colour scale is presented as follows: the deeper the red, the greater the number will be.

Table 7-2 Geographical Distribution of Reported Regions across Different Types of Contentious Coverage

Province	Soft News-Commentary	Hard News-Governance	Hard News-Rise	Hard News-Fall	Total
Anhui	10	2	8	8	28
Beijing	22	4	7	7	40
Chongqing	5	7	12	6	30
Fujian	6	2	9	6	23
Gansu	2	0	11	3	16
Guangdong	29	15	45	29	118
Guangxi	7	1	5	6	19
Guizhou	9	2	56	8	75
Hainan	6	9	21	11	47
Hebei	15	6	11	7	39
Heilongjiang	7	0	6	8	21
Henan	18	7	6	11	42
Hubei	14	4	22	15	55
Hunan	9	3	12	8	32
Inner Mongolia	3	1	2	2	8
Jiangsu	29	17	20	12	78
Jiangxi	17	10	16	16	59
Jilin	3	2	6	3	14
Liaoning	12	2	11	7	32
Ningxia	4	0	1	0	5
Qinghai	2	1	3	3	9
Shaanxi	5	3	9	6	23
Shandong	27	11	10	23	71
Shanghai	11	2	4	3	20
Shanxi	8	10	4	3	25
Sichuan	17	3	30	25	75
Tianjin	6	2	1	4	13
Tibet	0	1	17	0	18
Xinjiang	9	0	16	2	27
Yunnan	11	2	48	16	77
Zhejiang	18	11	33	27	89
Total	341	140	462	285	1228

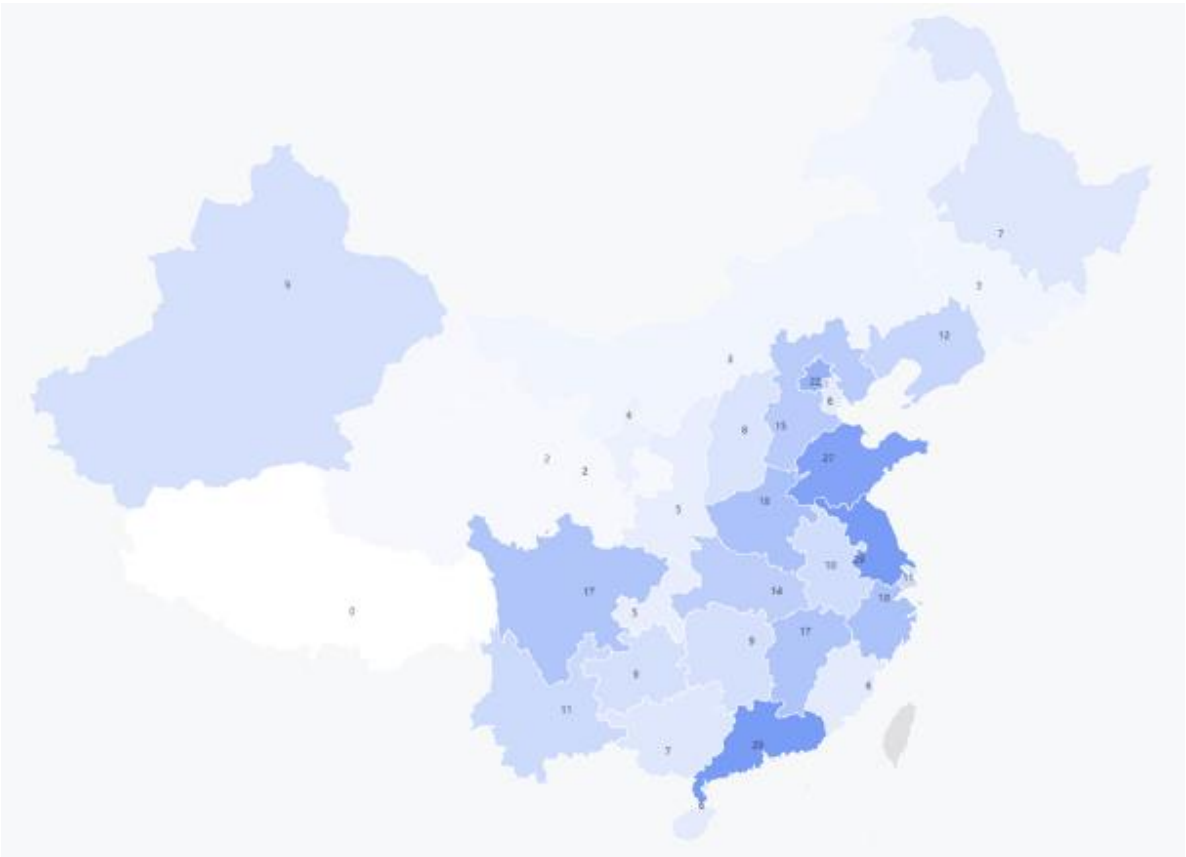
In Table 2, first, in the column of Soft News: Commentary, a total of 14 provinces successfully had access to at least 10 articles in the party press. It is easy to identify four standing provinces that were most frequently mentioned in contentious coverage in a general sense in the party press during this harmonious society-building era. Both Guangdong and Jiangsu received the same largest amount of commentary-related contentious coverage, i.e., 29 relevant articles for each. The third position was occupied by Shandong with 27 articles. Following these three regions, Beijing, the capital of China, was mentioned in 22 articles. The only province that did not receive any commentary-related articles reporting the issue of local contention, in general, was Tibet. Second, it is evident that the figures shown in the column of Hard News: Governance are quite small. A total of eight provinces received two governance-related articles, four

provinces merely received one article, and four provinces received nothing. By contrast, a total of six provinces received at least 10 news articles that reported how local contentions were handled on the ground. It is Jiangsu and Guangdong that received 15 and 17 governance-related articles, respectively, and took the first two places, again. Third, all provinces were covered in the articles falling in the category of Hard News: Rise. A total of 17 provinces were journalistically involved in at least 10 rise-related articles. Guizhou, Yunnan, and Guangdong had the largest number of news articles that offered factual information about the happening of local contentions, with 56, 48, and 45 articles, respectively. On the contrary, Tianjin and Ningxia received the least amount of rise-related contentious coverage, with only one article for each. Compared to the other three categories, Hard News: Rise shows the greatest range of provincial reception of relevant articles. Fourth, for the provincial reception of fall-related contentious coverage, 10 provinces were journalistically linked to the decline of local contentions in at least 10 fall-related articles, respectively. There are four provinces, i.e., Guangdong, Zhejiang, Sichuan, and Shandong, that received the largest amount of coverage, with 29, 27, 25, and 23 articles, respectively. It is Tibet and Ningxia that did not receive any news reports that intentionally deny the happening of local contention. In summary, according to Table 2, on the one hand, for each type of contentious coverage with reported regions, the geographical distribution of state attention on local contentions was extremely unequal across the provinces; on the other hand, for each protesting province, the provincial reception of state attention was not equally distributed across the types of news neither. Such a multi-faceted capture of the mediated distribution of state attention with a focus on reported regions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere has been further presented in a more visualised way in the following figures.

7.2.1 Overview of Commentary-related Articles

First, the geographical distribution of all commentary-related articles has been mapped out in Figure 2. As discussed above, the articles falling in the category of Soft News: Commentary did not cover any factual information about local contentions but conveyed the state's concern about the issue of local contention. Thus, for the provinces, the more articles received, the more concerns expressed by the state. As shown in Figure 2, overall, the numbers of relevant articles received by the provinces in the east and the south of China were relatively higher than the numbers received by the provinces in the west and the north of China. Particularly, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Guangdong, the provinces in the southern and eastern coastal regions, took the most prominent positions in the eyes of the state. This also means that the state was most concerned about the issue of local contention in these regions.

Figure 7-2 Geographic Distribution of Soft News: Commentary



Taking a close look at Shandong, Jiangsu and Guangdong as three high-profile cases, the very first interesting finding is that all three provinces had reportedly witnessed their respective provincial officials directly voiced their opinions on the issue of social stability and contention. For example, in the region of Shandong Province, which receives a total of 27 commentary-related articles between 2004 and 2020, there was a provincial governor who had a strong and clear track record of expressing concerns about this specific issue of social stability and contention. In 2006, Jiang Daming (姜大明), the then deputy secretary of the Shandong Provincial Committee of the CCP, published two signed articles in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* separately. On May 10, he stated that 'some [local officials] panic when faced with sudden mass incidents and dare not do mass work or deal with it'[1] and thus called for 'establishing the mediation mechanism of resolving social contradiction and the response mechanism of dealing with mass incidents …… [and] gradually bring the handling of mass incidents into the legal and standardised track'[2]. Later, on October 14, he further developed his statement and said, 'we [officials] must handle mass incidents in a right way, carefully identify the deep causes of different mass incidents, and strive to deter the occurrence of incidents from the very beginning. To deal with the radical actions taken by some people, we should not simply use coercive means to control them but persuade them with reason'. Two years later, in 2008, Jiang Daming, who had been promoted to the governor of Shandong Province, once again stated in his signed article published in *the People's Daily* that 'creating a harmonious environment of society, putting safety and stability first …… [and] effectively preventing and resolving mass incidents'[3]. Again, two years later, in 2010, Shandong Province, where Jiang

[1] The Original in Chinese: "有的面对矛盾和问题畏难发愁，遇到突发性、群体性事件惊慌失措，不敢做群众工作。" *The People's Daily*, May 10, 2006

[2] The Original in Chinese: "建立健全矛盾排查调处机制和群体性事件应急机制。…… 逐步把处理群体性事件纳入法制化规范化的轨道。" *The People's Daily*, May 10, 2006

[3] The Original in Chinese: "创造和谐稳定的社会环境。把安全稳定放在首位，…… 有效预防和化解群体性事件。" *The People's Daily*, October 10, 2008

Daming still took charge as the provincial governor, published an article signed by the Shandong Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Shandong Provincial People's Government in *the People's Daily* and emphasised on the importance of 'improving the system of social stability risk assessment, the mechanism of handling emergencies and mass incidents, [and] promoting the institutional innovation of social management and governance'[4]. After Jiang Daming left office as the governor of Shandong Province in 2013, Gong Zheng (龚正), the then provincial governor of Shandong and the now mayor of Shanghai, took the torch and still reportedly regarded the prevention of mass incidents as equally important tasks as ecological environmental protection, poverty alleviation, production safety and financial de-risking in 2017[5].

A similar phenomenon can be also found in the region of Guangdong Province. In 2011, Zhu Mingguo (朱明国), the then deputy secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the CCP, published a signed article titled as *Talking about Happiness* in *the People's Daily*. In the article, he insisted on 'the improvement of the joint meeting system for handling mass incidents and dealing with the pressing social issues arising through collective petitions, [because] if a ruling party does not seek happiness for the people, it will lose the value and legitimacy of its governance'[6]. One year later, his saying, concerns and thoughts on the issue of mass incident and social stability were directly and fully quoted in another article published in *the People's Daily*. As it was reported, he said, 'some local officials hold just a one-sided understanding of

[4] The Original in Chinese: "进一步健全社会稳定风险评估制度、处置突发事件和群体性事件制度等，积极推动社会管理体制机制创新。" *The People's Daily*, December 16, 2010

[5] The Original in Chinese: "突出抓好生态环保、精准脱贫、安全生产、群体性事件、金融风险防控等攻坚性任务。" *The People's Daily*, August 24, 2017

[6] The Original in Chinese: "一个执政党不为人民谋幸福，就失去了执政的价值和合法性。…… 完善处理信访突出问题和处理群体性事件联席会议制度。" *The People's Daily*, May 27, 2011

the notion of "stability overrides everything" and believe that safety means "no accidents". [So] they just turn a blind eye to some symptomatic problems, cover them up when possible, and suppress them when possible …… [and] hope that nothing happens on their watch, even though they know it's inappropriate'[7]. Furthermore, Zhu Mingguo stated that 'improper response to mass incidents …… in line with this rationale of governance, the maintenance of social stability ignores the protection of public rights and avoids the consultation on matters expected by the masses. [So], it is not about maintaining stability by rights, but maintaining stability of power; it is not about the maintenance of dynamic stability but the maintenance of static stability; it is not about maintaining stability through harmony, but about maintaining stability through force; and it even creates new factors facilitating the instability.'[8] However, in fact, Zhu Minguo is not the first provincial officials of Guangdong to publicly express the personal opinions on the issue of social stability and contention in the party newspapers. As early as 2006, Zhang Dejiang (张德江), the then member of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee and Secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, had already stated in an interview that 'especially at the critical moments like dealing with mass incidents and public emergencies, we [local officials] must insist on acting in accordance with the law and use legal means to resolve conflicts in a timely manner and properly appease the incidents' [9].

[7] The Original in Chinese: "一些地方和领导干部片面理解'稳定压倒一切'，认为平安就是'不出事'。对一些苗头性问题视而不见，能捂则捂、能压则压；…… 明知不妥，但愿不在我任上出事就'OK'。" *The People's Daily*, July 18, 2012

[8] The Original in Chinese: "对群体性事件应对失当，…… 这种逻辑下的维稳，忽视了对公众权利的保障，回避了对群众所急所盼的充分协商，不是权利维稳，而是权力维稳，不是动态维稳，而是静态维稳，不是和谐维稳，而是强制维稳，甚而产生新的不稳定因素。" *The People's Daily*, July 18, 2012

[9] The Original in Chinese: "尤其在处理群体性事件和突发性公共事件等重要关头，更要坚持依法办事，善于用法律手段及时化解矛盾，妥善平息事态。" *The People's Daily*, March 10, 2006

Compared to their provincial counterparts in other two regions, only one provincial official of Jiangsu publicly expressed his own opinion on the issue of social contention and stability through the party mouthpieces during the harmonious society-building period. In 2005, Wang Shouting (王寿亭), the then deputy secretary of the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee, published a signed article in *the People's Daily*. In the article, he showed his determinations to 'effectively enhance political sensitivity and the awareness of risk and proactively maintain the stability through the implementation of the intelligence and information-led strategy of governance, in order to detect and deal mass incidents early and prevent and handle mass incidents in accordance with the law'[10]. Additionally, he also introduced Social Conflict and Dispute Mediation Service Centre collaboratively participated by the judicial, the department of public security and grassroots social organisations at the levels of both county and township in Jiangsu Province and emphasised on the information-processing mechanism as the early warning mechanism for dealing with mass incidents[11].

Although the data suggest that provincial officials of Jiangsu did not pay too much attention to the issue of mass incidents between 2004 and 2020, it is worth noting that many local officials and governors in Jiangsu Province did voice their opinions on social stability and contention in a more specific and detailed way instead. For example, Miao Jiaqing (苗加清), then secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Committee of Tongshan County, Jiangsu Province,

[10] The Original in Chinese: "切实增强政治意识和忧患意识，通过实施情报信息主导警务战略，主动积极地做好维护稳定的各项工作，做到发现在早、处置在小，积极预防、依法处置群体性事件。" *The People's Daily*, June 8, 2005

[11] The Original in Chinese: "全省县、乡两级都建立了由司法、公安等部门和基层组织参加的社会矛盾纠纷调处服务中心，妥善处理化解了大量社会矛盾纠纷，从源头上有效控制了'民转刑'案件和群体性事件的发生。…… 一是维护稳定工作长效机制。以信息预警为龙头，健全维护国家安全的工作机制，完善社会矛盾排查调处和群体性事件预防处置机制，全面提高应急处置重大突发事件和敏感问题的能力。" *The People's Daily*, June 8, 2005

emphasised on the new problems and challenges that social contentions posed to local officials and governors rather than the pressing issues channelled through and claimed by the contention. In his signed article published in *the Guangming Daily* in 2009, Miao Jiaqing said, 'the number of petitions expressing demands in illegal ways continues to increase. In order to gain more influence, the petitioners exaggerate the seriousness of their claims and mislead the officials. In order to apply more pressure, petitioners often take actions like besieging offices, holding banners and wearing uniforms with slogans. They even intentionally disseminate the rumours to incite more people who did not know about the truth to take actions'[12]. On the contrary, Lan Shaomin (蓝绍敏), the then mayor of Suqian City, Jiangsu Province, showed a bit of sympathy for the challengers, at least to a certain extent. In his signed article published in *the People's Daily* in 2012, he admitted, 'to be honest, nowadays, the damage to the interests of the mass and the violation of administrative laws do still exist in some places and both thus lead to the occurrence of collective petitions and even mass incidents. For these illegal acts and misbehaviours [of local officials], [we] must not cover their mistakes up but deal with them in accordance with the law and hold them strictly accountable'[13].

Besides the province of Jiangsu, the other two provinces had also witnessed the local officials publicly expressing their concerns about social stability and contention in the party newspapers. For example, Chen Guang (陈光), the then secretary of the Heze Municipal Party Committee in Shandong Province, committed to 'focus on solving problems relating to rural land

[12] The Original in Chinese: "以非法方式反映诉求的信访不断增多。为了扩大影响，信访人在信中夸大问题的严重性，误导上级党政领导。为了施加压力，上访人经常采取围堵办公场所，打横幅、穿状衣等方式，甚至有意识散布谣言，鼓动不明真相的群众起哄。" *The Guangming Daily*, April 20, 2009

[13] The Original in Chinese: "实事求是地讲，当前有的地方仍存在伤害群众利益、违法行政的现象，由此造成了群众集体上访甚至群体性事件的发生。对这些违法行为，必须做到不护短、不遮丑，依法处理、严格问责。" *The People's Daily*, July 23, 2012

acquisition and urban demolition compensation, and try best to prevent and handle mass incidents'[14]. Li Zengyong (李增勇), the then member of the Standing Committee of the Qingdao Municipal Party Committee, emphasised the handling of mass incidents by specifying a series of 'unstable factors and causes like land acquisition, house demolition and enterprise restructuring [and] resolutely correcting the misbehaviours that harms the interests of the people'[15]. Zhang Zehua (张泽华), the then Director of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Longhu District, Shantou City, Guangdong Province, also admitted that 'especially in the area of urban-rural fringe, the distribution of land acquisition funds, the non-transparent use of funds, and the corruption of village cadres are most likely to cause sudden mass incidents'[16]. To summary, regarding the provinces of Guangdong, Shandong and Jiangsu, which received the largest amount of commentary-related contentious coverages in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020, the second interesting point that needs to be stressed here is that, besides the provincial officials, local officials also played the crucial roles of loudspeakers and thus constituted another solid source of voicing the issue of social stability and contention in the party press.

Finally, the third interesting finding is that, despite the lack of descriptive information about certain instances of social contention, many commentary-related articles covered the issue of social contention in connection with the policies in a journalistic manner. For example, according to the news reports published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*

[14] The Original in Chinese: "重点做好农村土地征用、城市拆迁补偿中的问题处理工作，做好突发性、群体性事件的预防处置工作。" *The People's Daily*, April 30, 2007

[15] The Original in Chinese: "群体性事件处置 …… 着力解决因土地征用、房屋拆迁、企业重组改制等问题引发的不稳定因素，坚决纠正侵害人民群众利益的行为。" *The Guangming Daily*, August 1, 2005

[16] The Original in Chinese: "特别是城乡结合部村居的征地款分配、资金使用不透明以及少数村居干部腐败的问题最容易引起突发性群体事件。" *The People's Daily*, August 11, 2004

between 2004 and 2020, Guangdong Province had introduced *Guangdong Province Regulations on Handling Mass Incidents* and *Interim Regulations on Accountability for Preventing and Accommodating Mass Incidents* to instruct the government's approach to the issue of social contention[17], issued *Property Management Regulations in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone* to address the mass incidents staged by urban homeowners in one of the most developed city in China[18], implemented the instant reporting system of wage arrears and held the local officials accountable for the outbreaks of mass incidents in the workplaces to address labour-focused contention in the region[19] [20].

In the province of Jiangsu, according to *Assessment Content and Scoring Criteria for Creating the Model of City Legally Governed in Jiangsu Province from 2009 to 2012*, the final score of each candidate city would be deducted for the occurrence of mass incidents[21]. Also, *Regulations on Risk Assessment of Social Stability in Jiangsu Province* was reportedly released to require local authorities to assess in advance the potential impacts that major project constructions may have on social stability. As reported, the document stated that a 'one-vote veto' would be implemented to those local officials who witness the mass incidents on the

[17] The Original in Chinese: "广东系统推出了《广东省处置群体性事件办法》、《预防和处置群体性和突发性公共事件责任追究暂行办法》等 7 个暂行办法，精心构筑起处置各种突发性群体性事件的防控机制。" *The People's Daily*, February 16, 2006

[18] The Original in Chinese: "近日，《深圳经济特区物业管理条例（草案征求意见稿）》（以下简称《条例》）发布全文，面向社会公开征求意见和建议。…… 物业纠纷的原因总结为四类：一是共有产权权属不清，业主维权引发群体事件。" *The People's Daily*, November 30, 2017

[19] The Original in Chinese: "近日，广东省纪委、省监察厅、省人力资源和社会保障厅、省总工会 4 个部门联合下发通知，对因当地企业发生大规模欠薪，造成群体性聚众闹事事件发生的，广东将对党政主要领导和企业主管部门的主要领导实行问责。" *The People's Daily*, December 23, 2011

[20] The Original in Chinese: "广东省严格执行企业倒闭引发群体性事件即时报告制度和欠薪报告制度，…… 有效预防和减少倒闭企业或欠薪逃匿引发群体性事件的发生。" *The Guangming Daily*, January 2, 2009

[21] The Original in Chinese: "《江苏省 2009—2012 年法治城市创建考核内容及评分标准》出台。…… 根据标准，…… 违法占用基本农田、违法批准征收、使用土地，违法强制搬迁、克扣征收补偿，引发群体性事件或人员伤亡事故，…… 均扣考核分。" *The People's Daily*, February 15, 2012

ground as the result of the failure to carry out effective risk assessments[22]. Similarly, Nanjing, the capital city of Jiangsu Province, reportedly issued *Interim Regulations on the Accountability of Party-State Members for Violating the Code of Conduct of House Demolition* which also clearly stated, for those officials who fail to prevent the outbreak of a mass incident during the process of house demolition, they must be removed from office first and then punished[23].

Turning to Shandong Province, it also reportedly emphasised the accountability of local officials for the failure to avoid the occurrence of mass incidents and the institutionalisation of stability-centred risk assessment of major projects construction [24]. In addition, various types of institutional innovation were reported in the party press to show how local authorities were dedicated to the accommodation of social contention in the region of Shandong Province. For example, the city of Weihai launched a city-wide campaign to create 'Enterprise with Harmonious Labor Relations', by urging the Municipal Trade Union to propose a star-rating system on the one hand to commend the 'harmonious' companies and on the other hand to shame those in which mass incidents actually occur[25]. Taking Linshu County for another example, it was reported that this county with a population of 660,000 had successfully

[22] The Original in Chinese: "江苏省出台《江苏省社会稳定风险评估办法（试行）》…… 《办法》明确，对因没有实施'评估'而引发重大群体性事件的，将实施社会治安综合治理警示或 '一票否决'。" *The People's Daily*, April 4, 2010

[23] The Original in Chinese: "拆违、拆迁涉及部门众多、问题复杂，在处理过程中行为不当很有可能引发群体性事件或重大安全责任事故。…… 南京近日出台《党员和国家工作人员违反拆违和拆迁管理规定行为责任追究暂行办法》， …… 引发群体性事件先免职后处理。" *The People's Daily*, September 30, 2010

[24] The Original in Chinese: "近些年，对重大决策、重点项目、重要改革等进行社会稳定风险评估， …… 此外，博山区还建立了责任追究制度，对应评估而未评估，或搞形式主义造成评估失实，以及因风险预防化解工作不落实、不到位而引发群体性事件或给社会稳定造成严重影响的，严肃追究评估责任主体主要领导、分管领导及相关责任人员的责任。" *The People's Daily*, April 1, 2013

[25] The Original in Chinese: "威海市在全市企业，…… 开展了创建'劳动关系和谐企业'活动，市总工会提出一星级、二星级、三星级'劳动关系和谐企业'的标准对企业进行考核。星级'劳动关系和谐企业'实行动态管理，凡命名后出现 …… 对社会稳定造成影响的群体性事件 …… 即取消称号。" *The People's Daily*, April 3, 2006

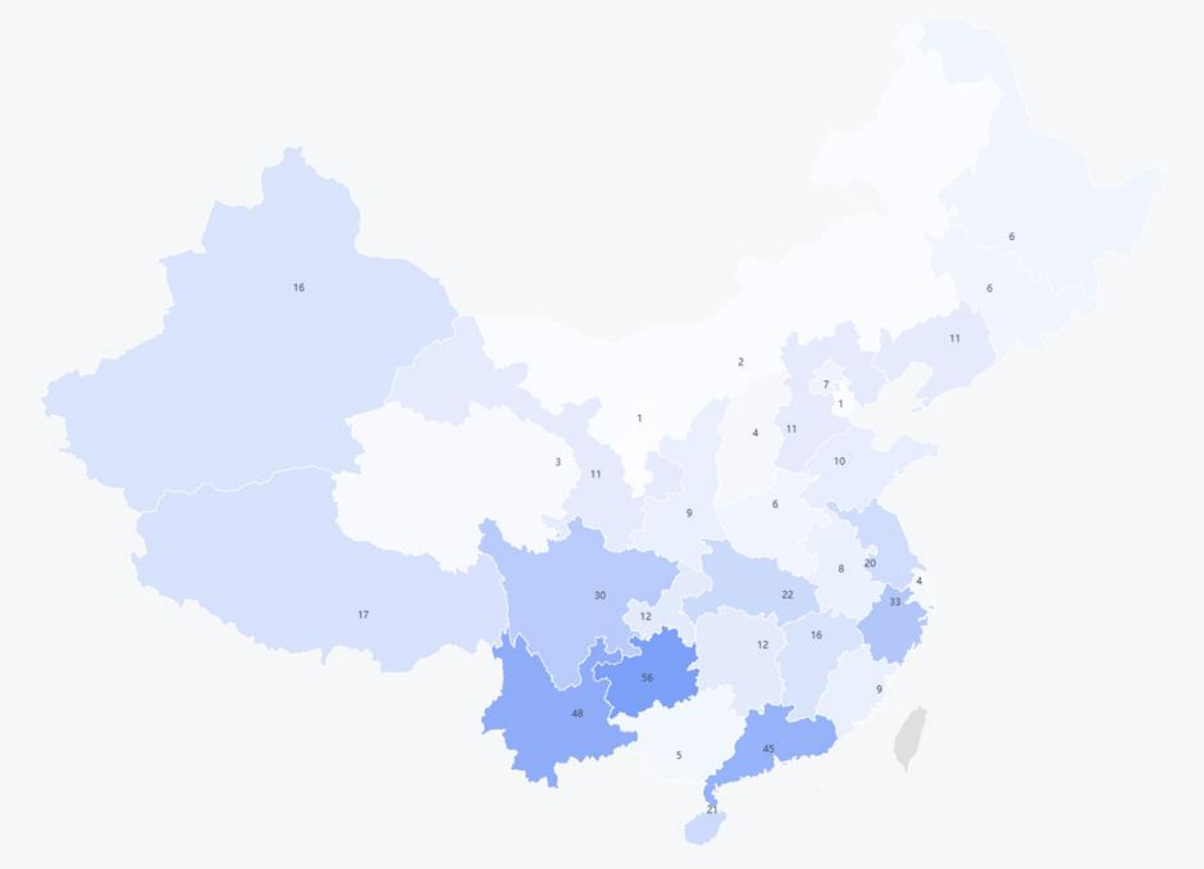
established more than 380 inter-departmental mediation centres dedicating to the prevention of mass incidents and the maintenance of social harmony and stability [26].

7.2.2 Overview of Rise-related Articles

Second, Figure 3 presents the geographical distribution of rise-related articles during the harmonious society-building era. As the articles classified into the category of Hard News: Rise offered factual information about the happening of local contentions, what the provincial reception of this type of news implies is that domestic incidents successfully catch the state's attention. For the provinces, the more this type of article were received, the more 'contentious' they would be perceived by the state. Interestingly, the pattern shown in Figure 3 is significantly different from the above-mentioned geographical distribution of commentary-related coverage. Generally speaking, the numbers of rise-related articles assigned to the western, southern, and southwestern regions of China were notably higher than the numbers received by the provinces in the east, the north, and the northeast. It is Guangdong and the southwestern regions, i.e., Yunnan and Guizhou in particular, that received a substantial amount of media coverage on the happening of local contention. This also suggests that the state was most aware of the happening of local contention in these regions. In other words, arguably, these three provinces can be considered the most reportedly contentious places, even the 'face' of local contentions, in the eyes of the state.

[26] The Original in Chinese: "为预防矛盾隐患和群体性事件苗头，维护社会和谐稳定，山东省临沭县 …… 全县共有调解组织 380 多个。" *The People's Daily*, November 3, 2010

Figure 7-3 Geographic Distribution of Hard News: Rise



To be more specific, first, what must not be ignored is that the rise-related articles published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020 did contain rich information about the actor, action and appeal of social contention staged on the ground. Taking the province of Yunnan as the first prominent case, it was reported that, 'at 9:00 am on June 27, 2007, nearly a hundred villagers in Yuhu Village, …… gathered at the entrance of the village to discuss about the issue of financial compensation for the water diversion in the Sanshu River, …… and then blocked the Sanshu River for 14 days'[27]. Also, 'on the morning of November 21, 2009, thousands of merchants occupied the streets and blocked the roads in

[27] The Original in Chinese: "云南省丽江市'玉湖水利群体事件' …… 2007 年 6 月 27 日上午 9 时，云南丽江玉龙纳西族自治县玉湖村近百村民，就三束河调水补偿问题在村口聚集，准备到县、市上访，继而堵断三束河 14 天。" *The People's Daily*, December 10, 2008

Luosiwan Market in Kunming due to the issue of house demolition'[28]. Regarding the notorious Menglian incident, it was reported by portraying the main figure who participated in the incident. As described in an article published in 2011, 'Yan Bodan was the leader who led the villagers to cut down trees to block roads and smashed police cars three years ago' [29].

In Guangdong Province, a few mass incidents also received media coverage. For example, 'at about 9:00 am on March 30 [2014], more than 80 people gathered …… in Maoming City and walked slowly through the city to express their dissatisfaction with the proposed building of PX project in the locality. At about 15:00 in the afternoon, some people gathered in front of the building of the Maoming Municipal Party Committee to express their opinions. A few people threw mineral water bottles, eggs, etc., blocked vehicles, and caused traffic jams. …… At about 20:00 pm in the evening, a group of outlaws began to block and smash vehicles in the city and later to attack the north and east gates of the building of the Maoming Municipal Party Committee. At about 23:00 in the evening, the lawbreakers burned down a police car parked near the east gate of the building of the Municipal Party Committee. Then a small group of troublemakers continued to smash shops and billboards along the streets in many places in the city, and set fire to many police vehicles, radio communication vehicles, trailers, etc'[30]. Besides this incident driven by environmental concerns, an incident triggered by medical dispute was

[28] The Original in Chinese: "2009 年 11 月 21 日上午，昆明螺蛳湾市场因拆迁问题发生上千商户集体上街堵路事件。下午 2 时许，螺蛳湾片区周边治安和交通秩序逐渐恢复正常。" *The People's Daily*, February 2, 2010

[29] The Original in Chinese: "3 年前的'孟连事件'中，岩波胆是个领着村民拿着大刀砍树堵路、打砸警车的'头头'。" *The People's Daily*, October 24, 2011

[30] The Original in Chinese: "3 月 30 日上午 9 时许，有 80 多名群众聚集在茂名市区油城五路大草坪并慢行通过市区部分路段，以表达对拟建芳烃（PX）项目的不满。当天下午 3 时许，又有部分群众聚集茂名市委门前表达意见，有少数人扔矿泉水瓶、鸡蛋等，并拦截车辆造成交通堵塞，…… 当晚 20 时许，一群不法分子开始在市区拦车辆，实施打砸行为，事后开始冲击茂名市委北门和东门。晚 23 时许，违法分子将停在市委东门附近一辆正在执勤的警车烧毁，随后小部分闹事者开始乘摩托车继续在市区多个地方打砸沿街商铺、广告牌，纵火烧毁多辆执勤警车及无线电通讯车、拖车等。" *The People's Daily*, April 3, 2014

also reported in the party newspapers. In 2009, it was reported that 'the family of the deceased patient, Huang, questioned whether it was the inappropriate medical behaviours that led to the patient's death in a hospital in Guangzhou and thus summoned more than 50 people to storm in the hospital and block the nearby roads'[31].

As for Guizhou Province, an article published in 2009 reported that, 'at about 5:00 am on November 27, …… Guizhou Boyu Real Estate Development Co., Ltd. was violently demolishing residential buildings. …… Subsequently, the residents were agitated and …… blocked the road with more than 40 liquefied gas tanks to demand explanations and solutions. …… According to statistics from the traffic police department, between 7:00 am and 9:00 am on the 27th, illegal road blockades caused nearly 10,000 vehicles to be stranded, and tens of thousands of people were delayed in going to work'[32]. Regarding another notoriously well-known incident, 'Weng-an 6.28 Incident', it was reported in the party press many times during this period of time. For example, as reported in 2008, 'from the afternoon of June 28 to the early morning of June 29, some people in Weng-an County, Guizhou Province were dissatisfied with the investigation of a female student's death and thus gathered at the building of the county government and that of the county public security bureau. This further triggered a large-scale mass gathering to surround the governments and the incident of smashing, looting,

[31] The Original in Chinese: "记者在越秀区了解到'中心'成功调处一起医患纠纷案：前不久，死者黄姓家属因质疑广州某医院医疗行为不当，导致黄某死亡，召集 50 多人要冲击医院办公区并在附近拦马路。" *The Guangming Daily*, November 14, 2009

[32] The Original in Chinese: "贵州省贵阳警方 30 日通报了一起暴力野蛮拆迁引发违法堵路群体性事件的处理结果，野蛮暴力拆迁和参与违法堵路的 24 人被刑事拘留，因暴力拆迁受到影响的群众也正在妥善安置。…… 11 月 27 日 5 时许，贵阳市云岩公安分局普陀路派出所接报警称，贵州博宇房地产开发有限公司正在对民居进行暴力拆迁。…… 随后，被拆迁住户情绪激动，不听现场民警劝阻，用 40 余瓶液化气罐堵路讨说法。…… 据交警部门统计，27 日 7 时至 9 时，违法堵路事件造成近万台车辆滞留，数万群众上班延误。" *The People's Daily*, December 2, 2009

and burning staged by a few outlaws'[33]. In the same article, the speech of Shi Zongyuan, the then Secretary of the Guizhou Provincial Party Committee, was directly quoted as follows, 'the apparent and direct trigger of the Weng-an incident was the dispute over the cause of Li Shufen's death, but the deep reasons was the frequent infringement of and the wide damage to the interests of the masses during the works of mineral mining, immigrants resettlement and house demolition at the local'[34]. Moreover, according to another article published in 2011, it was written that 'due to the relevant parties' improper handling of the case of a middle school girl drowned …… seven days ago and the wide spread of various rumours, the strong dissatisfaction of the deceased's family and the public triggered a large-scale mass incident which eventually led to a huge fire burned down the office buildings of the County Public Security Bureau, County Party Committee, and County Government'[35].

Although some other news articles did not offer detailed descriptions of the incidents, they did acknowledge and report the occurrence of social contention in a more indirect way. For example, as reported in an article published in *the Guangming Daily*, in Jiangmen City, Guangdong Province, 'many young police officers feel that the most rewarding thing in their deep hearts is to witness the transition of a village from a place where mass incidents took on stage to a harmonious and well-off place'[36]. Also in Guangdong Province, 'Shangpu Village,

[33] The Original in Chinese: "6 月 28 日下午至 29 日凌晨，贵州省瓮安县部分群众因对一名女学生死因鉴定结果不满，聚集到县政府和县公安局，引发大规模人群聚集围堵政府部门和少数不法分子打砸抢烧突发事件。" *The People's Daily*, July 5, 2008

[34] The Original in Chinese: "省委书记石宗源在 3 日召开的瓮安'6.28'事件阶段性处置情况汇报会上指出，瓮安'6.28'突发事件，表面的、直接的导火索是李树芬的死因争议，背后深层次原因是当地在矿产资源开发、移民安置、建筑拆迁等工作中，侵犯群众利益的事情屡有发生。" *The People's Daily*, July 5, 2008

[35] The Original in Chinese: "2008 年 6 月 28 日，因 7 天前一名中学女生在县城西门河大堰桥处溺水身亡，有关方面处置不当，加之各种谣言四起，引起死者亲属和群众强烈不满，进而引发大规模群体事件，直至一场大火烧向县公安局、县委、县政府的办公大楼。" *The People's Daily*, October 24, 2011

[36] The Original in Chinese: "谈起驻村工作，很多青年民警感慨地说：'你心里装着群众，群众心里才能有你！'看着曾经爆发过群体性事件的重点难点村，变成如今夜不闭户的和谐小康村，这是他们内心感到最有成就的事情。" *The Guangming Daily*, May 4, 2018

Jieyang City was well-known as a "petition village" or "problem village", [because] in 2013, a large-scale mass incident driven by the issue of land contract took place in this village'[37]. Moreover, in some other news articles, multiple mass incidents across different regions were covered at the same time, with a specific focus on the common ground they shared. For example, an article published in *the People's Daily* in 2010 specified the similarity in the mobilisational function of new media behind the emergence of Luosiwan incident in Yunnan Province, Shishou incident in Hubei Province, and Panyu 'Waste Incineration' incident in Guangdong Province [38]. According to another article published in 2011, it was stated that 'social conflicts and disputes still stood in some places and mass incidents occurred frequently, especially like the influential and shocking mass incidents in Menglian, Yunnan Province, Weng-an, Guizhou Province, Shishou, Hubei Province and Yihuang, Jiangxi Province. …… fundamentally speaking, it was because the interests of the local people had not been safeguarded properly, and had even been harmed; the relationship between local cadres and the masses had been indifferent and alienated for a long time, and even been antagonistic'[39]. In the article published in 2012, it not only implicitly acknowledged the actual occurrence of many mass incidents but also offered a general cadre-centred explanation for the rise of social contention. As reported, 'regarding the Weng-an incident in Guizhou Province, the Menglian incident in Yunnan Province, and the recent Wukan incident in Guangdong Province, they all originated in controllable social conflicts. However, due to the failure of local officials to make quick decisions and take effective measures, "small problems were magnified and big problems were

[37] The Original in Chinese: "同样是远近闻名，3 年前的上浦村却是因'上访村''问题村'而声名在外。2013 年，该村因土地承包问题曾经引发较大的群体事件。" *The People's Daily*, February 9, 2017

[38] The Original in Chinese: "近两年，特别是刚刚过去的 2009 年，…… 昆明'螺蛳湾'事件、…… 湖北石首事件、…… '番禺垃圾门'事件的背后，频现新兴媒体的身影。" *The People's Daily*, February 2, 2010

[39] The Original in Chinese: "然而，我们同样不能忽视的是，一些地方矛盾纠纷不断，群体性事件频发，尤其是云南孟连事件、贵州瓮安事件、湖北石首事件、江西宜黄事件等社会震动很大。…… 说到底还是因为当地群众利益没有得到维护，甚至受到损害，干群关系长期冷漠疏远，甚至出现对立。" *The People's Daily*, January 13, 2011

exploded" and thus led to a serious mass incident'[40]. The article published in 2014 focused on the contention labelled as NIMBY and summarised that 'from Dalian to Xiamen, from Shifang to Qidong, from Ningbo to Kunming …… in recent years, many major chemical projects had been opposed by local residents and public opinion and even triggered mass incidents. The responses of local governments to the objections were always awkward and normally resulted in the delay, suspension, and relocation of projects' [41].

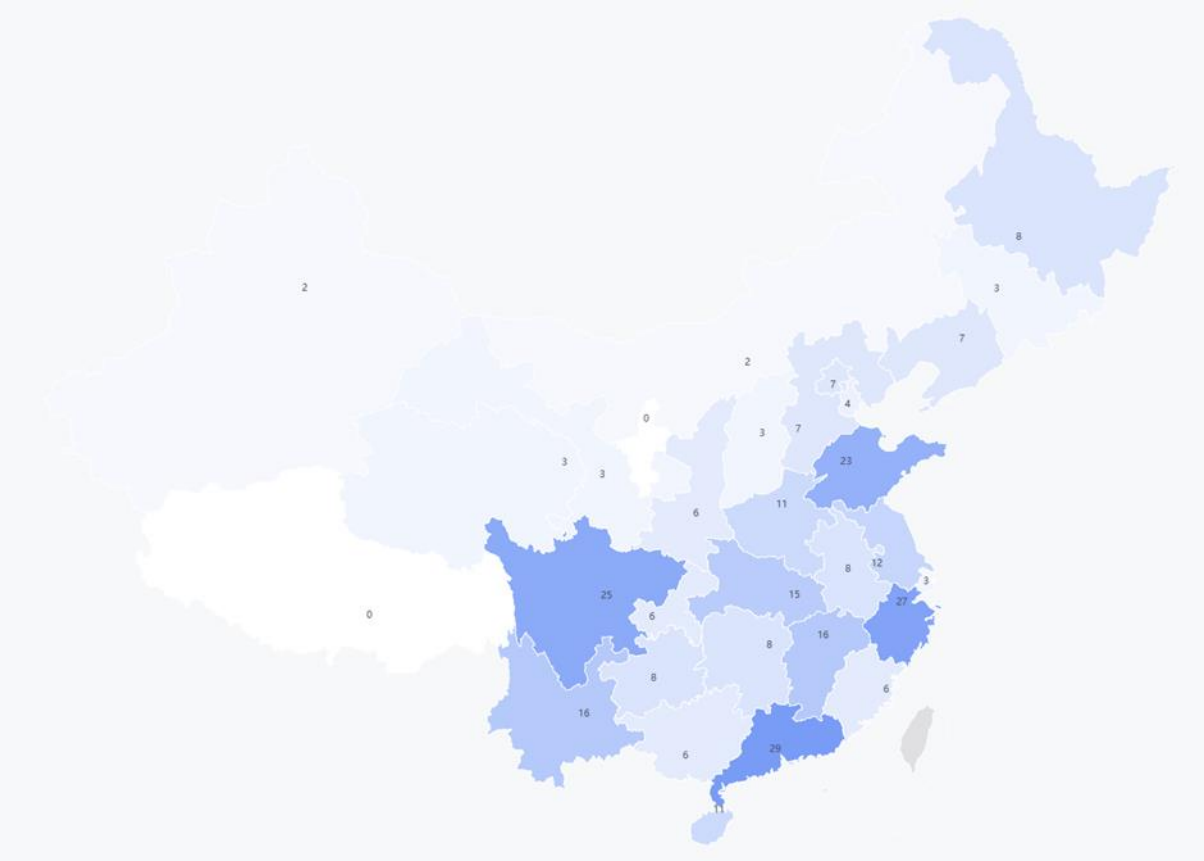
7.2.3 Overview of Fall-related Articles

Third, for the geographical distribution of fall-related articles, Figure 4 shows that the eastern and southern regions of China, compared to the west and the north, received relatively larger numbers of relevant articles. As illustrated above, the articles falling into the category of Hard News: Fall offer factual information to deny the happening of local contentions. In this sense, the provincial reception of fall-related articles reflects the journalists' construction, endorsed by the state, of local 'harmony' rather than local contention. Therefore, for the provinces, the greater number of this type of article, the more 'harmonious' the image acknowledged by the state. Therefore, as shown in Figure 4, the four most salient and non-bordering provinces, i.e., Shandong, Sichuan, Guangdong, and Zhejiang, were the most 'uncontentious' places intentionally promoted by the party press in the eyes of the state. In the context of an authoritarian regime like China, no news about protest is good news indeed, but news about no protest is better news.

[40] The Original in Chinese: "从贵州瓮安事件、云南孟连事件到最近的广东乌坎事件，最初都源于可控的社会矛盾，但由于当地领导议而不决，没有及时采取应对措施，结果'小事拖大，大事拖炸'，酿成严重的群体性冲突。" *The People's Daily*, January 17, 2012

[41] The Original in Chinese: "从大连到厦门，从什邡到启东，从宁波到昆明…… 最近几年不少重大化工项目受到当地居民、社会舆论的反对，甚至引发群体性事件。地方政府总是尴尬应对，处理结果基本上都是项目缓建、停建、迁建等。" *The People's Daily*, May 7, 2013

Figure 7-4 Geographic Distribution of Hard News: Fall



Selecting Zhejiang Province as the first prominent case, it is interesting to find that even Xi Jinping, the then Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee and the incumbent General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee, once conveyed the message of the decline of social contention to the public through *the Guangming Daily*. In a news article published in 2006, Xi Jinping clearly stated that 'the people's perception of security and happiness had been improved, …… the numbers of collective petitions and mass incidents had dropped significantly in the region of Zhejiang Province' [42]. The media coverage on the fall of social contention can be found at different administrative levels across the region of Zhejiang Province. For example, at a provincial level, it was reported in 2006 that 'no mass incidents

[42] The Original in Chinese: "在推进'平安浙江'建设中，各方面工作取得了积极的进展，人们的安全感和幸福感得到提升，全省安全生产事故、刑事案件、群众上访和群体性事件等都有较大幅度的下降。" *The Guangming Daily*, March 19, 2006

involving the issue of farmers' burdens had been witnessed for the past four consecutive years'[43] and in 2016 that 'no major mass incidents had occurred during the campaign for "three reconstructions and one demolition"[44]. In a more general sense, according to a news article published in 2012, 'for the past six consecutive years, the total number of mass incidents and collective petitions had generally shown a downward trend year by year'[45]. Moreover, In Zhoushan City, 'over the past fourteen months, there had neither a single major mass incident happened in the city nor a single incident of local people collectively going to Beijing to make petition detected'[46]. In Jiashan county, as reported in a news article published in *the Guangming Daily* in 2005, 'the social stability was secured, …… there had been no major mass incidents happened across the county over the past ten years' [47]. Even at the levels of village and town, news reports also suggested that 'no instances of collective petitions happened in Fengyuan Village last year'[48] and 'no local people of Fengqiao Town collectively went to Zhuji City to make petition over the past five years'[49].

Turning the focus to Sichuan Province as another interesting case, it, like Zhejiang Province, not only had its own provincial officials who publicly endorsed the decline of social contention in the region through the party mouthpieces but also received the coverage at all administrative

[43] The Original in Chinese: "连续四年多未发生农民负担问题的恶性案件、群体性事件和造成重大影响的其他案(事)件。" *The People's Daily*, December 26, 2006
[44] The Original in Chinese: "浙江在'三改一拆'中没有发生一起重大的群体性事件和安全事故。" *The People's Daily*, April 28, 2016
[45] The Original in Chinese: "连续 6 年，…… 群体性事件、信访总量 …… 总体却呈逐年下降趋势。" *The People's Daily*, November 7, 2012
[46] The Original in Chinese: "去年 8 月以来，全市 …… 未发生一起重大群体性事件，未发生一起信访人员非正常进京上访事件。" *The People's Daily*, October 24, 2009
[47] The Original in Chinese: "10 年来，…… 全县社会治安稳定，…… 没有发生过重大群体性事件。" *The Guangming Daily*, August 22, 2005
[48] The Original in Chinese: "去年，枫源村 …… 没有发生一起上访事件。" *The Guangming Daily*, August 28, 2011
[49] The Original in Chinese: "'5 年来，没有发生一起到诸暨市的集体上访事件。'浙江省诸暨市枫桥镇的负责人告诉前来调研的领导。" *The People's Daily*, December 17, 2008

levels in the region. But, in contrast with the fall-related articles received by Zhejiang Province, that of Sichuan Province showed a tendency to present statistical figures in order to suggest the decline of social contention. For example, Liu Qibao (刘奇葆), the then secretary of the Sichuan Provincial Committee of the CCP, once clearly stated in his signed article published in *the People's Daily* that 'in 2009, the number of mass incidents in the province dropped by 23.5%' [50]. Another article published in *the Guangming Daily* in the same year added another important statistical figure, that is, 'in 2009, the number of participants in mass incidents in Sichuan Province decreased by 37.6%'[51]. A series of news articles further suggested that, 'from January to May 2010, the number of mass incidents in the province dropped by 40.8%'[52], 'from January to August 2011, the number of mass incidents in the province dropped by 86.8%'[53], and, as stated in an article published in 2013, 'in recent years, mass incidents in the province had dropped by 72.2%'[54]. Of course, there were also news articles reporting the decline of social contention in the region of Sichuan Province in a general way. According to an article published in 2006, it was reported that 'since 2003, no mass incidents involving the issue of farmers' burdens took place in the province for the past three and a half consecutive years'[55]. At the level of city, Suining City was reported in *the Guangming Daily* in 2009 that 'the number of mass incidents driven by the contradiction among the people had decreased significantly year by year'[56]. Another article published in *the Guangming Daily* in 2016 shifted

[50] The Original in Chinese: "2009 年，全省群体性事件同比下降 23.5%。" *The People's Daily*, June 17, 2010
[51] The Original in Chinese: "2009 年，四川省…… 群体性事件下降 23.5%，参与人数减少 37.6%。" *The Guangming Daily*, March 23, 2010
[52] The Original in Chinese: "今年 1-5 月，全省群体性事件同比下降 40.8%。" *The People's Daily*, June 18, 2010
[53] The Original in Chinese: "今年 1-8 月，该省群体性事件同比下降 86.8%。" *The People's Daily*, September 21, 2011
[54] The Original in Chinese: "近年来，…… 全省群体性事件下降 72.2%。" *The People's Daily*, February 20, 2013
[55] "2003 年至今，全省连续三年半未发生涉及农民负担恶性案件和严重群体性事件。" *The People's Daily*, August 13, 2006
[56] The Original in Chinese: "遂宁市因人民内部矛盾引发的群体性事件逐年大幅下降。" *The Guangming Daily*, August 8, 2009

the focus to the levels of county and reported that Chenghua District, Chengdu City successfully 'achieved the "Five Declines" in the total number of letters and visits, collective petitions, repetitive petitions, cross-level complaints, and serious mass incidents'[57]. As a region which suffered the large and deadly earthquakes, Sichuan Province also received special attention specifically suggesting that 'no large mass incidents took place in the affected area in the post-earthquake period'[58], as stated by Weihong (魏宏) in 2011, the then Executive Deputy Governor of Sichuan Province.

Regarding the region of Guangdong Province, it was reported in 2009 and 2010 [59] [60] that the general number of mass incidents gradually decreased in the province. At the city level, Zhanjiang city, a 'financially poor city' in the western region of Guangdong Province, had reportedly witnessed a sharp decrease in mass incidents as well [61]. Also, as reported in the party press, 'the innovative practice of society management and governance in Yunfu City had achieved significant positive outcomes, …… in 2010, …… no serious mass incident occurred in the city'[62]. In Zhuhai city, 'no mass incidents staged by construction workers demanding unpaid wages occurred at any of 521 construction sites in the city during New Year and Spring Festival holiday in 2006' [63]. As for Chencun Town, which was portrayed as 'a "backward

[57] The Original in Chinese: "全区实现信访总量、集体访、重复访、越级访、群体性事件的'五下降'。" *The Guangming Daily*, May 27, 2016
[58] The Original in Chinese: "灾区没有发生大的群体性事件，走出了一条大灾之后人心安定、社会和谐的重建之路。" *The People's Daily*, October 14, 2011
[59] The Original in Chinese: "矛盾纠纷调解成功率提高，群体性事件 …… 减少。" *The People's Daily*, November 11, 2009
[60] The Original in Chinese: "群体性事件数量逐步下降。" *The People's Daily*, May 24, 2010
[61] The Original in Chinese: "粤西'财政穷市'湛江， …… 群体性事件急剧减少。" *The People's Daily*, June 1, 2007
[62] The Original in Chinese: "云浮市创新社会管理的实践探索收到明显成效， …… 2010 年， …… 全市未发生严重群体性事件。" *The People's Daily*, August 24, 2011
[63] The Original in Chinese: "今年元旦、春节期间，全市 521 处在建工地没有发生一起因为拖欠建筑工人工资奖金而引发的群体性事件。" *The Guangming Daily*, October 29, 2006

village" in Shunde District, Foshan City due to the issue of land expropriation, it once ranked first in the province of Guangdong in the number of cross-level collective complaints and petitions …… nowadays, thanks to comprehensive reforms of local governance …… there have been no mass incidents occurred over the past three years'[64]. In addition, the stability of even a small area with potential risks deserved the repeated publicity in the party press as well. For example, the article published in 2008 reported that 'the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau had effectively maintained the public security and local stability in the area near the Guangzhou Railway Station', as 'no mass incidents …… happened'[65]. Again, as reported in 2018, Xu Huanling (徐焕灵), the then director of the West Kowloon Station Police Station in the Shenzhen Railway Public Security Department, said in the interview that 'nothing happened at all (and) the number of mass incident that took place in the area is zero'[66].

In Shandong Province, it was reported repeatedly that, in 2014, the very first year of announcing the national campaign from the centre for building harmonious society across the country, the number of mass incidents and other crucial indicators of social stability had dropped by more than 10% and the people's perception of security had generally increased in the region [67] [68]. Furthermore, some other news articles also reported the decline of certain types

[64] The Original in Chinese: "陈村镇，曾因征地纠纷，导致越级上访量排名全省第一，…… 成了顺德区的'后进村'。今天，通过全方位的基层治理改革，…… 3 年来再也没有发生过群体性事件。" *The People's Daily*, April 22, 2015

[65] The Original in Chinese: "广州市公安机关精心组织，周密部署，指挥得当，措施有力，…… 没有发生群体性事件、打砸烧事件和因踩踏导致的群死群伤事件，有力地维护了广州火车站地区的治安秩序和当地社会稳定。" *The People's Daily*, March 1, 2008

[66] The Original in Chinese: "'啥事都没有。'深圳铁路公安处西九龙站派出所所长徐焕灵说话爽朗、幽默，…… '治安案件，0 宗；刑事案件，0 宗；群体性事件，0 宗。'" *The People's Daily*, November 15, 2018

[67] The Original in Chinese: "2004 年，全省刑事案件发案率逐季下降，治安案件、群体性事件、信访案件、安全生产事故等社会稳定重要指标均下降 10%以上，人民群众的安全感普遍增强。" *The People's Daily*, December 29, 2004

[68] The Original in Chinese: "2004 年，山东省刑事案件、治安案件、群体性事件等指标同比均下降 10%以上，人民群众对社会治安的满意率达 95%以上。" *The People's Daily*, March 23, 2005

of social contention across the region. For example, as reported in 2004, in Yangxin County, Binzhou City, 'neither a single instance of cross-level collective petitioning nor a single mass incident driven by ethnical conflicts had ever occurred in the county over the past three years'[69]. According to the news report published in 2011, 'there had not been a single mass incident or collective petition triggered by personal financial issues of village cadres in Laishan District, Yantai City since 2007'[70]. Another article published in *the Guangming Daily* in 2013 implicitly mentioned the issue of NIMBY movements by emphasising the reciprocal interactions between the newly established industrial area and local residents. As reported, 'since the establishment of Economic and Technological Development Zone in Linyi City, no major mass incident had ever occurred here' [71]. In Dongchangfu District, Liaocheng City, the task of large-scale house demolition was reportedly completed in 2014 without a single mass incident or cross-level collective petition happened [72]. Last, with respect to the question of why so many cities received the fall-related articles and were portrayed as harmonious places, the title of one article published in *the Guangming Daily* in 2004 might hint at the political rationale behind the scenes, as it stressed that 'social security and stability constitute the best environment of investment'[73].

7.2.4 Overview of Governance-related Articles

[69] The Original in Chinese: "阳信是鲁北最大的少数民族聚居地，近 3 年来，全县无一起越级集体上访事件，没有发生一起民族间的群体性事件。" *The People's Daily*, November 4, 2004

[70] The Original in Chinese: "2007 年以来，…… 莱山没有发生过一起因村干部经济问题引发的群体性事件和集体上访。" *The People's Daily*, July 27, 2011

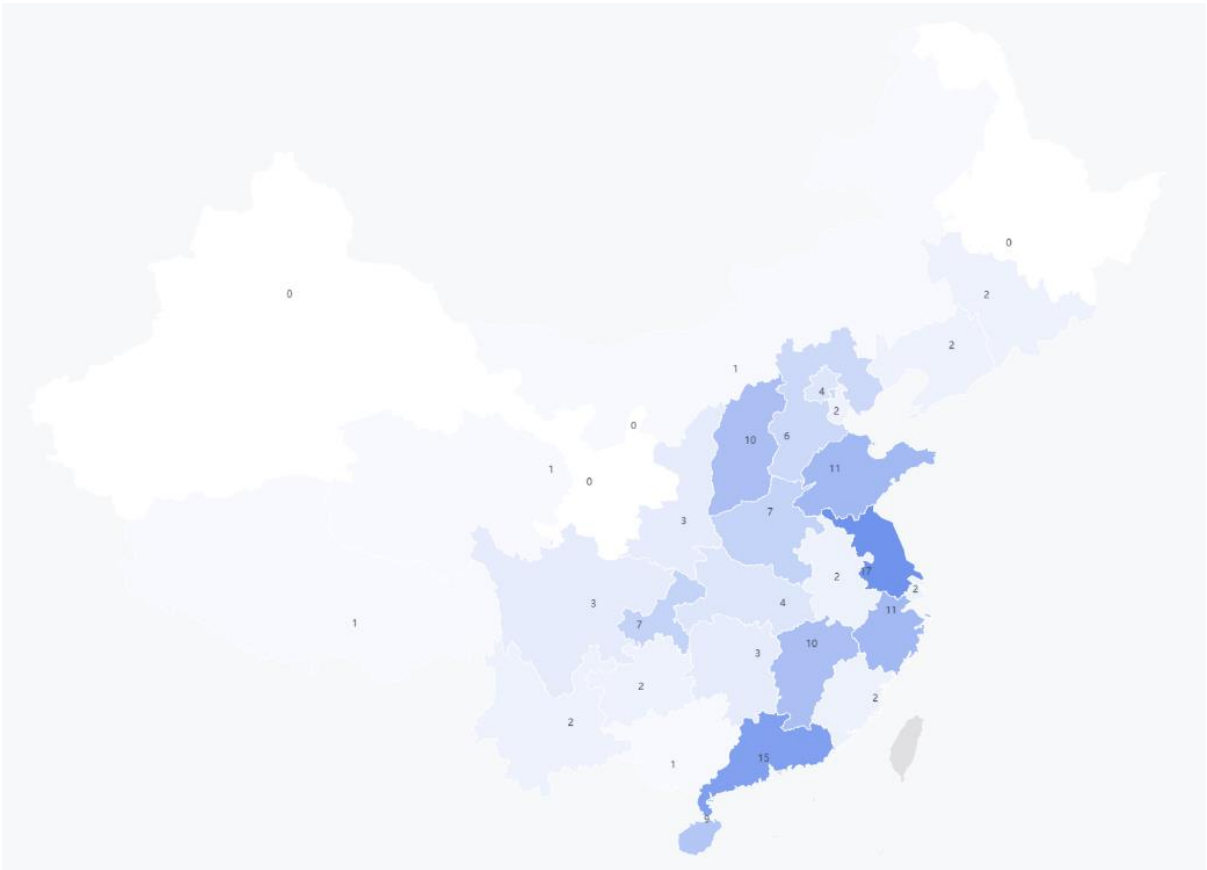
[71] The Original in Chinese: "山东临沂经济技术开发建区以来，这里没有发生一起重大刑事案件或群体事件。工业园区与当地居民之间，已形成一种互惠互利、互相提升的格局。" *The Guangming Daily*, November 13, 2013

[72] The Original in Chinese: "东昌府区完成大规模的拆迁工作，没有发生一起群体事件、越级上访事件和安全事件。" *The People's Daily*, November 12, 2014

[73] The Original in Chinese: "《社会治安稳定是最过硬的投资环境——山东省烟台市打造安全城市的报告》" *The Guangming Daily*, January 16, 2004

Fourth, the geographical distribution of governance-related articles has been shown in Figure 5. According to the above-mentioned operational definition of Hard News: Governance, the factual information offered in the articles that fall into this category is about the handling of potential local contentions on the ground. Therefore, what the provincial reception of this type of article implies is the intentional creation of the journalistic image of 'strong local states'. For the provinces, the more this type of article received, the more impressive the image of strong local states perceived by the state. As depicted in Figure 5, the governance-related contentious coverage paid little attention to the western, northern, and northeast regions of China. Only a handful of provinces in the eastern coastal areas received higher numbers of relevant articles. In particular, Guangdong and Jiangsu took the most salient positions in the eyes of the state and thus were portrayed and perceived as the two regions with the strongest local states that have high capacities of successfully dealing with the potential local contentions.

Figure 7-5 Geographic Distribution of Hard News: Governance



Taking Jiangsu Province and Guangdong Province as two cases, the very first evident observation is that there were news reports, of course, covering the effective prevention of social contention across the regions in a very general way. For example, in Jiangsu Province, it was reported in 2004 that 'more than 2000 mass incidents were prevented from the actual occurrences' [74]. The article published in 2009 indicated that 'Nantong City, Jiangsu Province prevented a total of 3689 cross-level petitions and 3105 mass incidents over the past six years' [75]. As for Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, the coverage suggested in 2009 that, 'in recent years, nearly 100 mass incidents were avoided at the city level every year'[76]. Besides, another interesting point that needs to be noted is that many governances-related articles received by these two provinces, despite of the unclear descriptions, did cover a wide range of actors who proactively got involved in the governance, or handling, of social contention. For example, Sun Jianguo (孙建国), the then Captain of the SWAT Squadron in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, it was reported, 'had successfully participated in the handling of more than 260 mass incidents since joining the team of public security' [77]. By contrast, the story in another article published in 2011 showed that the appeasement of social contention can even rely on influential individuals rather than officials. In Lianjiang City, Guangdong Province, it was a very prestigious businessman, Huang Liankui (黄廉奎), whose timely return to the

[74] The Original in Chinese: "目前，全省已有 37%的县、区和 50%的乡镇、街道建立了社会矛盾纠纷调解中心，共调解各类矛盾纠纷 8 万多件，调解成功率达 96%，同时预防了 2000 多起群体性事件的发生。" *The People's Daily*, August 3, 2004

[75] The Original in Chinese: "江苏省南通市 …… 6 年间 …… 有效防止'民转刑'案件 1732 起、越级上访 3689 起、群体性事件 3105 起。" *The People's Daily*, November 8, 2009

[76] The Original in Chinese: "近年来，广州市政府 …… 每年预防群体事件近百宗。" *The People's Daily*, October 28, 2009

[77] The Original in Chinese: "参加公安工作以来，孙建国 …… 带队成功处置突发性、群体性事件 260 余次。" *The People's Daily*, November 3, 2014

village from Beijing, successfully eased the tensions between the parties involved and thus resolved the crisis of a potential mass incident [78].

Furthermore, some other articles emphasised the cooperation of different actors in preventing and curbing the contention. For example, the collaborative efforts made by the judicial, public security and land departments was reported in Huizhou City, Guangdong Province, too 'quickly resolve the contradictions that were likely to trigger mass incidents' [79]. As for Jiangsu Province, as reported in 2009, in Nanjing City, 'the grassroots mediation organisations and the municipal judiciary had worked together to effectively prevent the occurrence of mass incidents over the past two years' [80]. In 2019, it is the Procuratorate in Taixing City, Jiangsu Province that reportedly communicated and coordinated with the township governments and police forces to collaboratively prevent the outbreak of mass incidents[81]. Such a collaborative approach to the prevention of social contention can also be found at the county level. In Dafeng District, Yancheng City, as reported, 'a "bridge" was established between the courts and the grassroots organisations for social management and more than ten mass incidents were thus avoided' in 2012 [82]. Another article published in the same year reported that the occurrence of serious mass incidents was effectively prevented thanks to the cooperation of the County Party

[78] The Original in Chinese: "广东廉江市塘蓬镇一个在村中极有威望的老板黄廉奎从北京及时赶回，缓解了双方对抗情绪。最终，通过多方努力，两村握手言和，一场潜在的群体性事件被成功化解。" *The People's Daily*, December 2, 2011

[79] The Original in Chinese: "村民准备越级上访。联合接访中心获悉后，由司法、公安、国土等部门组成工作组立即展开调查。…… 很可能引发群体性事件的矛盾迅速得以化解。" *The People's Daily*, November 9, 2010

[80] The Original in Chinese: "近两年，全市各基层调解组织与司法合力，…… 有效避免了 …… 群体性事件的发生。" *The Guangming Daily*, December 10, 2009

[81] The Original in Chinese: "检察机关 …… 与乡镇、派出所沟通协调，防止发生群体事件。" *The People's Daily*, June 6, 2019

[82] The Original in Chinese: "大丰法院发送平安月报，在与基层社会管理组织之间架起了'桥梁'。…… 有效预防了 10 多起群体性事件的发生。" *The Guangming Daily*, April 3, 2012

Committee Political and Legal Committee, County Court, County Procuratorate, County Public Security Bureau and County Justice Bureau in Peixian County, Xuzhou City [83].

Following the illustration above, the next question is naturally about how. How did the governance-related articles cover the way in which the contention was governed in the regions of Guangdong Province and Jiangsu Province? There were some news articles that briefly described how mass incidents were either de-mobilised or appeased at the local. In short, the way of communication and negotiation rather than the suppression was reportedly prioritised and publicly promoted in the party press. At least, such a conclusion can be safely drawn from the texts of governance-related articles channelled through the party mouthpieces to the public. According to a news article published in *the People's Daily* in 2010, Yang Shiyong (杨诗勇), the then full-time official of a trade union in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, facing the angry employees who demanded a pay rise, 'took the lead to not only communicate but also reason with the owner of the company. As a result, the employers agreed to raise the pay for all employees and the mass incident was successfully handled' [84]. Another example reported in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province is also related to the issue of labour and wage. As shown in the article published in 2009, 'more than 60 employees of a restaurant had not received their salaries for two months and were planning to walk to the city hall with banners carried' [85]. In response to the risk of the materialisation of a potential mass incident, Sun Wanming (孙万明), the director of justice office in Sanyuanli Street, 'persuaded the employees

[83] The Original in Chinese: "江苏沛县县委政法委将县法院开展的'村村有法官'、县检察院的'法制村长'、县公安局的'社区民警挂职'和县司法局的'村村有法律顾问'等活动有机整合，…… 有效防止了恶性群体性事件的发生。" *The Guangming Daily*, September 18, 2012

[84] The Original in Chinese: "今年初一家企业单给主管加工资，员工情绪激愤。杨诗勇找到企业主做沟通工作，摆事实讲道理，最后企业给全体员工加薪，平息了这场群体事件。" *The People's Daily*, June 20, 2010

[85] The Original in Chinese: "某餐厅 60 多位员工两个月的工资无法领取，正准备拉起横幅到市政府上访。" *The People's Daily*, February 11, 2009

to calm down, educated them on the knowledge of laws and regulations, and promised to repay their unpaid salaries. …… In the next two days, Sun Wanming negotiated with the restaurant owner many times in accordance with the laws and regulations, with the assistance of Employment Dispute Arbitration Commission' [86]. Eventually, the issue of arrears of pay was successfully resolved.

Turning the focus to Jiangsu Province, it was reported in 2012 that due to an exposed emergency of medical contamination caused by radioactive sources, the residents near that hospital collectively protested on the website 'Hanshan Wenzhong' and thus attracted many online supporters and bystanders. Facing the potential risk and danger of a materialised transition from online gathering to offline mobilisation, 'the Municipal Commission for Discipline Inspection quickly stepped in …… [and] facilitated the communication between the residents and relevant parties involved on the basis of equality …… as a result, the intensifying contradiction was promptly resolved and the potential outbreak of mass incidents was successfully avoided'[87]. Another article published in *the Guangming Daily* in the 2012 showed that the Sanlong Court of Dafeng District, Yancheng City prioritised the processing of a case involving the economic losses of farmers caused by a pesticide company in 2010. As reported, 'the court staff started to process the files in advance, conducted the house-to-house investigations, educated the farmers on knowledge of relevant regulations and laws, calmed them down and instructed them to file the lawsuit and safeguard their rights properly. The court

[86] The Original in Chinese: "所长孙万明会 …… 对员工们进行劝说，宣传法律知识，并保证一定依法追回员工们的拖欠工资。 …… 之后的两天，孙万明依照法律依据，与出租方多次交涉，在市劳动仲裁部门的协助下， …… 一次性支付了员工们的欠薪。" *The People's Daily*, February 11, 2009

[87] The Original in Chinese: "今年 4 月，沧浪医院曝出伽马刀放射源污染事件，由于有关部门未及时处理，医院附近居民纷纷在'寒山闻钟'上发声抗议，引来众多围观、声援。市纪委迅速介入，组织相关单位与附近群众进行平等对话，纪委负责人协调有关部门集中处置，及时化解了正趋尖锐化的社会矛盾，避免了群体性事件的发生。" *The People's Daily*, December 18, 2012

staff further communicated with the Consumers Association, Agricultural Committee, and Village Committee to discuss compensation plans. After nearly a week of orderly work, the pesticide company reached a compensation agreement with 225 farmers. …… more importantly, the risk of a potential mass incident was eliminated in a timely manner' [88].

7.3 Explaining the Variation in Provincial Receptions of State Attention

7.3.1 Preparation for QCA: Case, Outcome, and Condition Selection

The results above not only detect the variation in provincial reception of state attention channelled through the party mouthpiece but also suggest the fact that protesting provinces took different positions in the eyes of the state. Next, based on such a descriptive finding, this chapter aims to explain why protesting provinces were covered in the party press so differently. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is adopted here as the research approach to the exploration of the complexity of the scenes. As a widely used research approach in social movement study and, particularly, the field of social movement outcome and protest impact research (e.g., McAdam and Boudet, 2012; Amenta et al, 2019), QCA addresses the methodological issue of complexity in empirical studies from two perspectives. First, QCA is a case-based approach that was intended, at least originally, to deal with small- and intermediate-N research and, to a certain extent, bridges the gap between qualitative and quantitative analysis. What the term 'case-based' means is that each case in the study is considered as a whole entity that needs to be comprehended from a holistic perspective and

[88] The Original in Chinese: "2010 年 8、9 月间，大丰市大中镇、新丰镇 225 户农民购买某品牌农药 350 瓶，用于桑叶治虫，农民使用治药的桑叶喂蚕后，发生了不同程度的秋蚕死亡事件，损失最多达万余元。该院三龙法庭对此案高度重视，提前介入逐户调查，讲解法律，稳定农户情绪，引导他们依法诉讼、维权；及时与消协、农委和村委会等进行沟通，共商处置预案。经过近一周的有序工作，使农药公司与 225 户农民达成赔偿协议。为众多农户挽回损失近 80 万元；更重要的是及时消除了一起群体性事件隐患。" *The Guangming Daily*, April 3, 2012

operationally transformed into several components, or conditions, that configurationally link to each other. Second, QCA develops the operational concept of multiple conjunctural causations to stress the complex causality. As the researchers clarified, '[t]he term "multiple" refers to the number of paths, while the term "conjunctural" conveys the notion that each path consists of a combination of conditions' (Berg-Schlosser et al, 2008: 8). Therefore, the causal explanations that QCA offers are not the 'independent' variable- or correlational relation-based universal laws, but different set theory-driven configurational pathways, being relevant but distinctive, to the same destination or outcome.

'Science studies cases', as David Byrne argued in the very first sentence of *Handbook of Case-based Methods* co-edited with Charles Ragin. The concept of 'case' not only occupies the central position in scientific research but also is the key to good practice of case-based QCA research. To explain why protesting provinces took such different positions in the eyes of the state in this study, what the case is must be explicated at the very first stage. This chapter suggests all 31 provinces observed during the harmonious society-building era, i.e., between 2004 and 2020, as the cases. Such a choice of case selection is appropriate for small- and intermediate-N research using QCA. More importantly, each unit of observation has very clear temporal and spatial boundaries and thus can be considered a bounded system in which the within-case complexity can be configurationally constituted and captured, and the outcome of interest can emerge. Therefore, the next step is to clearly identify the observable outcomes of interest, to select a set of theory-supported conditions that are potentially associated with the emergence of the observable outcomes, and then, to transform all cases into a table of configurations for further cross-case comparisons.

With respect to the identification of the outcomes, based on the results previously presented in the study, a total of five outcomes are to be explained with QCA. The first one is *Total*, i.e., the total amount of contentious coverage, regardless of what type of news it is, received by each province between 2004 and 2020. The second one is *Commentary*, i.e., the total number of articles falling into the category of Soft News: Commentary received by the respective province between 2004 and 2020. The third one is *Rise*, i.e., the total number of articles falling into the category of Hard News: Rise received by the respective province between 2004 and 2020. The fourth one is *Fall*, i.e., the total number of articles falling into the category of Hard News: Fall received by each province between 2004 and 2020. The fifth one is *Governance*, i.e., the total number of articles falling into the category of Hard News: Governance received by each province between 2004 and 2020. In addition, as shown above, the result shown above that mediated distribution of state attention on local contentions is complicatedly uneven also suggests the heterogeneity of each type of outcome across all cases.

Then, the selection and identification of conditions should be elucidated. Briefly speaking, it is a practical process of not only constructing a set of factors that are theoretically responsible for the respective outcomes, but also theoretically transforming the within-complexity of the cases into the configurations of combinatorial attributes. Therefore, the selection and identification of conditions must be guided by theoretical criteria. Taking both endogenous and exogenous factors, the mainstream theories in social movement study, and the ratio between the number of conditions and the number of cases into account, simultaneously, this study suggests a set of five important conditions, i.e., *Economy*, *Population*, *Protest*, *Media Visibility,* and *Political Relations*, that are theoretically associated with the emergence of the outcomes, i.e., the provincial reception of state attention on local contentions during the harmonious society-building era. First, as the two endogenous conditions of the cases, *Economy* and

Population are deeply rooted in the theories of resource mobilisation and indicate the economic capability and population base of the region for potential mobilisation, respectively. Besides being two decisive factors that have an impact on the mobilisation of local contentions, from a perspective of the state, *Economy* and *Population* also imply the top two priorities of CCP's rule, i.e., economic development and social stability (Heurlin, 2016). Therefore, theoretically, the more developed and more populous the region is, the easier it is to successfully catch the state's attention. The third endogenous condition of the cases, *Protest*, simply indicates the frequency of documented protest events that happened in the region and theoretically denotes the most direct interactions between protesting signals and institutional responses. In short, the more protests documented in the region, the more likely the region successfully catch a large amount of state attention on local contention. The last two exogenous conditions, which are derived from the theories of both opportunity structures and mediation models, capture the contextual relations of the cases with the party press and the central state. To be more specific, *Media Visibility* indicates the total frequency of each case generally covered in the party press between 2004 and 2020. Such a media preference for the cases can also be considered a general type of communicative, or mediated, channel bridging the provinces to the party press. Theoretically, the higher the media visibility the region enjoys, the easier it is to receive a large amount of contentious coverage. Likewise, another exogenous condition, *Political Relations*, indicate the general strength of each case's political connection with the central state. Also, such local-central power relations can serve as a general type of communicative, or mediated, channel bridging the provinces to the state. Theoretically, the stronger the political connection with the central state the region has, the easier it is to get the state's direct response to the issue of local contention. In the next section details about the choice of indicators, the procedures of data sources and collection, the techniques of calibration and values assignment, and the final construction of configurations leading to the outcomes will be discussed.

7.3.2 Preparation for QCA: Data, Calibration, and Observed Configurations

First, for the condition of Economy, there are two indicators selected, i.e., *GDP* and *GDP per capita* for each province. The data source is the official statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China between 2004 and 2020. Due to a wholistic view of the case applicable to QCA, historical raw data must be processed to indicate the general economic capacity of each province observed between 2004 and 2020. Hence, the average numbers of each province's annual statistics of GDP and GDP per capita are expected to be obtained by simple calculations. Likewise, to indicate the populational base of the region, the *Total Population* and *Population Density* of each province are selected, and the data source is also the official statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China between 2004 and 2020. Again, because of the same reason, historical raw data about the condition of *Population* needs to be transformed into a series of average numbers for the provinces observed during the harmonious society-building era. Third, for the documented number of domestic protest events that happened in each province between 2004 and 2020, it is indeed a complicated and tricky issue. Despite the ongoing intellectual efforts made by many researchers to statistically capture the overview of the reality of local contention in China (e.g., Chen, 2019; Göbel, 2019; Zhang and Pan, 2019), there is no such dataset either claiming to be or being considered a statistically representative sample of the population of Chinese protest events on the ground. Therefore, this chapter takes the accessibility of the dataset, the employment and acceptance of the dataset by peers in academia, the size of the dataset, and the diversity of the data sources into account, such that two secondary datasets of Chinese protest events are selected as the sources to cautiously indicate the condition of Protest for each province. The first one is the Wickedonna dataset created by Chinese activists Yuyu Lu and Tingyu Li who collected the contention-related information from the posts published on Chinese social media platforms like Sina

Weibo, Tencent Weibo, Qzone, and others. Based on the original reports published in its official blog, a total of 38,490 protest events were identified between 2015 and June 2016 and was used here. Second, a project conducted by a Chinese researcher (Shao, 2017) and published in Chinese was developed by searching the articles published in more than '4000' Chinese newspapers between 1998 and 2014, and a total of 5702 protest events were detected, 'showing the overview of mass incidents in China … especially since the year of 2000' (127-129). Although these two datasets are not methodologically perfect, the collaborative use of these two independent but complementary datasets of Chinese protest events offers a chance for researchers to understand the geographical distribution of protest events that happened in China from a bird's eye view. Fourth, the condition of Media Visibility is simply indicated by the total number of news articles received by each province in the party press between 2004 and 2020. Thanks to the WiseNews database, all articles published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020 were searched for each province's name as the keyword, and the total number of reports involving each province was counted respectively. Fifth, the total number of provincial leaders promoted to the Standing Committee of the CCP during the harmonious society-building era is used here to indicate the condition of Political Relations with the central state for each province. Public information and the official resumes of CCP leaders released by the authority were used as the source to identify the number of provincial officials promoted to the Standing Committee of the CCP in each province and thus to determine the strength of local-central power relation for all 31 cases in China between 2004 and 2020.

Table 7-3 Raw Data for fsQCA

Case	Raw Data for Conditions								Raw Data for Outcomes				
	Economy		Population		Protest		Media	Politics					
Province	GDP (billion Yuan)	GDP Per Capita (Billion Yuan/Ten Thousand People)	Population (Ten Thousand People)	Population Density (Ten Thousand People/km² Area)	Wickedonna (Number of Events)	Shao, 2017 (Number of Events)	Public Visibility (Number of Articles)	Political Relation (Number of Members in the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau)	Soft News: Commentary	Hard News: Rise	Hard News: Fall	Hard News: Governance	Contentious Coverage: Total
Anhui	19137.79	3.16	6065.18	432.92	1711	210	21013	0	10	8	8	2	28
Beijing	19903.80	10.12	1967.47	1199.68	881	346	347795	2	22	7	7	4	40
Chongqing	12327.57	4.14	2979.71	361.61	837	88	23047	2	5	12	6	7	30
Fujian	21630.75	5.64	3835.47	315.94	1072	195	20563	0	6	9	6	2	23
Gansu	5178.01	2.04	2535.71	59.55	408	147	15215	0	2	11	3	0	16
Guangdong	60519.03	5.54	10918.53	607.60	3220	1593	33455	3	29	45	29	15	118
Guangxi	11670.06	2.43	4805.35	203.01	938	223	23011	0	7	5	6	1	19
Guizhou	8000.40	2.17	3693.59	209.62	795	74	16513	1	9	56	8	2	75
Hainan	2883.08	3.18	907.82	256.45	227	106	14068	0	6	21	11	9	47
Hebei	21705.85	3.02	7193.47	381.01	2843	95	27515	0	15	11	7	6	39
Heilongjiang	9641.27	2.66	3628.94	76.72	618	50	12333	1	7	6	8	0	21
Henan	29799.31	3.10	9611.47	575.54	3865	213	27849	1	18	6	11	7	42
Hubei	23379.84	4.04	5784.82	311.18	1855	218	24643	1	14	22	15	4	55
Hunan	21695.26	3.32	6544.24	308.98	1152	136	30151	0	9	12	8	3	32
Inner Mongolia	10180.46	4.18	2435.35	20.59	551	49	17275	0	3	2	2	1	8
Jiangsu	55461.44	6.88	8062.24	785.79	2740	216	34238	0	29	20	12	17	78
Jiangxi	13215.73	2.97	4443.59	266.24	860	166	21676	0	17	16	16	10	59
Jilin	7742.89	2.93	2639.35	140.84	592	45	11724	0	3	6	3	2	14
Liaoning	16492.58	3.82	4312.65	291.40	925	78	17463	1	12	11	7	2	32
Ningxia	2075.22	3.16	656.29	98.84	287	13	12108	0	4	1	0	0	5
Qinghai	1595.43	2.81	568.06	7.88	68	18	11479	1	2	3	3	1	9
Shaanxi	13885.28	3.65	3799.71	184.63	2061	211	19056	1	5	9	6	3	23
Shandong	42864.90	4.42	9689.76	613.66	2588	170	36483	2	27	10	23	11	71
Shanghai	22436.58	9.80	2288.94	3610.32	613	144	83887	4	11	4	3	2	20
Shanxi	10422.41	3.00	3475.00	221.76	1369	54	19859	0	8	4	3	10	25
Sichuan	24486.12	2.99	8184.82	168.31	2421	233	33601	1	17	30	25	3	75
Tianjin	8539.66	6.61	1292.06	1085.76	466	45	25343	1	6	1	4	2	13
Tibet	838.31	2.65	316.71	2.58	10	1	17393	0	0	17	0	1	18
Xinjiang	7458.45	3.28	2273.12	13.65	255	27	29023	0	9	16	2	0	27
Yunnan	11887.72	2.58	4605.59	116.86	862	283	20513	0	11	48	16	2	77
Zhejiang	35405.02	6.25	5667.65	556.74	1400	255	35323	1	18	33	27	11	89

As a result, based on the above discussion, the case profiles of all 31 provinces have been constituted and presented in a table of eight variables and five different outcomes (Table 3). The next step is to transform the raw data to the calibrated values applicable to QCA. There are two different approaches to value assignment used here. First, for the condition of Political Relations, the values were coded in simple binary terms to answer whether there were local-central power relations observed. Therefore, all cases with at least one provincial leader promoted to the Standing Committee of CCP between 2004 and 2020 were labelled as the membership in the set of Political Relations and the values were recoded to '1'. For those provinces which did not build observed Political Relations with the central state, they were thus considered the non-member in the set, and the raw values of '0' were kept. Second, since the rest of the conditions and all outcomes are interval-scale variables, the fuzzy-set membership was assigned to the cases based on the percentile value for each condition and outcome relative to other cases (also see methodological notes in McAdam and Boudet, 2012). Ragin suggested that '[w]ith crisp sets, each case is assigned one of two possible membership scores in each set included in a study: "1" (membership in the set) or "0" (non-membership in

the set)' (2012: 89), but what makes fuzzy sets so powerful is that 'they allow researchers to calibrate partial membership in sets using values in the interval between [0] (nonmembership) and [1] (full membership) without abandoning core set-theoretic principles (e.g., the subset relation)' (2012: 88). As a result, the raw data of seven conditions and five outcomes were directly calibrated to the continuous fuzzy-set scores that purposively indicate the case's degree of membership in the sets.

Table 7-4 Calibrated Data for fsQCA

Case	Calibration for Conditions								Calibration for Outcomes				
	Economy		Population		Protest		Media	Politics					
Province	GDP (billion Yuan)	GDP Per Capita (Billion Yuan/Ten Thousand People)	Population (Ten Thousand People)	Population Density (Ten Thousand People/km^2 Area)	Wickedonna (Number of Events)	Shao, 2017 (Number of Events)	Public Visibility (Number of Articles)	Political Relation (Number of Members in the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau)	Soft News: Commentary	Hard News: Rise	Hard News: Fall	Hard News: Governance	Contentious Coverage: Total
Anhui	0.62	0.48	0.76	0.64	0.76	0.76	0.45	0	0.54	0.28	0.54	0.50	0.43
Beijing	0.64	0.98	0.15	0.96	0.50	0.97	1.00	1	0.89	0.22	0.50	0.63	0.64
Chongqing	0.44	0.64	0.32	0.58	0.46	0.21	0.53	1	0.15	0.52	0.38	0.80	0.50
Fujian	0.67	0.81	0.50	0.54	0.57	0.71	0.42	0	0.22	0.35	0.38	0.50	0.27
Gansu	0.11	0.02	0.23	0.08	0.13	0.51	0.12	0	0.05	0.50	0.12	0.05	0.12
Guangdong	0.98	0.80	0.97	0.76	0.96	1.00	0.71	1	0.96	0.95	0.97	0.97	0.99
Guangxi	0.40	0.07	0.63	0.32	0.52	0.80	0.53	0	0.30	0.13	0.38	0.18	0.18
Guizhou	0.20	0.03	0.48	0.34	0.41	0.16	0.17	1	0.50	0.98	0.54	0.50	0.93
Hainan	0.06	0.50	0.06	0.47	0.06	0.29	0.09	0	0.22	0.70	0.65	0.87	0.72
Hebei	0.67	0.37	0.85	0.60	0.94	0.24	0.61	0	0.72	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.62
Heilongjiang	0.28	0.15	0.46	0.10	0.25	0.10	0.05	1	0.30	0.17	0.54	0.05	0.22
Henan	0.80	0.44	0.95	0.74	0.98	0.77	0.62	1	0.81	0.17	0.65	0.80	0.66
Hubei	0.70	0.62	0.73	0.54	0.80	0.79	0.56	1	0.69	0.72	0.78	0.63	0.80
Hunan	0.67	0.52	0.80	0.54	0.59	0.45	0.66	0	0.50	0.52	0.54	0.57	0.53
Inner Mongolia	0.31	0.64	0.22	0.05	0.21	0.10	0.21	0	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.18	0.04
Jiangsu	0.97	0.90	0.90	0.86	0.93	0.78	0.73	0	0.96	0.68	0.69	0.98	0.94
Jiangxi	0.50	0.33	0.58	0.50	0.48	0.60	0.50	0	0.78	0.60	0.81	0.90	0.84
Jilin	0.19	0.30	0.25	0.19	0.23	0.09	0.04	0	0.07	0.17	0.12	0.50	0.10
Liaoning	0.57	0.59	0.57	0.52	0.52	0.18	0.22	1	0.62	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.53
Ningxia	0.05	0.49	0.05	0.12	0.08	0.04	0.05	0	0.11	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.03
Qinghai	0.04	0.22	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.04	1	0.05	0.07	0.12	0.18	0.05
Shaanxi	0.51	0.57	0.50	0.28	0.84	0.76	0.31	1	0.15	0.35	0.38	0.57	0.27
Shandong	0.92	0.67	0.95	0.77	0.92	0.61	0.76	1	0.94	0.42	0.93	0.92	0.91
Shanghai	0.68	0.98	0.19	1.00	0.25	0.50	0.99	1	0.58	0.10	0.12	0.50	0.20
Shanxi	0.32	0.35	0.42	0.37	0.66	0.11	0.36	0	0.39	0.10	0.12	0.90	0.33
Sichuan	0.72	0.35	0.90	0.24	0.90	0.83	0.72	1	0.78	0.83	0.94	0.57	0.93
Tianjin	0.23	0.88	0.09	0.94	0.15	0.09	0.57	1	0.22	0.04	0.18	0.50	0.09
Tibet	0.04	0.14	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.21	0	0.02	0.62	0.03	0.18	0.16
Xinjiang	0.18	0.52	0.19	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.64	0	0.50	0.60	0.08	0.05	0.40
Yunnan	0.41	0.12	0.60	0.15	0.48	0.92	0.41	0	0.58	0.96	0.81	0.50	0.93
Zhejiang	0.86	0.86	0.72	0.73	0.67	0.88	0.74	1	0.81	0.87	0.96	0.92	0.96

As depicted in Table 4, the raw data were preliminarily converted into the table of conditions and outcomes with the scores ranging from 0 to 1 which can apply to fsQCA. However, for the condition of Economy, Population, and Protest, two different indicators were used for each. To determine the final membership score for each case in these three sets, this chapter adopts the logical OR, rather than logical AND or arithmetic means, as the tool for aggregating and assigning fuzzy scores for conditions with multiple indicators (also see the methodological discussion in Veri, 2022). Briefly speaking, two or more sets can be joined through logical OR, i.e., the union of sets, in other words. As Ragin stated, '[w]hen using fuzzy sets,

logical *OR* directs the researcher's attention to the *maximum* of each case's memberships in the component sets. That is, a case's membership in the set formed from the *union* of two or more fuzzy sets is the *maximum* value of its memberships in the component sets' (Ragin, 2012: 97). Therefore, in this study, the final membership scores of each case in the set of Economy, Population, and Protest, is identical to the largest score of two indicators in each set, respectively. The reason for using logical OR to recode the membership scores is that the relationship between two indicators and a certain condition is logically substitutable. As Goertz and Mahoney stated in their classic article, '[a] substitutable relationship refers to a set of secondary-level variables [i.e., the indicators here] that are individually sufficient but not necessary for the presence of a given basic-level variable [i.e., the condition here]; they are various means to attain a given end' (2005: 499). Therefore, in this study, for example, GDP and GDP per capita show the substitutable ways in which the condition of Economy for each province can be observed; the populational base of each case can be determined by either its total population or its population density; the two datasets of Chinese protest events can be used to independently suggest to what degree the protesting province is social unrest on the ground. As a result, the final dataset applicable to fsQCA was constructed, as presented in Table 5.

Table 7-5 Final Data for fsQCA with Logic OR

Case	Conditions					Outcomes				
	Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	Commentary	Rise	Fall	Governance	Total
Province	Logic OR	Logic OR	Logic OR							
Anhui	0.62	0.76	0.76	0.45	0	0.54	0.28	0.54	0.50	0.43
Beijing	0.98	0.96	0.97	1.00	1	0.89	0.22	0.50	0.63	0.64
Chongqing	0.64	0.58	0.46	0.53	1	0.15	0.52	0.38	0.80	0.50
Fujian	0.81	0.54	0.71	0.42	0	0.22	0.35	0.38	0.50	0.27
Gansu	0.11	0.23	0.51	0.12	0	0.05	0.50	0.12	0.05	0.12
Guangdong	0.98	0.97	1.00	0.71	1	0.96	0.95	0.97	0.97	0.99
Guangxi	0.40	0.63	0.80	0.53	0	0.30	0.13	0.38	0.18	0.18
Guizhou	0.20	0.48	0.41	0.17	1	0.50	0.98	0.54	0.50	0.93
Hainan	0.50	0.47	0.29	0.09	0	0.22	0.70	0.65	0.87	0.72
Hebei	0.67	0.85	0.94	0.61	0	0.72	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.62
Heilongjiang	0.28	0.46	0.25	0.05	1	0.30	0.17	0.54	0.05	0.22
Henan	0.80	0.95	0.98	0.62	1	0.81	0.17	0.65	0.80	0.66
Hubei	0.70	0.73	0.80	0.56	1	0.69	0.72	0.78	0.63	0.80
Hunan	0.67	0.80	0.59	0.66	0	0.50	0.52	0.54	0.57	0.53
Inner Mongolia	0.64	0.22	0.21	0.21	0	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.18	0.04
Jiangsu	0.97	0.90	0.93	0.73	0	0.96	0.68	0.69	0.98	0.94
Jiangxi	0.50	0.58	0.60	0.50	0	0.78	0.60	0.81	0.90	0.84
Jilin	0.30	0.25	0.23	0.04	0	0.07	0.17	0.12	0.50	0.10
Liaoning	0.59	0.57	0.52	0.22	1	0.62	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.53
Ningxia	0.49	0.12	0.08	0.05	0	0.11	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.03
Qinghai	0.22	0.05	0.05	0.04	1	0.05	0.07	0.12	0.18	0.05
Shaanxi	0.57	0.50	0.84	0.31	1	0.15	0.35	0.38	0.57	0.27
Shandong	0.92	0.95	0.92	0.76	1	0.94	0.42	0.93	0.92	0.91
Shanghai	0.98	1.00	0.50	0.99	1	0.58	0.10	0.12	0.50	0.20
Shanxi	0.35	0.42	0.66	0.36	0	0.39	0.10	0.12	0.90	0.33
Sichuan	0.72	0.90	0.90	0.72	1	0.78	0.83	0.94	0.57	0.93
Tianjin	0.88	0.94	0.15	0.57	1	0.22	0.04	0.18	0.50	0.09
Tibet	0.14	0.04	0.03	0.21	0	0.02	0.62	0.03	0.18	0.16
Xinjiang	0.52	0.19	0.07	0.64	0	0.50	0.60	0.08	0.05	0.40
Yunnan	0.41	0.60	0.92	0.41	0	0.58	0.96	0.81	0.50	0.93
Zhejiang	0.86	0.73	0.88	0.74	1	0.81	0.87	0.96	0.92	0.96

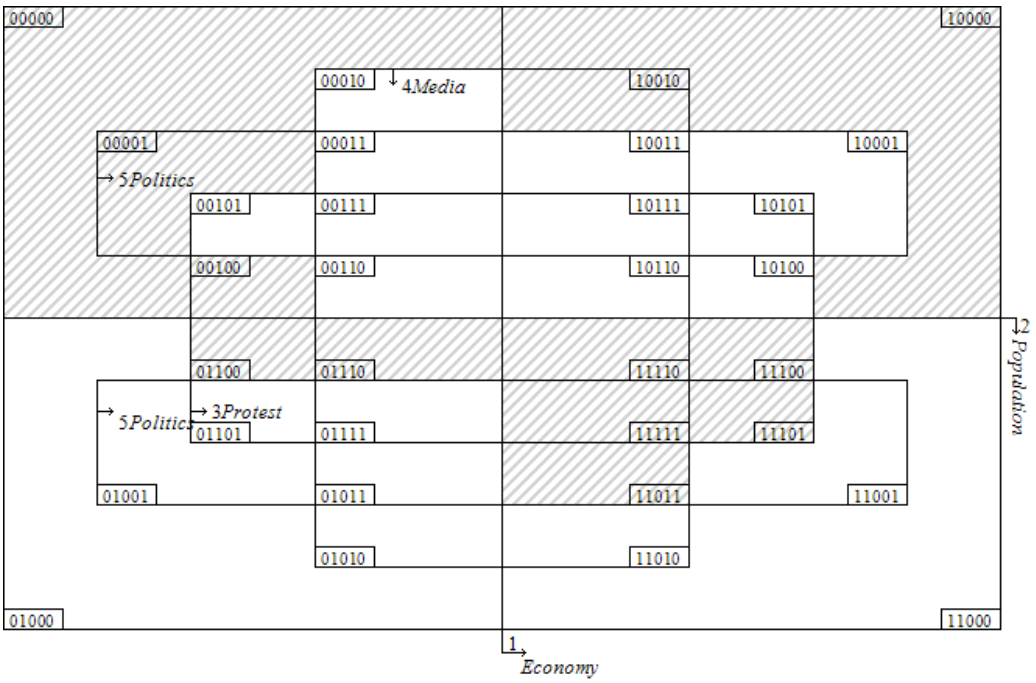
Next, as Ragin argued, '[t]he key to QCA is that it sees cases as configurations of conditions and uses truth tables to represent and analyse them logically' (2008: 155). As depicted in Table 6, the observed cases were assigned to different configurations. Thanks to the programme fsQCA, for each row, the programme reported the number of cases with greater than 0.5 membership, and the table was sorted by the number of cases falling into each configuration. The configuration of ECONOMY, POPULATION, PROTEST, MEDIA, and POLITICS had most cases, i.e., seven provinces in total. In addition, five configurations contained only one case for each. For the other 20 logically possible configurations but lacking empirical instances, they can be considered the logical remainders. In other words, there was no observed case assigned to these certain configurations. Thanks to the programme of TOSMANA (Cronqvist, 2016.), the distribution of cases in all logically possible configurations was presented in a more visualised way in the Venn diagram. As depicted in Figure 6, each cell refers to a special

combination of conditions, and details can be found in the five-digit number as shown in each cell, representing the value of Economy, Population, Protest, Media, and Politics, respectively. According to the Venn diagram, the logical remainders can be detected easily as blank cells, and most of them fell into the configurations involving the combination of ~ECONOMY and POLITICS, PROTEST and ~POPULATION, POPULATION and ~PROTEST, MEDIA and ~POPULATION, POLITICS and ~POPULATION, separately. For all logically possible configurations containing each aforementioned pair of two conditions, there is only one cell identified as the configuration with one observed case and seven of eight configurations are logical remainders. Of course, the existence of logical remainders shows the limited diversity of the dataset, and the solutions generated through fsQCA 'depends on how this remainder is treated' (Ragin, 2008: 155). The most conservative strategy is to treat the logical reminders as false, such that the Boolean logical minimisation can be carried out **e**ntirely based on observed configurations to generate the most detailed solutions. An alternate strategy is to treat logical remainders as the configurations of 'don't care', which 'may be assigned either 1 or 0 on the outcome by fsQCA, depending on which assignment yields a more parsimonious solution' (Ragin, 2008: 138-139). In this chapter, both strategies are used in search of complex and parsimonious causal pathways to each type of outcome.

Table 7-6 Observed Configurations and Logic Remainders

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	Number	Cases
1	1	1	1	1	7	Hubei; Sichuan; Henan; Zhejiang; Shandong; Beijing; Guangdong
0	0	0	0	0	3	Tibet; Jilin; Ningxia
0	0	0	0	1	3	Guizhou; Qinghai; Heilongjiang
1	1	1	1	0	3	Hunan; Hebei; Jiangsu
0	0	1	0	0	2	Gansu; Shanxi
1	1	1	0	0	2	Anhui; Fujian
1	1	0	1	1	2	Chongqing; Tianjin
0	1	1	0	0	1	Yunnan
0	1	1	1	0	1	Guangxi
1	0	0	0	0	1	Inner Mongolia
1	0	0	1	0	1	Xinjiang
1	1	1	0	1	1	Liaoning
0	1	0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	1	0	0	
0	1	0	1	0	0	
0	0	1	1	0	0	
0	1	0	0	1	0	
0	0	1	0	1	0	
0	1	1	0	1	0	
0	0	0	1	1	0	
0	1	0	1	1	0	
0	0	1	1	1	0	
0	1	1	1	1	0	
1	1	0	0	0	0	
1	0	1	0	0	0	
1	1	0	1	0	0	
1	0	1	1	0	0	
1	0	0	0	1	0	
1	1	0	0	1	0	
1	0	1	0	1	0	
1	0	0	1	1	0	
1	0	1	1	1	0	

Figure 7-6 Venn Diagram for All Possible and Observed Configurations



Last but not least, as depicted in Table 5, four cases, i.e., Jiangxi, Hainan, Shaanxi, and Shanghai, had 0.5 membership in certain causal conditions, suggesting the point of maximum ambiguity in the assessment of whether a case is more in or out of a set. Facing any case with a value of 0.5 on a causal condition, Ragin simply suggested that 'it is good practice to avoid, if possible, using the 0.5 membership score …… when assessing the degree of membership in a causal condition' (2005: 131). Some other researchers chose to operationally add a constant of 0.001 to every set value below 1.0 to avoid the allocation of the 0.5 anchor (e.g., Fiss, 2011) or recalibrated each set with an exact 0.5 membership score by adding a small constant (0.001) (e.g., Du and Kim, 2021). In this chapter, the above-mentioned four cases, i.e., Jiangxi, Hainan, Shaanxi, Shanghai, that have 0.5 membership in at least one causal condition are removed and excluded from the employment of logical minimisation in fsQCA, because the 'maximum ambiguity' does matter too and should not be arbitrarily recoded as the presence of a certain condition. Besides, the revised dataset that includes the above-mentioned four cases by operationally adding a constant of 0.001 to certain conditions has also been tested in fsQCA and the results suggest that the inclusion of these cases does not significantly impact the solutions derived from the Boolean logical minimisation.

7.4 Pathways to the Emergence of Protesting Provinces in the Eyes of the State (or Not)

This section explores the complexity of causal mechanisms of the emerging pattern of provinces receiving different types of contentious coverage in the party press and thus explains why protesting provinces caught the state's attention so differently during the harmonious society-building era. The application of fsQCA searches for both sufficient and necessary pathways to certain outcomes and the results of fsQCA suggest logical solutions. As Schneider

and Wagemann suggest that the 'analysis of necessary conditions should be separate from and should precede the analysis of sufficient conditions' (2012: 278), the logical exploration of complex causality for a certain outcome normally starts with a brief analysis of causal necessity. Technically speaking, the detection of causal necessity in fsQCA is determined by the consistency score, which is measured as the percentage that the cases whose membership of the condition is equal to or greater than their membership in the outcome, and it is recommended that the consistency level be no lower than 0.9 (Ragin 2006). In addition, for the detection of causal sufficiency, it relies on the construction of a truth table. The setting of an appropriate consistency threshold is the key to the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations and the raw consistency level is recommend not to be lower than 0.75 (Ragin 2008: 78; Schneider and Wagemann 2012: 279). Ragin also suggests that 'it is always possible to examine several different thresholds and assess the consequences of lowering and raising the consistency cutoff' (2008: 144). Therefore, in this case, different strategies of consistency threshold setting might be applied to fit in the given circumstance of each truth table constructed for a certain outcome and then to choose the most appropriate one to ensure an operationally healthy balance between theoretical richness and solution simplicity, to the greatest extent possible. In the following sections, the causal pathways to the presence of each type of outcome will be presented in the first place. Subsequently, the focus will turn to the absence of each outcome, and the causal mechanisms of the scenes will be explored and disclosed. Lastly, the software programme fs/QCA (Ragin and Davey, 2014) was employed to process the data and conduct necessity and sufficiency analyses for the set-relationships between the configurations of conditions and all types of observed outcomes.

7.4.1 Explaining the Presence of 'Total'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the presence of a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage received by provinces begins with the analysis of causal necessity. According to Table 7, PROTEST, POPULATION, and ECONOMY had the highest consistency values, with 0.88, 0.87, and 0.85, respectively. Nevertheless, given an acceptable consistency threshold commonly set at 0.9, the results suggested that there was no identifiable single causal condition required for the emergence of so-called 'high-profile' cases with the observed outcome of TOTAL.

Table 7-7 Results of Necessity Analysis on TOTAL

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.852577	0.709555
~Economy	0.48728	0.5938
Population	0.868884	0.725095
~Population	0.420744	0.510689
Protest	0.879974	0.751114
~Protest	0.420744	0.494632
Media	0.728637	0.796719
~Media	0.599478	0.541225
Politics	0.566862	0.579333
~Politics	0.433138	0.415

Next, the truth table should be constructed to search for complex sufficient conditions for TOTAL. As shown in Table 8, the threshold of consistency was set at 0.80, and the frequency threshold was set at 1. As a result, a total of six configurations occupied by 14 cases exhibited the consistent presence of Total as the outcomes, i.e., a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage received by the provinces in the party press. The remaining six configurations with 13 cases were labelled as the 'false'.

Table 7-8 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on TOTAL

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	Total	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.920595	0.804878	0.804878
1	1	1	1	1	7	1	0.896552	0.838202	0.903148
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.881579	0.419355	0.419355
1	1	1	1	0	3	1	0.869565	0.713044	0.732143
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0.844687	0.544	0.544
0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0.808219	0.508772	0.508772
1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0.794549	0.481482	0.481481
1	1	0	1	1	2	0	0.713262	0.223301	0.227723
0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0.705	0.337079	0.337079
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.70362	0.268156	0.268156
0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0.683735	0.347826	0.347826
0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.554128	0.162069	0.162069

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for TOTAL, the prime implicant chart was detected during the search for the complex solutions. As depicted in Figure 7, notably, both prime implicants contained a combinatory condition of POPULATION and PROTEST and MEDIA, which can be interpreted as 'being populous, being intense social unrest, and being favoured by the media' at the same time. In this case, all these three prime implicants were selected. As a result, a total of five 'descriptive' and three parsimonious formulae were generated by fsQCA.

Figure 7-7 Prime Implicant Chart for TOTAL

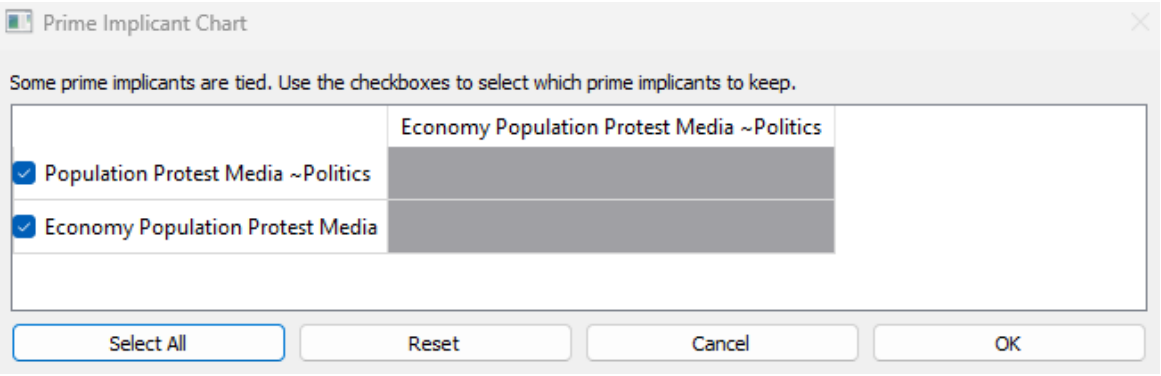


Figure 7-8 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for TOTAL

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.808219
Assumptions:
                                                    raw       unique
                                                   coverage   coverage   consistency
                                                  ----------  ----------  ----------
~Economy*Population*Protest*~Politics             0.23092     0.028702    0.784922
Economy*Population*Protest*Politics               0.4788      0.0717548   0.8707
Economy*~Population*~Protest*Media*~Politics      0.174821    0.028702    0.881579
Population*Protest*Media*~Politics                0.287671    0           0.846449
Economy*Population*Protest*Media                  0.694064    0           0.885192
solution coverage: 0.823875
solution consistency: 0.839761



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.808219
Assumptions:
                          raw       unique
                         coverage   coverage   consistency
                        ----------  ----------  ----------
~Economy*Population     0.442922    0.0450098   0.822034
Media*~Politics         0.317678    0.10698     0.807629
Protest*Politics        0.521853    0.334638    0.830737
solution coverage: 0.88454
solution consistency: 0.796242
```

As depicted in Figure 8, these sufficient pathways to TOTAL can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *without* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *without* close political relations
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *with* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure

that receive a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without a strong local economy *AND with* a large local population

OR

with high media exposure *AND without* close political connections

OR

with intense local unrest *AND with* close political connections

that receive a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage.

Taking a look at the complex solutions in the first place, there are four five-condition recipes and one five-condition recipe. The most sufficient recipe for TOTAL is quite straightforward. A combination of ECONOMY, POPULATION, MEDIA, and PROTEST has the highest raw coverage value of 0.69 and this means that this specific combinatory condition covers about 69.43% of the total membership in the outcome. However, the raw coverage values for the other four complex solutions are at a quite low level, ranging from 0.17 to 0.48. Additionally, what needs to be noted is that all four-condition sufficient solutions consist of a combinatory condition of POPULATION and PROTEST as an indispensable component of the recipes, but the five-condition solution disagrees on it and interestingly indicates an 'un-contentious' pathway constituted by the absence of intense local unrest, i.e., ~PROTEST, in combination with ECONOMY, MEDIA, ~POPULATION and ~POLITICS to a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage in the party press.

As for parsimonious solutions, three two-condition recipes do not hold very high raw coverage values, but they do suggest entirely distinctive ways to the outcome of TOTAL. First and foremost, the most logically sufficient solution is a 'contentious' combination of PROTEST and POLITICS which covers about 52.25% of the total membership in the outcome of TOTAL. By contrast, the other two solutions are logically irrelevant to the condition of Protest at all and thus offer alternative 'non-contentious' pathways to the outcome of TOTAL. The conditions that the protesting provinces successfully 'catch' a relatively large amount of state attention include one of two 'non-contentious' pathways. The first emphasises endogenous attributes of the cases and highlights those 'economically underdeveloped but populous' provinces and the second focuses on exogenous conditions in provinces 'favoured by the media but politically marginalised by the centre'. But, again, what needs to be noted is that the raw coverage scores for these two solutions are merely 0.44 and 0.32.

7.4.2 Explaining the Presence of 'Commentary'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the observed outcome of COMMENTARY also begins with the analysis of causal necessity. As shown in Table 9, notably, a total of three highlighted conditions have consistency values above 0.9, i.e., ECONOMY with 0.93, POPULATION with 0.95, and PROTEST with 0.93. Given an acceptable consistency threshold set at 0.9, it is safe to claim that the presence of a strong local economy, a large local population, and intense local unrest are necessary, respectively, for protesting provinces to receive a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage in the party press during the harmonious society-building era.

Table 7-9 Results of Necessity Analysis for COMMENTARY

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	**0.93232**	0.732899
~Economy	0.468923	0.539746
Population	**0.950276**	0.749048
~Population	0.408149	0.467933
Protest	**0.925414**	0.746103
~Protest	0.411602	0.457055
Media	0.792818	0.81883
~Media	0.574586	0.489988
Politics	0.583563	0.563333
~Politics	0.416436	0.376875

Next, to explore the complexity of sufficient pathways to COMMENTARY, the truth table needs to be constructed. As shown in Table 10, the threshold of consistency was set at 0.8 and the frequency threshold was set at 1. To be more specific, a total of seven configurational combinations occupied by 16 cases were assigned to the 'true' set with consistent outcomes, i.e., a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage. The remaining five configurations with 11 cases were labelled as the configurations leading to the 'false' outcomes.

Table 7-10 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on COMMENTARY

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	Commtentary	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	1	1	1	7	1	0.922414	0.879733	0.893665
1	1	1	1	0	3	1	0.881423	0.684211	0.718232
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0.877384	0.423077	0.423077
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.865132	0.338709	0.35
1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.836228	0.607143	0.607143
0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0.824201	0.388888	0.392
1	1	1	0	0	2	1	0.81761	0.44586	0.448718
1	1	0	1	1	2	0	0.734767	0.119047	0.119047
0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0.725	0.153846	0.153846
0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0.635542	0.0241935	0.0245901
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.613122	0.109375	0.109375
0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.484404	0.0602007	0.0602007

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for COMMENTARY, there was no prime implicant chart

detected. As a result, a total of three 'descriptive' and two parsimonious formulae were generated.

Figure 7-9 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for COMMENTARY

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.81761
Assumptions:
                                                raw       unique
                                              coverage    coverage   consistency
                                             ----------  ----------  ----------
Population*Protest*~Politics                 0.366713    0.0234807   0.757489
Economy*Population*Protest                   0.873619    0.530387    0.876646
Economy*~Population*~Protest*Media*~Politics 0.18163     0.0296962   0.865132
solution coverage: 0.926795
solution consistency: 0.83875


--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.81761
Assumptions:
                        raw       unique
                      coverage    coverage   consistency
                     ----------  ----------  ----------
Media*~Politics      0.338398    0.0296962   0.812604
Population*Protest   0.916436    0.607735    0.828857
solution coverage: 0.946133
solution consistency: 0.814023
```

As Figure 9 shows, these sufficient pathways to COMMENTARY can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

that receive a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

with high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

OR

with a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest

that receive a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage.

Furthermore, the raw coverage scores for these two three-condition solutions and one five-condition solution range from 0.18 through 0.37 to 0.87. It is a 'contentious' pathway constituted by a causal combination of ECONOCONOMY, POPULATION, and PROTEST that enjoys the highest raw coverage value of 0.87. In plain English, this means that 87.34% of observed cases that received a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage in the party press can be logically attributed to a combinatory condition of 'being economically developed, populous and intense social unrest' at the same time. Additionally, the five-condition recipe makes the least contribution to the logical explanation of the outcome of COMMENTARY, thanks to the lowest coverage value of 0.18. But, noted, this five-condition solution has been also identified as the causal pathway to the outcome of TOTAL, with the smallest raw coverage value of 0.17, as illustrated above.

Turning to parsimonious solutions, it is exciting to find a simple two-condition 'contentious' recipe with a raw coverage score as high as 0.92. In other words, a combinatory condition of POPULATION and PROTEST covers about 91.64% of the total membership in the outcome of COMMENTARY. For an alternative 'non-contentious' recipe which does not involve the condition of Protest at all, a combinatory condition of 'being favoured by the media but being marginalised by the state' is sufficient for relatively extensive commentary-related contentious

coverage received by the provinces and covers about 33.84% of the total membership in the outcome. Again, what needs to be reminded here is that such a 'non-contentious' pathway constituted by MEDIA and ~POLITICS is also an identified parsimonious solution to the outcome of TOTAL, with a raw coverage value of 0.31. Therefore, based on the results of fsQCA for the outcome of TOTAL and COMMENTARY, arguably, the sufficient pathways to these two types of outcomes are overlapping to a certain extent.

7.4.3 Explaining the Presence of 'Rise'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the presence of a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage at the provincial level begins with the analysis of causal necessity. As shown in Table 11, three conditions have consistency values above 0.8, i.e., PROTEST with 0.84, POPULATION with 0.82, and ECONOMY with 0.8. But, given an acceptable consistency threshold for a necessary condition commonly set at 0.9, there is no identifiable single condition that is necessary for the emergence of RISE, i.e., a relatively large number of news stories covering the actual happening of mass incidents in the party press.

Table 7-11 Results of Necessity Analysis on RISE

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.801749	0.597177
~Economy	0.588921	0.642289
Population	0.815598	0.609146
~Population	0.540816	0.58749
Protest	0.838192	0.640312
~Protest	0.520408	0.547546
Media	0.701166	0.686163
~Media	0.693878	0.56066
Politics	0.503644	0.460667
~Politics	0.496356	0.425625

Next, the sufficiency analysis for RISE relies on the truth table. As depicted in Table 12, the consistency values are at a quite lower level. There are only two configurations that have higher

consistency values than 0.8. Given such a certain circumstance of truth table construction, 0.75 was eventually chosen as the threshold of consistency and the frequency threshold was still set at 1. As a result, a total of five configurations occupied by eight cases were sufficiently consistent to build set-theoretic explanations from 'RISE', i.e., a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage received by the provinces. The remaining seven configurations with 19 cases in total were labelled as Contradictory configurations from which set-theoretic explanations cannot be built.

Table 7-12 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on RISE

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	Rise	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.858561	0.589928	0.59854
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.845395	0.253968	0.253968
1	1	1	1	0	3	1	0.772727	0.430693	0.486034
0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0.769406	0.391566	0.391566
0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0.755	0.279412	0.281481
0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.749319	0.33813	0.33813
1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0.742138	0.276471	0.276471
1	1	1	1	1	7	0	0.706897	0.523364	0.571428
0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.673395	0.212389	0.229665
0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0.668675	0.3125	0.3125
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.667421	0.140351	0.140351
1	1	0	1	1	2	0	0.663082	0.168142	0.169643

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for RISE, the prime implicant chart was detected during the search for parsimonious solutions. As shown in Figure 10, all three prime implicants involve a combinatory condition of ~MEDIA*POLITICS, which can be interpreted as 'not enjoying high media visibility but having strong Political Relations with the centre'. In this case, PROTEST~MEDIA*POLITICS was selected, because, compared to the condition of ECONOMY and the condition of POPULATION, the presence of a high number of documented protest events on the ground is a much more direct condition that theoretically

leads to a large number of news articles covering the actual happening of the grassroots incidents. As a result, a total of four 'descriptive' and three parsimonious formulae were generated by fsQCA.

Figure 7-10 Prime Implicant Chart for RISE

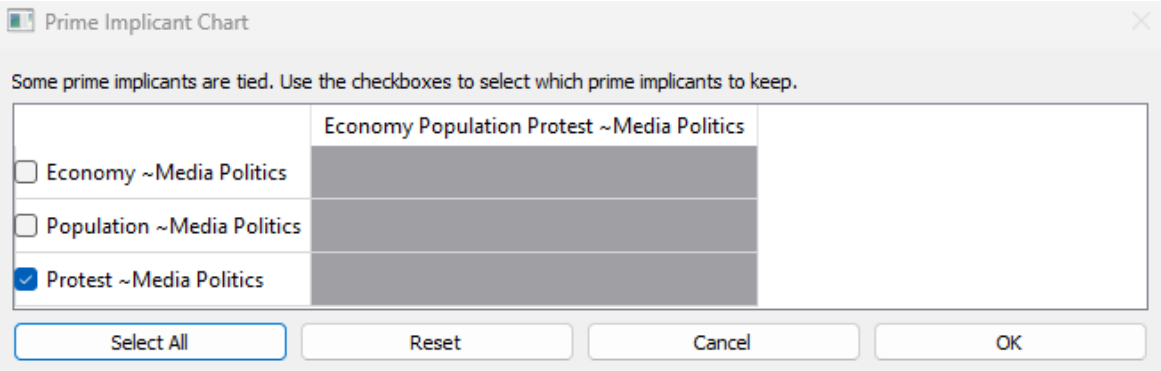


Figure 7-11 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for RISE

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.755
Assumptions:
                                                raw       unique
                                              coverage    coverage   consistency
                                             ----------  ----------  ----------
~Economy*Protest*~Media*~Politics            0.265306    0.0655978   0.745902
Economy*~Population*~Protest*Media*~Politics 0.187318    0.0408164   0.845395
Economy*Population*Protest*Media*~Politics   0.284985    0.0750729   0.772727
Economy*Population*Protest*~Media*Politics   0.252187    0.252187    0.858561
solution coverage: 0.643586
solution consistency: 0.801998



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.755
Assumptions:
                            raw       unique
                          coverage    coverage   consistency
                         ----------  ----------  ----------
~Economy*Protest*~Media  0.468659    0.0655978   0.809824
Economy*Media*~Politics  0.325802    0.126093    0.785589
Protest*~Media*Politics  0.267493    0.0641399   0.828442
solution coverage: 0.658892
solution consistency: 0.787457
```

As Figure 11 shows, these sufficient pathways to RISE can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without a strong local economy AND *with* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure AND *without close political connections*

OR

with a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that receive a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without a strong local economy AND *with* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure

OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

OR

with intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that receive a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage.

Regarding the complex solutions, the most notable point is that the raw coverage scores of all complex solutions, including three five-condition recipes and one four-condition recipe, are at a very low level, ranging from 0.19 to 0.28, and this means that each sufficient pathway only

covers a small proportion of the total membership in the outcome of RISE. Besides, a combinatory condition of ECONOMY, ~POPULATION, ~PROTEST, MEDIA, and ~POLITICS, which have been identified as the sufficient complex pathway to both TOTAL and COMMENTARY above, covers about 18.73% of the total membership in the outcome of RISE as well. But, what it implies is much more interesting here, because it offers an 'un-contentious' pathway that includes the condition of ~PROTEST as an indispensable ingredient of the recipe for RISE. In short, these economically developed and publicly visible provinces can still receive relatively extensive contentious coverage on the actual happening of local contentions in the party press, even if they do not have: close political connections with the centre; a large population base; well-documented intense social unrest.

Although the raw coverage values of all parsimonious solutions are still less than 0.5, ranging from 0.27 to 0.47, the three-condition recipes shed more theoretical light on the sufficient causality of the emergence of RISE. Besides an 'un-political' sufficient pathway led by ECONOMY and MEDIA which can be considered an alternative 'non-contentious' recipe, the most interesting finding lies in the two 'contentious' pathways which unanimously contain a combination of PROTEST and ~MEDIA as an indispensable ingredient of the sufficient recipes for RISE. These two solutions combine PROTEST and ~MEDIA with either ~ECONOMY or POLITICS and thus collaboratively indicate that those provinces that are not favoured by the media but do suffer from intense social unrest can still receive relatively extensive contentious coverage on the actual happening of local contentions, under such conditions of either being economically underdeveloped or having strong local-central relations.

7.4.4 Explaining the Presence of 'Fall'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the presence of a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage received by the provinces begins with the analysis of causal necessity. According to Table 13, it is notable that two highlighted single conditions have consistency values greater than 0.9, i.e., POPULATION with a consistency value of 0.92 and PROTEST with 0.91. Given an acceptable consistency threshold commonly set at 0.9, it is safe to claim that, for protesting provinces, the presence of a large local population and the presence of intense local unrest are necessary, independently, for the observed outcome of FALL, i.e., the provincial reception of a relatively large amount of media coverage on the decline of local contentions.

Table 7-13 Results of Necessity Analysis on FALL

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.869172	0.678067
~Economy	0.510786	0.583466
Population	**0.919972**	0.719652
~Population	0.459986	0.523357
Protest	**0.914405**	0.731626
~Protest	0.421016	0.463957
Media	0.732081	0.750357
~Media	0.637439	0.539458
Politics	0.590814	0.566
~Politics	0.409186	0.3675

Next, to search for complex sufficient conditions for FALL, the truth table needs to be constructed. As shown in Table 14, the threshold of consistency was set at 0.85 and the frequency threshold was still set at 1. As a result, a total of five configurations occupied by a total of 14 cases exhibited the consistent outcomes of 'Fall', i.e., a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage received by the provinces in the party press. The remaining seven configurations with 13 cases were labelled as contradictory configurations with relatively inconsistent outcomes.

Table 7-14 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on FALL

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	Fall	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.945409	0.835821	0.848485
1	1	1	1	0	3	1	0.873518	0.607362	0.692308
1	1	1	1	1	7	1	0.867816	0.783529	0.878628
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0.852861	0.495327	0.495327
1	1	1	0	0	2	1	0.851153	0.462121	0.465649
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0.819635	0.473333	0.473333
0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0.801205	0.282609	0.282609
0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0.715	0.278481	0.278481
1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.697368	0.185841	0.185841
1	1	0	1	1	2	0	0.670251	0.12381	0.12381
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.590498	0.165899	0.165899
0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.455046	0.108108	0.108108

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as ‘false’ or ‘don’t cares’, respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for FALL, there was no prime implicant chart detected. As a result, two ‘descriptive’ and two parsimonious formulae were generated.

Figure 7-12 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for FALL

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.851153
Assumptions:
                                       raw       unique
                                     coverage    coverage   consistency
                                    ----------  ----------  ----------
Economy*Population*Protest          0.835769    0.528184    0.832294
Population*Protest*Media*~Politics  0.308281    0.000695884 0.850288
solution coverage: 0.836465
solution consistency: 0.824417



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.851153
Assumptions:
                      raw       unique
                    coverage    coverage   consistency
                   ----------  ----------  ----------
Economy*Protest    0.844816    0.116214    0.817508
Protest*Media      0.729297    0.000695884 0.859721
solution coverage: 0.845511
solution consistency: 0.81
```

As Figure 12 shows, these sufficient pathways to FALL can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *with* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest
>
> OR
>
> *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

that receive a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

with a strong local economy AND *with* intense local unrest

OR

with intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure

that receive a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage.

First, the most notable complex solution is a three-condition pathway constituted by ECONOCONOMY, POPULATION, and PROTEST, which has the highest raw coverage value of 0.84. This means about 83.58% of the provinces that receive a relatively large amount of contentious coverage on the decline of grassroots incidents in the party press can be logically attributed to a configuration of 'being economically developed, populous and intense social unrest'. What needs to be reminded here is that such a specific solution has also been identified as a sufficient recipe for the outcome of COMMENTARY, with a raw coverage value of 0.87, as illustrated above. Besides, although another four-condition solution has a relatively low raw coverage value of 0.3, it does contain the condition of PROTEST as well, in combination with POPULATION, MEDIA, and ~POLITICS. Thus, the results of fsQCA suggest that the condition of PROTEST is necessary for the sufficient complex pathways to the outcome of FALL and thus both solutions can be labelled as the 'contentious' pathways.

Furthermore, turning to parsimonious solutions, it is notable that both two-condition recipes have pretty high raw coverage values. A combinatory condition of ECONOMY and PROTEST and that of PROTEST and MEDIA covers about 84.48% and 72.93% of the total membership in the outcome of FALL, respectively. Additionally, again, the condition of PROTEST can be easily located in both solutions, so, arguably, PROTEST is a necessary ingredient of both parsimonious recipes for FALL. In other words, both solutions collaboratively constitute the 'contentious' pathway to the presence of a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious

coverage received by provinces. Such interesting findings also recall the results of necessity analysis presented above which identify the condition of PROTEST as a necessary condition of the emergence of FALL. Therefore, it is safe to argue that the results of fsQCA for the outcome of FALL suggest a strong logical association between PROTEST as the condition and FALL as the outcome. In short, the news about 'few' actually emerges from 'many'.

7.4.5 Explaining the Presence of 'Governance'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the observed outcome of GOVERNANCE begins with the process of analysing necessity and the results of causal necessity analysis for every single condition have been shown in Table 15. A total of three conditions have consistency values above 0.8, i.e., ECONOMY with 0.86, POPULATION with 0.86, and PROTEST with 0.85. But, given an acceptable consistency level commonly set at 0.9, there is no identifiable single condition that is necessary for the emergence of a relatively large amount of media coverage on the handling of local contention received by the provinces in the party press.

Table 7-15 Results of Necessity Analysis on GOVERNANCE

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.864671	0.783931
~Economy	0.461677	0.612878
Population	0.862275	0.783887
~Population	0.432335	0.571655
Protest	0.847904	0.788419
~Protest	0.434132	0.555982
Media	0.705389	0.840228
~Media	0.616766	0.606596
Politics	0.541317	0.602667
~Politics	0.458683	0.47875

Next, to explore the complexity of sufficient pathways to GOVERNANCE, the truth table needs to be constructed. As shown in Table 16, the consistency values are at a very high level. There are nine configurations in total having consistency values greater than 0.8. Given such a

certain circumstance of truth table construction, 0.9, a relatively high level, was eventually chosen as the threshold of consistency and the frequency threshold was still set at 1. To be more specific, a total of five configurational combinations occupied by 15 cases were assigned to the 'true' set with consistent outcomes, i.e., the presence of a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage received by the provinces. The remaining seven configurations with 12 cases were labelled as the 'false' configurations that lead to relatively inconsistent outcomes.

Table 7-16 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on GOVERNANCE

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	Governance	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0.97491	0.840909	1
1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.945409	0.842857	0.855072
1	1	1	1	1	7	1	0.931035	0.872341	1
1	1	1	1	0	3	1	0.93083	0.841629	0.849315
1	1	1	0	0	2	1	0.90566	0.727273	0.769231
0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.871935	0.614754	0.614754
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0.853881	0.602484	0.638158
0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0.8175	0.570588	0.570588
1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.80921	0.504273	0.504273
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.708145	0.426667	0.426667
0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0.665663	0.152672	0.155039
0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.592661	0.292994	0.312925

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for GOVERNANCE, there was no prime implicant chart detected. As a result, two 'descriptive' and one parsimonious formula were generated.

Figure 7-13 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for GOVERNANCE

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.90566
Assumptions:
                                      raw       unique
                                    coverage    coverage   consistency
                                   ----------  ----------  ----------
Economy*Population*Protest         0.785629    0.397605    0.909217
Economy*Population*Media*Politics  0.413174    0.0251497   0.870113
solution coverage: 0.810778
solution consistency: 0.879221



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.90566
Assumptions:
                         raw       unique
                       coverage    coverage   consistency
                      ----------  ----------  ----------
Economy*Population    0.826347    0.826347    0.846626
solution coverage: 0.826347
solution consistency: 0.846626
```

As Figure 13 shows, these sufficient pathways to GOVERNANCE can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *with* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest
>
> OR
>
> *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that receive a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population

that receive a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage.

First, taking a look at the complex solutions which consist of one three-condition solution with a raw coverage value of 0.78 and one four-condition solution with a raw coverage value of 0.41, it is a combinatory condition of ECONOMY, POPULATION, and PROTEST that constitutes the most sufficient pathway to the presence of a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage received by the provinces and covers about 78.56% of the cases with an observed outcome of GOVERNANCE. Again, this specific combination of three conditions has already been identified as the sufficient pathway to the presence of three different types of outcomes, i.e., COMMENTARY, FALL, and GOVERNANCE. Besides, another interesting finding is that both complex solutions contain the combinatory condition of ECONOMY and POPULATION and view it as a necessary ingredient of the recipes for GOVERNANCE. But noted, it does not mean that the co-presence of being economically developed and being populous is sufficient for the outcome of GOVERNANCE. Instead, it only becomes sufficient when it is combined with either the presence of intense social unrest or the co-presence of high media visibility and strong local-central relations.

Next, turning to the parsimonious solution, there is only one two-condition recipe detected and its raw coverage score is as high as 0.83. This means that a combinatory condition of ECONOMY and POPULATION covers about 82.63% of the total membership in GOVERNANCE. Such a finding confirms again the aforementioned crucial logical position taken by the combinatory condition of ECONOMY and POPULATION in the sufficient

pathway to the emergence of GOVERNANCE. More importantly, what this parsimonious solution indicates is that the presence of relatively extensive contentious coverage on the handling of local contentions received by the provinces is logically irrelevant to the condition of Protest. Thus, this sufficient parsimonious pathway can be labelled as the 'non-contentious'.

7.4.6 Explaining the Absence of 'Total'

Likewise, the presentation of fsQCA results for the outcome of ~TOTAL also begins with the analysis of causal necessity. As shown in Table 17, there is only one condition that has a consistency value above 0.8, i.e., ~MEDIA with 0.82. Given an acceptable consistency level which was commonly set at 0.9, the results suggest that there is no identifiable single condition that is necessary for the outcome of ~TOTAL, i.e., the absence of a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage received by the provinces in the party press.

Table 7-17 Results of Necessity Analysis on ~TOTAL

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.673899	0.57329
~Economy	0.658583	0.82035
Population	0.605616	0.516603
~Population	0.677728	0.840855
Protest	0.579451	0.505568
~Protest	0.714742	0.858896
Media	0.502872	0.562054
~Media	0.818124	0.755006
Politics	0.40268	0.420667
~Politics	0.59732	0.585

Next, to identify the sufficient pathways to the outcome of ~TOTAL, the truth table needs to be constructed. As shown in Table 18, it is clear that the consistency values are at a pretty high level. Nine of 12 configurations have the consistency values greater than 0.8. Given such a certain circumstance of the truth table, 0.85 was eventually chosen as the threshold of consistency and the frequency threshold was still set at 1. To be more specific, five

configurational combinations occupied by nine cases were assigned to the 'true' set with consistent outcomes of ~TOTAL. The remaining seven configurations with 18 cases in total were labelled as 'false' configurations that lead to relatively inconsistent outcomes of ~TOTAL.

Table 7-18 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on ~TOTAL

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	~Total	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.914474	0.580646	0.580645
0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0.913761	0.837931	0.837931
1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0.910394	0.757281	0.772277
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.891403	0.731844	0.731844
0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0.85	0.662921	0.662921
0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0.831325	0.652174	0.652174
0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.814714	0.456	0.456
1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0.809224	0.518518	0.518519
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0.80137	0.491228	0.491228
1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0.672456	0.195122	0.195122
1	1	1	1	0	3	0	0.664032	0.260869	0.267857
1	1	1	1	1	7	0	0.418103	0.0898877	0.0968523

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for ~TOTAL, the prime implicant chart was detected during the search for parsimonious solutions**.** As shown in Figure 14, all three prime implicants unanimously view the condition of ~PROTEST, which can be interpreted as 'not having a high number of documented protest events on the ground', as an indispensable component of the recipes. In this case, all these three prime implicants were selected. As a result, three 'descriptive' recipes and four parsimonious formulae were generated by fsQCA.

Figure 7-14 Prime Implicant Chart for ~TOTAL

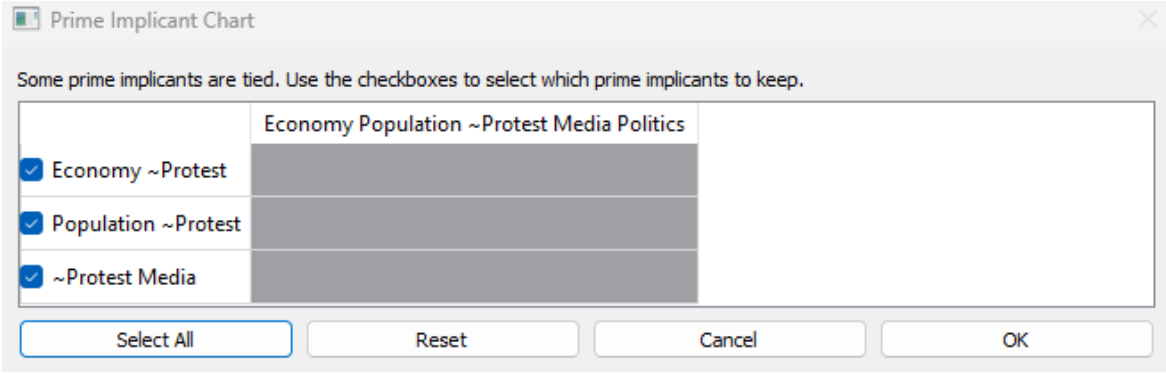


Figure 7-15 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for ~TOTAL

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.85
Assumptions:
                                                raw       unique
                                              coverage    coverage   consistency
                                             ----------  ----------  ----------
~Economy*~Population*~Media*~Politics        0.367581    0.14231     0.876712
Economy*~Population*~Protest*~Politics       0.261646    0.0363752   0.895197
Economy*Population*~Protest*Media*Politics   0.162093    0.162093    0.910394
solution coverage: 0.56605
solution consistency: 0.892354



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.85
Assumptions:
                            raw       unique
                          coverage    coverage   consistency
                         ----------  ----------  ----------
~Population*~Politics    0.458839    0.179962    0.855952
Economy*~Protest         0.497128    0.0108488   0.908985
Population*~Protest      0.424378    0.0114869   0.865885
~Protest*Media           0.363114    0           0.911859
solution coverage: 0.705807
solution consistency: 0.8607
```

As Figure 15 shows, these sufficient pathways to ~TOTAL can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

OR

with a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* close political connections

OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that fail to receive a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without a large local population AND *without* close political relations

OR

with a strong local economy AND *without* intense local unrest

OR

with a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest

OR

without intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure

that fail to receive a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage.

First, as depicted in Figure 15, the raw coverage values for two four-condition complex solutions and one five-condition complex solution range from 0.16 to 0.37, at a relatively low level. This means that each recipe covers no more than 40% of the total membership in ~TOTAL. The complex solutions distinguish one 'non-contentious' pathway, which is logically irrelevant to the condition of Protest, from two 'un-contentious' pathways that share the condition of ~PROTEST in common. Two interesting findings need to be noted here. First, the 'non-contentious' combinatory condition of ~ECONOMY, ~POPULATION, ~MEDIA. and ~POLITICS, with the highest raw coverage score at 0.37, simply implies the fully

disadvantaged provinces are more likely to fail to receive a relatively large amount of contentious coverage in the party press in total, regardless of whether they are intense social unrest or not. Second, for other two solutions, they not only view the condition of ~PROTEST as an indispensable ingredient of the sufficient recipes but also agree that a combination of ECONOMY and ~PROTEST is necessary for the sufficient 'un-contentious' pathways to the outcome of '~TOTAL'.

With respect to the simpler pathways sufficiently leading to the outcome of ~TOTAL, the raw coverage values for all four two-condition parsimonious solutions are smaller than 0.5, ranging from 0.36 to 0.49. Such a relatively low level of raw coverage values indicates that each recipe covers less than half of the cases with the outcome of ~TOTAL. The parsimonious solutions also suggest a distinction between one 'non-contentious' pathway and a set of 'un-contentious pathway' to the outcome of ~TOTAL. The 'non-contentious' pathway is logically reduced to a combination of ~POPULATION and ~POLITICS and it covers about 45.83% of the total membership in ~TOTAL. In short, it is the co-presence of 'not being populous and being marginalised by the central state' that leads the provinces to the absence of a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage received. Besides, taking a look at three 'un-contentious' pathways to the ~TOTAL, the results of fsQCA further confirm the interesting finding derived from the complex solutions. It is the combination of ECONOMY and ~PROTEST, thanks to the highest raw coverage value, that constitutes the most sufficient pathway to the ~TOTAL and nearly half of the cases with the outcome of ~TOTAL can be logically explained by the co-presence of 'being economically developed and not being intense social unrest'.

7.4.7 Explaining the Absence of 'Commentary'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the absence of COMMENTARY begins with the analysis of causal necessity. As shown in Table 19, only one condition has a consistency value greater than 0.8, i.e., ~MEDIA with 0.85. Given an acceptable consistency level set at 0.9, there is no identifiable single condition that is necessary for the absence of COMMENTARY, i.e., the absence of a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage received by the provinces in the party press.

Table 7-19 Results of Necessity Analysis on ~COMMENTARY

Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.649516	0.582519
~Economy	0.702179	0.922099
Population	0.59322	0.533478
~Population	0.720944	0.942993
Protest	0.571429	0.525613
~Protest	0.723971	0.917178
Media	0.475787	0.560628
~Media	0.846247	0.823322
Politics	0.396489	0.436667
~Politics	0.603511	0.623125

Next, to identify the sufficient pathways to the outcome of ~COMMENTARY, the truth table needs to be constructed. As shown in Table 20, it is clear that the consistency values are at a very high level. Seven configurations have the consistency values greater than 0.95 and there are only three configurations that have the consistency values below 0.8. Given such a certain circumstance of the truth table, the threshold of consistency was eventually set at a relatively high level, i.e., 0.9, and the frequency threshold was still set at 1. To be more specific, a total of five configurations occupied by 11 cases was assigned to the 'true' set with consistent outcomes of ~COMMENTARY. The remaining seven configurations with 16 cases in total were labelled as 'false' configurations that lead to relatively inconsistent outcomes.

Table 7-20 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on ~COMMENTARY

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	~Commtentary	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0.98494	0.959677	0.97541
0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0.966972	0.939799	0.939799
1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0.964158	0.880953	0.880952
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.952489	0.890625	0.890625
0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0.95	0.846154	0.846154
1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.924342	0.629032	0.65
0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.910082	0.576923	0.576923
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0.885845	0.603175	0.608
1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0.851153	0.547771	0.551282
1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0.746898	0.392857	0.392857
1	1	1	1	0	3	0	0.725296	0.268421	0.281768
1	1	1	1	1	7	0	0.422414	0.104677	0.106335

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for ~COMMENTARY, the prime implicant chart was detected during the search for parsimonious solutions. As shown in Figure 16, both prime implicants view the condition of ~PROTEST, which can be interpreted as 'not having a high number of documented protest events on the ground', as an indispensable component of the recipes. In this case, both prime implicants were selected. As a result, four 'descriptive' recipes and three parsimonious formulae were generated by fsQCA.

Figure 7-16 Prime Implicant Chart for ~COMMENTARY

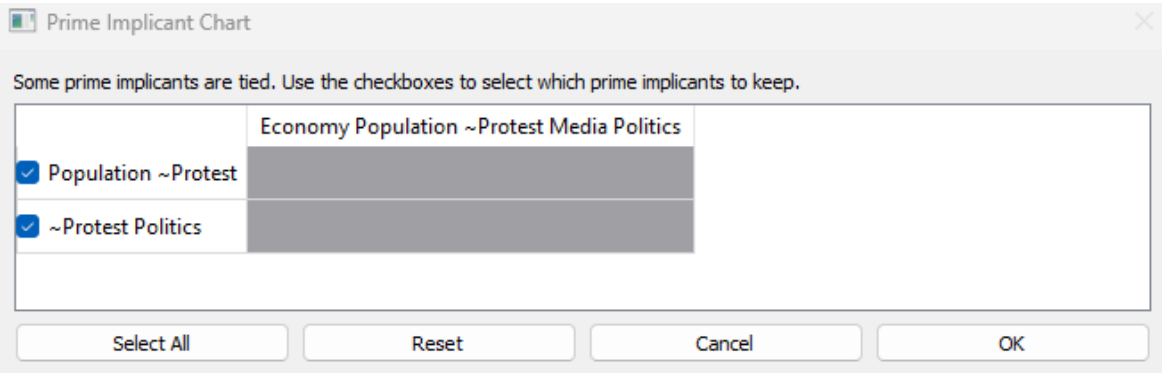


Figure 7-17 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for ~COMMENTARY

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.95
Assumptions:
                                                raw       unique
                                              coverage    coverage   consistency
                                             ----------  ----------  ----------
~Population*~Protest*~Media*~Politics        0.378329    0.059322    0.967492
~Economy*~Population*~Media*~Politics        0.385593    0.0665859   0.969559
~Economy*~Population*~Protest*~Media         0.516949    0.104116    0.973774
Economy*Population*~Protest*Media*Politics   0.162833    0.0690072   0.964158
solution coverage: 0.711864
solution consistency: 0.968699



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.95
Assumptions:
                          raw       unique
                        coverage    coverage   consistency
                       ----------  ----------  ----------
~Population*~Media     0.699758    0.294794    0.966555
Population*~Protest    0.435835    0.0127119   0.9375
~Protest*Politics      0.300242    0.00968522  0.92365
solution coverage: 0.800847
solution consistency: 0.947029
```

As Figure 17 shows, these sufficient pathways to ~COMMENTARY can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *without* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *without* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure

OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without a large local population AND *without* high media exposure

OR

with a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest

OR

without intense local unrest AND *with* close political connections

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage.

As shown above, the complex solutions to the outcome of ~COMMENTARY consist of three four-condition solutions and one five-condition solution. However, there is only one recipe that has a raw coverage score higher than 0.5 and it is a combinatory condition of ~ECONOMY, ~POPULATION, ~PROTEST and ~MEDIA that covers about 51.69% of the membership in the outcome. Additionally, one 'non-contentious' pathway which suggests the outcome of ~COMMENTARY is logically irrelevant to the condition of Protest and can be distinguished from the other three 'un-contentious' pathways which unanimously view ~PROTEST as a crucial component of the recipes for the outcome ~COMMENTARY. Nearly 38.56% of the cases with the outcome of ~COMMENTARY can be explained by the 'non-contentious' combinatory condition of ~ECONOMY, ~POPULATION, ~MEDIA and ~POLITICS. This 'non-contentious' sufficient pathway to the outcome of ~COMMENTARY has been identified as the sufficient pathway to the outcome of ~TOTAL as well, as discussed above. Additionally, so does the five-condition pathway constituted by ECONOMY, POPULATION, ~PROTEST,

MEDIA, and POLITICS. In short, based on the results of fsQCA, these two distinctive sufficient pathways can not only lead the provinces to the outcome of ~TOTAL but also to the outcome of ~COMMENTARY.

Turning the focus to parsimonious solutions, there are three two-condition solutions identified. The raw coverage values for all solutions range from 0.3 to 0.7. The most sufficient solution is the only 'non-contentious' pathway constituted by ~POPULATION and ~MEDIA and it covers about 69.98% of the membership in the outcome. In plain language, 69.98% of the provinces that failed to receive a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage can be explained by the co-presence of 'not being populous and not being favoured by the media'. Other two 'un-contentious' pathways view the condition of ~PROTEST as an indispensable component and combine it with POPULATION and POLITICS, respectively, to constitute the sufficient recipes for the outcome of ~COMMENTARY. Notably, a combinatory condition of POPULATION and ~PROTEST has also been identified as the parsimonious sufficient pathway to the outcome of ~TOTAL, with a raw coverage value of 0.42. Therefore, again, the results show the same pathway can lead the cases to distinctive destinations.

7.4.8 Explaining the Absence of 'Rise'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the outcome of ~RISE begins with the analysis of causal necessity. As shown in Table 21, the results of necessity analysis for every single condition suggest that none of them has a consistency level even close to 0.9. It is ECONOMY and ~MEDIA that have the consistency values greater than 0.7. Given an acceptable consistency level commonly set at 0.9, there is no identifiable single condition that is necessary for the

absence of a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage received by the provinces in the party press,

Table 7-21 Results of Necessity Analysis on ~RISE

Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.739583	0.693811
~Economy	0.570602	0.783784
Population	0.698495	0.65705
~Population	0.584491	0.799683
Protest	0.658565	0.63363
~Protest	0.626157	0.829755
Media	0.568287	0.700428
~Media	0.74537	0.758539
Politics	0.468171	0.539333
~Politics	0.531829	0.574375

Next, to further explore the complexity of sufficient pathways to ~RISE, the truth table needs to be constructed. As shown in Table 22, it is easy to find that the consistency values observed in all configurations are at a pretty high level. There are only three configurations that have smaller consistency values than 0.8. In this case, 0.9, a relatively high level, was eventually chosen as the threshold of consistency and the frequency threshold was set at 1. To be more specific, five configurations occupied by eight cases were assigned to the 'true' set with the consistent absence of a relatively large amount of contentious coverage received by the provinces. The remaining seven observed configurations with 19 cases were labelled as 'false' configurations that lead to relatively inconsistent outcomes.

Table 7-22 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on ~RISE

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	~Rise	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.947368	0.746032	0.746032
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.945701	0.859649	0.859649
1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0.928315	0.823009	0.830357
0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0.9025	0.713235	0.718518
1	1	1	0	0	2	1	0.901467	0.723529	0.723529
0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.880734	0.712389	0.770335
0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.871935	0.66187	0.661871
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0.851598	0.608434	0.608434
0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0.849398	0.6875	0.6875
1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0.791563	0.395683	0.40146
1	1	1	1	0	3	0	0.782609	0.455446	0.513967
1	1	1	1	1	7	0	0.626437	0.392523	0.428571

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for ~RISE, the prime implicant chart was detected during the search for parsimonious solutions. As shown in Figure 18, both prime implicants include the condition of ~PROTEST, which can be interpreted as 'not having a high number of documented protest events on the ground', as an indispensable component of the recipes. In this case, both prime implicants were selected. As a result, four 'descriptive' recipes and three parsimonious formulae were generated by fsQCA.

Figure 7-18 Prime Implicant Chart for ~RISE

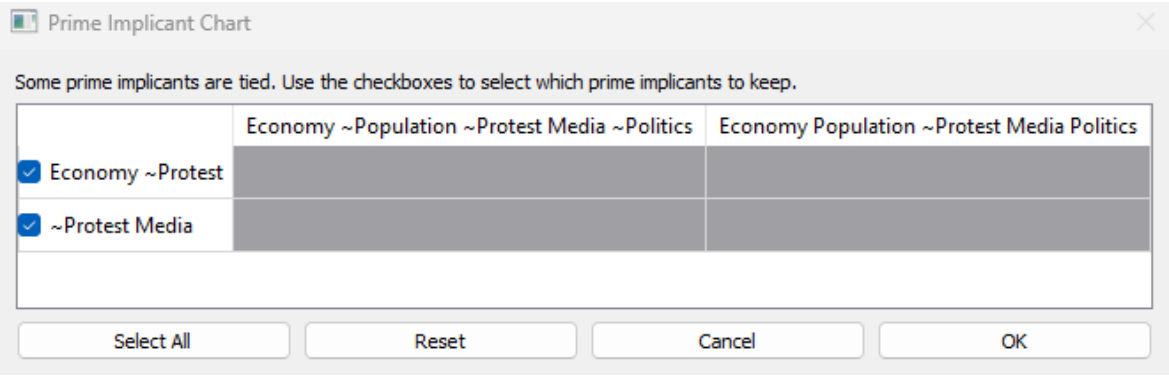


Figure 7-19 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for ~RISE

```
--- TRUTH TABLE SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.901467
Assumptions:
                                                    raw       unique
                                                  coverage    coverage   consistency
                                                 ----------  ----------  ----------
Economy*~Population*~Protest*~Politics           0.244213    0.0787037   0.921397
~Economy*~Population*Protest*~Media*~Politics    0.208912    0.0358797   0.9025
Economy*Population*Protest*~Media*~Politics      0.248843    0.0677083   0.901467
Economy*Population*~Protest*Media*Politics       0.149884    0.149884    0.928315
solution coverage: 0.51331
solution consistency: 0.898683



--- TRUTH TABLE SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.901467
Assumptions:
                             raw       unique
                           coverage    coverage   consistency
                          ----------  ----------  ----------
~Population*Protest       0.367477    0.0636574   0.873453
Economy*~Media*~Politics  0.327546    0.0503471   0.894155
Economy*~Protest          0.461227    0.0306712   0.929988
~Protest*Media            0.333333    0.00405091  0.923077
solution coverage: 0.60706
solution consistency: 0.874166
```

As figure 19 shows, these sufficient pathways to ~RISE can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *with* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *without* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest

OR

with a strong local economy AND *without* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections

OR

with a strong local economy AND *without* intense local unrest

OR

without intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage.

Regarding the complex solutions, the most notable point is that the raw coverage scores of all complex solutions, including three five-condition recipes and one four-condition recipe, are at a very low level, ranging from 0.15 to 0.25, and this means that each sufficient pathway only covers about a small proportion of the total membership in the outcome of ~RISE. Besides, the results show that these four complex solutions agree that the absence of a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage received by the provinces is not logically irrelevant to the condition of Protest, because there are two 'contentious' solutions including the condition of PROTEST and two 'un-contentious' solutions that contain the condition of ~PROTEST. Another point needs to be stressed is that the combinatory condition of ECONOMY, POPULATION, ~PROTEST, MEDIA, POLITICS, as a sufficient recipe for ~RISE, has already been identified as the complex sufficient pathway to the outcome of ~TOTAL and ~COMMENTARY, respectively, as well. Lastly, these complex solutions

derived from the fsQCA are indeed not ideal and quite 'messy', and thus do not offer a strong basis for set-theoret insights into the exploration of causal mechanisms.

Next, there are three two-condition solutions and one three-condition solution identified as the parsimonious pathways to ~RISE, with the raw coverage values all below 0.5, but they shed some theoretical light on the sufficient causality. First, the most interesting finding is the 'contentious' pathway to the absence of a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage received by the provinces. As indicated by the configuration of ~POPULATION and PROTEST, 36.75% of the provinces that failed to receive relatively extensive contentious coverage on the actual happening of local contentions can be explained by the co-presence of 'not being populous but suffering from intense social unrest'. In other words, for those provinces with small local populations, even if they did witness a well-documented high number of mass incidents on the ground, they were still likely to receive a relatively small amount of rise-related contentious coverage. Second, the 'non-contentious' pathway constituted by a combinatory condition of ECONOMY, ~MEDIA and ~POLITICS also interestingly indicates that the lack of both communicative channels, in combination with the presence of a strong local economy, covers 32.75% of the provinces with the outcome of ~RISE. In plain language, 'economically developed provinces but being marginalised by the media and the state at the same time' are unlikely to receive a relatively great amount of rise-related contentious coverage, regardless of whether they experience intense social unrest or not. Lastly, one of the two 'un-contentious' solution is the most sufficient pathway to the outcome of ~RISE, 'being economically developed and not suffering from intense social unrest' covers 46.12% of provinces that failed to receive extensive contentious coverage on the actual happening of local contentions. Therefore, all three distinctive types of sufficient pathways,

i.e., ‘contentious’, ‘un-contentious’, and ‘non-contentious’, to the outcome of ~RISE have been identified.

7.4.9 Explaining the Absence of ‘Fall’

The presentation of fsQCA results for the outcome of ~FALL begins with the analysis of causal necessity. As shown in Table 23, the results of necessity analysis for every single condition indicate that, unfortunately, none of them has a consistency level even close to 0.9. It is ~MEDIA that has the highest consistency values of 0.78. Given an acceptable consistency level commonly set at 0.9, there is no single condition that is necessary for the outcome of ~FALL, i.e., the absence of a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage received by the provinces in the party press.

Table 7-23 Results of Necessity Analysis on ~FALL

Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.684907	0.61835
~Economy	0.643416	0.850556
Population	0.638004	0.577572
~Population	0.690319	0.908947
Protest	0.579675	0.536748
~Protest	0.710162	0.905675
Media	0.529766	0.628388
~Media	0.789537	0.773263
Politics	0.391461	0.434
~Politics	0.608539	0.6325

Next, the truth table needs to be constructed to fully explore the complexity of sufficient pathways to ~FALL. As shown in Table 24, it is easy to find that the consistency values for all observed configurations are at a pretty high level. Nine configurations have the consistency values greater than 0.8. Given such a certain circumstance of the truth table, 0.9, a relatively high level, was eventually chosen as the threshold of consistency and the frequency threshold was still set at 1. To be more specific, five configurations occupied by 10 cases were assigned

to the ‘true’ set with consistent outcomes of ~FALL. The remaining seven observed configurations with a total of 17 cases were labelled as ‘false’ configurations that lead to relatively inconsistent outcomes.

Table 7-24 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on ~FALL

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	~Fall	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0.953405	0.87619	0.87619
0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0.933945	0.891892	0.891892
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.930921	0.81416	0.81416
0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0.921687	0.717391	0.717391
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.918552	0.834101	0.834101
0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0.89	0.721519	0.721519
1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0.870021	0.530303	0.534351
0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0.855586	0.504673	0.504673
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0.8379	0.526667	0.526667
1	1	1	1	0	3	0	0.764822	0.269939	0.307692
1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0.717121	0.149254	0.151515
1	1	1	1	1	7	0	0.45546	0.108235	0.121372

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were accordingly derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as ‘false’ or ‘don’t cares’, respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for GOVERNANCE, there was no prime implicant chart detected. As a result, three ‘descriptive’ recipes and one parsimonious formula were generated by fsQCA.

Figure 7-20 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for ~FALL

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.918552
Assumptions:
                                                raw       unique
                                              coverage    coverage   consistency
                                             ----------  ----------  ----------
~Economy*~Population*~Protest*~Media         0.490078    0.185207    0.929305
Economy*~Population*~Protest*~Politics       0.253758    0.0348768   0.921398
Economy*Population*~Protest*Media*Politics   0.159952    0.0739627   0.953405
solution coverage: 0.598918
solution consistency: 0.94051



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.918552
Assumptions:
               raw       unique
             coverage    coverage   consistency
            ----------  ----------  ----------
~Protest    0.710162    0.710162    0.905675
solution coverage: 0.710162
solution consistency: 0.905675
```

As Figure 20 shows, these sufficient pathways to ~FALL can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *without* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without intense local unrest

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage.

Taking a look at the complex solutions in the first place, there are two four-condition solutions and one five-condition solution detected in total. However, noted, the raw coverage scores of all three solutions are lower than 0.5, ranging from 0.16 to 0.49, and this means that each sufficient recipe covers no more than 50% of the total membership in the outcome of ~FALL. The most sufficient pathway is constituted by a combination of ~ECONOMY, ~POPULATION, ~PROTEST and ~MEDIA, and nearly half of the membership in the outcome of ~FALL can be explained by this recipe. Besides, the most important finding is that all three sufficient solutions share the condition of ~PROTEST in common and view it as an indispensable ingredient of the recipes for ~FALL. Therefore, arguably, the absence of intense local unrest is a necessary condition for all sufficient pathways to the absence of a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage received by the provinces. In other words, the results of fsQCA suggest an interesting logical association between ~PROTEST and ~FALL and all sufficient pathways to the outcome of ~FALL can be labelled as the 'un-contentious'.

The parsimonious solution obtained is very straightforward. The condition of ~PROTEST is sufficient for the outcome of ~FALL and covers 71.06% of the provinces that fail to receive a relatively large amount of fall-related contentious coverage. In plain language, those provinces which do not suffer from intense social unrest on the ground are unlikely to receive extensive contentious coverage on the decline of local contentions either. Thus, this one-condition

sufficient solution further confirms the observed strong logical association between ~PROTEST as the condition and ~FALL as the outcome. In short, such an interesting finding about the causal mechanism of the emergence of ~FALL can be generalised as 'no protest happened, no news about no protest happened either'.

7.4.10 Explaining the Absence of 'Governance'

The presentation of fsQCA results for the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE begins with the analysis of causal necessity. As shown in Table 25, the results of necessity analysis for every single condition indicate that there is only one condition that has a consistency value greater than 0.8, i.e., ~MEDIA with 0.84. Given an acceptable consistency level commonly set at 0.9, there is no identifiable single condition that is necessary for the absence of a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage received by the provinces in the party press.

Table 7-25 Results of Necessity Analysis on ~Governance

Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
Economy	0.659441	0.511944
~Economy	0.721678	0.82035
Population	0.621678	0.483941
~Population	0.722378	0.817894
Protest	0.595105	0.473831
~Protest	0.734266	0.805215
Media	0.532867	0.543509
~Media	0.843357	0.710247
Politics	0.416783	0.397333
~Politics	0.583217	0.52125

Next, to further explore the complexity of sufficient pathways to the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE, the truth table needs to be constructed. As shown in Table 26, it is evident that the consistency values are at a relatively low level. There are only three configurations that have higher consistency values than 0.8. Given such a certain circumstance of the truth table construction, 0.78 was eventually chosen as the threshold of consistency and the frequency

threshold was still set at 1. To be more specific, six configurations occupied by 11 cases were assigned to the 'true' set with consistent outcomes of ~GOVERNANCE, i.e., the absence of a relatively larger amount of media coverage on the handling of mass incidents received by provinces in the party press. The remaining six observed configurations with 16 cases in total were labelled as the 'false' configurations that lead to relatively inconsistent outcomes.

Table 7-26 Truth Table for Sufficiency Analysis on ~Governance

Economy	Population	Protest	Media	Politics	number	~Governance	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0.933735	0.832061	0.844962
1	1	0	1	1	2	1	0.842294	0	0
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0.805921	0.495727	0.495727
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0.79564	0.385246	0.385246
0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0.794495	0.643312	0.687075
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.782805	0.573333	0.573333
0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0.757991	0.341615	0.361842
0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0.7575	0.429412	0.429412
1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0.72956	0.218182	0.230769
1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0.702233	0.142857	0.144928
1	1	1	1	0	3	0	0.628459	0.149321	0.150685
1	1	1	1	1	7	0	0.45977	0	0

Then, the most detailed solutions and parsimonious solutions were derived from the Boolean logical minimisation of observed configurations, by assuming all logical remainders as 'false' or 'don't cares', respectively. In this minimisation process of exploring the complexity of causal sufficiency for GOVERNANCE, there was no prime implicant chart detected. As a result, four 'descriptive' and two parsimonious formulae were generated by fsQCA.

Figure 7-21 Complex and Parsimonious Recipes for ~GOVERNANCE

```
--- TRUTH TABLE COMPLEX SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.782805
Assumptions:
                                                  raw       unique
                                                 coverage    coverage   consistency
                                                ----------  ----------  ----------
~Economy*~Population*~Protest*~Media            0.51958     0.209091    0.847206
Economy*~Population*~Protest*~Politics          0.253147    0.0377623   0.790393
~Economy*Population*Protest*Media*~Politics     0.204196    0.0783218   0.79564
Economy*Population*~Protest*Media*Politics      0.164336    0.0699301   0.842294
solution coverage: 0.705594
solution consistency: 0.847187



--- TRUTH TABLE PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1
consistency cutoff: 0.782805
Assumptions:
                      raw       unique
                     coverage    coverage   consistency
                    ----------  ----------  ----------
~Protest            0.734266    0.454545    0.805215
~Economy*Media      0.393007    0.113287    0.852807
solution coverage: 0.847552
solution consistency: 0.814516
```

As Figure 21 shows, these sufficient pathways to ~GOVERNANCE can be interpreted as follows:

The complex solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

> *without* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* high media exposure
>
> OR
>
> *with* a strong local economy AND *without* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR
>
> *without* a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *with* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *without* close political connections
>
> OR

with a strong local economy AND *with* a large local population AND *without* intense local unrest AND *with* high media exposure AND *with* close political connections

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage.

The parsimonious solutions suggest that it is the provinces,

without intense local unrest

OR

without a strong local economy AND *with* high media exposure

that fail to receive a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage.

First, there are two four-condition solutions and two five-condition solutions detected as the complex solutions. The raw coverage values for all these sufficient pathways to the outcome ~GOVERNANCE range from 0.15 to 0.52, at a pretty low level. Compared to other solutions, a combinatory condition of ~ECONOMY, ~POPULATION, ~PROTEST and ~MEDIA is the most sufficient recipe and covers about approximately half of the total membership in the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE. Besides, the complex solutions also distinguish one 'contentious' pathway to the absence of a relatively large amount of governance-related contentious coverage received by the provinces from the other three 'un-contentious' pathways which unanimously view the condition of '~PROTEST' as an indispensable ingredient of the recipes. More importantly, these three 'un-contentious' pathways to ~GOVERNANCE have already been identified as *all* solutions to the outcome of ~FALL as well, as illustrated above. Therefore, the results of fsQCA suggest that the sufficient pathways to the outcome of ~FALL are fully covered by the sufficient pathways to outcome of ~GOVERNANCE. In other words, those provinces which do not receive extensive contentious coverage on the decline of local contentions are very unlikely to receive a relatively large amount of contentious coverage on the handling of local contentions either.

The parsimonious solutions, including one one-condition solution and one two-condition solution, with the raw coverage values at 0.73 and 0.39, respectively, further advance the theoretical understanding of sufficient pathways to the emergence of ~GOVERNANCE in a very straightforward way. The most sufficient parsimonious solution is the single condition of ~PROTEST, a direct 'un-contentious' pathway, which covers more than 70% of the total membership in the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE. In plain English, this solution indicates that the provinces 'not witnessing intense local unrest' are unlikely to receive relatively extensive contentious coverage on the handling of mass incidents in the party press. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that ~PROTEST is the only parsimonious sufficient recipe, with a raw coverage value of 0.71, for the outcome of ~FALL as well. Therefore, the results of fsQCA reconfirm that the sufficient pathway to ~FALL is fully logically covered by the sufficient pathway to ~GOVERNANCE. Besides such a 'un-contentious' pathway, the results of fsQCA also offer an alternative 'non-contentious' pathway to the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE and it is a combinatory condition of ~ECONOMY and MEDIA, which can be understood as the economically underdeveloped provinces, even being favoured by the media, is unlikely to receive a relatively large amount of contentious coverage on the handling of local contentions, regardless of whether they suffer from intense social unrest or not.

7.5 Discussion and Conclusion

Focusing on the observable interactions between protesting signals sent from within the provinces and journalistic responses of the party press as the institutional outcome, this chapter is dedicated to a comprehensive examination of not only the media-protest relations in China but also the mediated relations between the state and local contentions at the provincial level

during the harmonious society-building era. This chapter began with a direct challenge to the 'happening'-centred news-making logic of contentious coverage which was widely adopted by the researchers as the presumption of studies on the topic of media-protest relations. Then, this chapter advances a multi-dimensional understanding of contentious coverage by offering an innovative typology, which includes the category of Commentary, Rise, Fall and Governance, to stress the diversified journalistic relations built between the media and the incidents particularly in the authoritarian regime like China. Such a diversification of contentious coverage also enables researchers to situate the reported regions within contentious coverage geographically, such that a multi-faceted understanding of the state-initiated contentious public sphere can be gained based on various mediated relations between the state and local contentions built through the party mouthpiece. As a result, a complex landscape emerges of local contentions in the eyes of the state and the unequal distribution of state attention channelled through different types of contentious coverage on the reported regions at a provincial level. The chapter concludes with a discussion about why protesting provinces took different positions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and selects five causal conditions and proposes a theoretical framework to tentatively explore the causal mechanisms of the complex scenes.

First, for the provincial reception of contentious coverage in total, the results of fsQCA presented in this chapter suggest three generalised, distinctive, and theoretically informative causal pathways to the outcome of TOTAL. A combination of PROTEST and POLITICS constitutes the only 'contentious' solution. As discussed earlier, the condition of Protest implies the strength of protesting signals sent from the grassroots; the condition of Political Relations not only indicates the positions taken by the provinces in the political arena, but also can be considered a communicative channel built between the local and the central through which the

protesting signals can be transmitted. Therefore, this 'contentious' pathway to the outcome of TOTAL can be labelled as 'politically signalling' approach, which reflects the news-making logic of journalistic professionalism and is facilitated by the political communicative channels. The second identified solution is a 'non-contentious' combination of ~ECONOMY and POPULATION, which can be understood from the classic idea of 'weapon of the poor'. On the one hand, from a grassroots perspective, such a combinatory condition implies an underdeveloped region but with a huge populational potential for local mobilisation. On the other hand, from the state's perspective, it prioritises the risky issue of social stability in poor regions. Therefore, in other words, although this recipe does logically involve the condition of Protest, but what it suggests is that a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage received by the provinces is driven by the concern of potentially emerging 'weapon of the poor' on the ground. Another 'non-contentious' pathway constituted by a combination of MEDIA and ~POLITICS reflects the party press's institutional continuity and practical consistency in the process of news-making particularly for those provinces lacking the strong local-central relations. Briefly speaking, politically marginalised regions but generally favoured by the media can still receive a relatively large total amount of contentious coverage on local contentions, regardless of whether they suffer from intense social unrest or not. Clearly, this is rooted in the mechanism of media bias and the selective bias in particular, such that this 'non-contentious' pathway to the outcome of TOTAL can be termed as a 'biased news-making' approach. In summary, thanks particularly to the parsimonious solutions detected by fsQCA**,** this chapter finds three main distinctive approaches to the provincial receptions of extensive contentious coverage on local contentions in general. More importantly, these findings set the logical baselines not only for further exploration of causal mechanisms of the emergence of each type of contentious coverage but also for the further comparisons of various news-making rationales adopted by the party press and the state for different purposes.

Second, the most important finding offered in this chapter is a strong logical association between the condition of Protest and the outcome of Fall. On the one hand, the results of fsQCA suggest that the condition of PROTEST, i.e., the presence of well-documented intense social unrest witnessed by the provinces, is not only necessary for the presence of a relative larger amount of contentious coverage on the decline of local contentions received by the provinces, but also an indispensable necessary condition for all sufficient pathways to the outcome of FALL. Therefore, this finding simply indicates that it is those provinces suffering from intense social unrest that received relatively extensive contentious coverage on the decline of local contentions. On the other hand, the causal pathways to the outcome of ~FALL, the results of fsQCA suggest a strong logical association between ~PROTEST and ~FALL as well. This recipe implies that regions with relatively few documented incidents are unlikely to receive a relatively large amount of contentious coverage on the decline of local contentions either. In other words, unfortunately, these 'less contentious' provinces failed to be covered in the news reports focusing on the declining local contentions in the party press. Consequently, the emergence of fall-related contentious coverage in the state-initiated contentious public sphere is not the objective journalistic representation of the reality on the ground at the provincial level but manufactured for the purpose like propaganda. Taking the most parsimonious solution for example, it is a combinatory condition of ECONOMY and PROTEST that sufficiently leads protesting provinces to the outcome of FALL. Therefore, from a perspective of maintaining economic growth, what this causal pathway implies is a propagandistic attempt to create and promote an investment-friendly public image of 'harmonious society' for those protesting but prosperous places. Also, from a perspective of resource mobilisation, the emergence of fall-related contentious coverage can be understood as the propagandistic tool used to publicly appease the dissatisfied in these resource-rich regions and prevent further actions taken by the

angry grassroots.

In contrast with such a strong logical association between the condition of PROTEST and the outcome of FALL, the causal pathways to the outcome of GOVERNANCE suggest that it is logically irrelevant to the outcome of PROTEST. As presented in this chapter, the two complex sufficient pathways share the co-presence of ECONOMY and POPULATION in common and the parsimonious solution detected is indeed the combinatory condition of ECONOMY and POPULATION. Therefore, the results of fsQCA indicate that a relatively large amount of contentious coverage on the handling of local contentions received by the provinces can be logically attributed to those regions 'being economically developed and being populous', regardless of whether they suffer from intense social unrest or not. On the one hand, from the perspectives of resource mobilisation, it can be understood as that it is those resource rich regions with large populations that are more likely to get reported on the existence of strong local states with the capacity to deal with the incidents and appease the dissatisfied. On the other hand, from the state's perspective of ensuring the economic growth and maintaining the social stability, the presence of extensive contentious coverage on the handling of local contentions in the party press can also be considered the propagandistic exercise of creating the journalistic image of strong local states in these economically and populationally advantageous regions to strengthen the public confidence in the good momentum of local developments. Moreover, the explanation of the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE, the 'non-contentious pathway' constituted by the combinatory condition of ~ECONOMY and MEDIA, has also been presented to further support the observed logical association between the condition of Economy and the outcome of Governance. This sufficient two-condition solution simply indicates that economically underdeveloped regions even favoured by the media are not likely to receive a relatively large amount of contentious coverage on the handling of local

contentions. Again, this is potentially due to no strong local states emerging from economically disadvantaged regions or because of no need for the party-state to publicise the image of strong local states for these deprived regions. Last but not least, the results of fsQCA also suggest the sufficient pathways led by the condition of ~PROTEST to the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE. In plain language, it simply means that 'no protest happened, no news about the handling of protest'. But more importantly these 'un-contentious' recipes for ~GOVERNANCE cover *all* sufficient pathways to the outcome of ~FALL. In other words, the recipes for ~FALL is sufficient for the solutions to ~GOVERNANCE and the pathways leading the provinces to the outcome of ~FALL must lead them to the outcome of ~GOVERNANCE as well.

Some interesting theoretical implications can be also drawn from the seemingly inconsistent and contradictory findings. To explain the presence of a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage received by the provinces, the results of fsQCA suggest a logical association between the condition of PROTEST and the outcome of RISE. For example, it is either a configuration of ~ECONOMY, PROTEST and ~MEDIA or a configuration of PROTEST, ~MEDIA and POLITIC that constitutes the sufficient parsimonious solutions to outcomes of RISE. Clearly, these two solutions share the combination of PROTEST and ~MEDIA in common and view it as an indispensable ingredient of the recipes. This necessary two-condition component for the 'contentious' pathways to the outcome of RISE clearly indicates that those provinces unfavoured by the media but suffering from intense social unrest can still receive relatively extensive contentious coverage on the happening of mass incidents on the ground. The major distinction between both solutions is that the first solution stresses the realisation of 'weapon of the poor' rather than the concern about the potential of it and the second solution emphasises the politically signalling approach to the provincial reception of contentious coverage and state attention. Likewise, there is also an evidence-supported logical

association between the condition of ~PROTEST and the outcome of ~RISE detected. For example, it is either a configuration of ~ PROTEST and MEDIA or a combinatory condition of ~ PROTEST and ECONOMY that sufficiently leads to the absence of a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage received by the provinces. In plain language, even for economically developed regions or those places favoured by the media all the time, they are unlikely to receive extensive contentious coverage on the actual happening of local contention, if there was less mass incident happened on the ground. Therefore, in summary, the above-mentioned findings reconfirm a very basic and simple news-making logic of contentious coverage, that is, 'where protest occurred, there is news about the occurrence; no protest occurred, no news about the occurrence', and thus show the journalistic professionalism of the party press to a certain extent. In addition, some alternative logics to this traditional happening-based news-making logic have been found in this chapter. For instance, the results of fsQCA suggest a 'non-contentious' pathway constituted by ECONOMY, MEDIA, and ~POLITICS that sufficiently leads to the outcome of RISE. This solution suggests that the presence of a relatively large amount of rise-related contentious coverage received by the provinces can be logically attributed to the media preference for those politically marginalised but economically strong regions. Moreover, for the causal pathway to the outcome of ~RISE, there is a configuration of ~POPULATION and PROTEST. What this recipe implies is that, those regions suffering from intense social unrest but having less potential for population mobilisation are unlikely to receive extensive contentious coverage on the actual happening of local contentions in the party press. Obviously, this solution rejects the traditional news-making logic based on the actual happening of the incidents. Therefore, all these findings suggest that rise-related contentious coverage in the party press merely is partially produced in line with the traditional occurrence-based rationale of journalistic practice and thus cannot be considered a full representation or mirrored reflection of the reality of local contentions in China. Instead,

there is selective and deliberated media construction driven by multiple distinctive logics. More importantly, the coverage values for all identified solutions to the outcome of Protest are at a very low level, which simply means that each sufficient pathway only covers a small proportion of the total membership in a certain outcome. On the one hand, this might reflect that the five-condition theoretical framework proposed in this chapter is not ideal for explaining the outcome of Rise, but on the other hand, such a 'limited explanation' of sufficient solutions might also suggest the fact that the news-making process of rise-related contentious coverage in the party press is logically messy in itself, and there is no clear identifiable and traceable widely-applied news-making logic of this type of journalistic practice, which can be very interesting and take on great significance.

Lastly, the causal pathways identified in this chapter to the outcome of Commentary, compared to the solutions to other types of contentious coverage, show the journalistic professionalism of the party press, to the greatest extent. To explain the outcome of COMMENTARY, the results of fsQCA suggest two distinctive sufficient pathways, i.e., a configuration of POPULATION and PROTEST, and that of MEDIA and ~POLITICS. The first solution implies that the presence of a relatively large amount of commentary-related contentious coverage received by the provinces can be logically attributed to those provinces 'being populous and witnessing intense social unrest'. Such a combination of two conditions constitutes a direct challenge to social stability in the eyes of the state and thus sufficiently facilitates the emergence of COMMENTARY. Another 'non-contentious' solution indicates that it is those provinces 'being politically marginalised by the centre but favoured by the media' that received extensive commentary-related contentious coverage. This solution simply implies that the presence of commentary-related contentious coverage in the party press is significantly shaped by media preference, or media bias in other terms, of the party press. Furthermore, the findings

on the causal pathways to the outcome of ~COMMENTARY further confirm such a news-making logic of journalistic professionalism with the emergence of COMMENTARY. As indicated by the 'non-contentious' pathway constituted by ~POPULATION and ~MEDIA, the co-presence of 'being less populous and unfavoured by the media' leads the regions to the absence of relatively extensive commentary-related contentious coverage. In addition, the 'un-contentious' pathways led by the condition of ~PROTEST, in combination with either POPULATION or POLITICS can be simply understood as, for those populous or politically significant regions, 'no protest, no comment'. In short, the commentary-related contentious coverage, arguably, is the most 'journalistic' report on the pressing issue of local contention and social stability and the most direct institutional response to protesting signals sent from the bottom. In short, commentary-contentious coverage is the journalistic expression of the party-state's concrete concerns about the issue, and its production is significantly conditioned by the institution's long-standing news-making practices.

The journalistic linkages between the incidents and the news reports and then proposing a typology of contentious coverage with reported regions. Adopting such a multi-faceted approach to the state-initiated contentious public sphere during the harmonious society-building era, this chapter not only describes the mediated relations built between the state and local contentions through the party mouthpiece but also reveals the generative mechanisms of the emerging reported regions within contentious coverage in the party press. Based on the rich empirical evidence offered above, this chapter explores the complexity of causal pathways to a total of five different types of contentious coverage as the outcomes, respectively, and answers the questions of why the party press responds to protesting signals so differently and thus why the state distributes its attention to protesting provinces so differently. The findings presented in this chapter highlight the dual nature of the party press and show how the

production of contentious coverage in the party press is shaped by distinctive, overlapping, and even contradictory news-making logics. Besides the multiple conjunctural causal pathways identified in this chapter, it is also highlighted that a narrow focus on just one type of media-protest relation (e.g., the total amount of contentious coverage received by the provinces in this case), or a dedicated search of the universal solutions for all mediated relations between the state and local contentions, may be very misleading, simply because those deep and covert causal mechanisms behind the scenes may be overlooked. Instead, this chapter argues that, in order to understand the whole picture of the state-initiated contentious public sphere emerging in the harmonious society-building era, the diversification of protest-media relations and the complexity of multiple conjunctural causations are the keys. In summary, this chapter examines the journalistic interactions between the state and local contentions at the provincial level based on reported regions within different types of contentious coverage. In the next chapter, the mediated distribution of state attention on local contentions is expected to be further explored, and the focus shifts from reported regions to identified incidents within contentious coverage instead.

CHAPTER 8

THE HIGHLIGHT AND THE SPOTLIGHT:

Mediated Distribution of State Attention on Identified Incidents

Shifting the focus from the collectivity of local contentions at a provincial level to the emphasis on specific positions occupied by individual incidents in the eyes of the party-state, this chapter is dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the landscape of identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. It will empirically assess the cultural-political achievements of each identified incident and mediated relations between the party-state and protest events through a lens of individual reception of contentious coverage during the harmonious society-building era. Some basic but crucial questions will be answered in the following.

First, this chapter starts with an overview of identified incidents in the party press with rich details and advances the understanding of what kinds of identified incidents successfully caught the attention of the state and in which journalistic way they were covered and publicised through the mouthpiece of the party during this period. Next, for the unequal distribution of state attention on identified incidents, this chapter not only tackles the questions from a conventional perspective of protest event analysis in social movement study by measuring the amount of contentious coverage obtained by each identified incident but also offers an innovative alternative structuring approach to the capture of media attainment of identified incidents in the party press. By doing so, in the second major part, this chapter distinguishes the ‘highlight’ from the ‘spotlight’ of state attention on local contentions and emphasises the

conceptual and empirical distinctions between both. After which identified incidents were the high-profile cases and the focal points in the eyes of the party-state are located and answered based on the assessment of their various media attainments, Quadratic Assignment Procedure (QAP) is further employed in this chapter to tentatively reveal the mechanism of the formation of the highlight and the spotlight in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, and the questions about the constructive rationales by which the highlight and the spotlight were formed during the harmonious society-building era are answered. Nevertheless, instead of bottom-up storytelling about why and how one specific protest event successfully caught the attention of the party-state in line with the investigative logic of traditional social movement studies, this chapter examines the questions at a macro level and from a relational perspective. This chapter views the journalistic presence of identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere as a whole and aims to identify the causes of the emergence of the highlight and the spotlight in the eyes of the party-state in the harmonious society-building era. In other words, the questions of how the party-state chose to establish such a kind of journalistic relationship with these specific instances of local contentions through its mouthpiece and in which ways the party-state publicly created the visible landscape of identified incidents in the party press will be explored. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief discussion about how the distribution of state attention is split but inherently intertwined through an observatory lens of exemplary identified incidents covered in the party press.

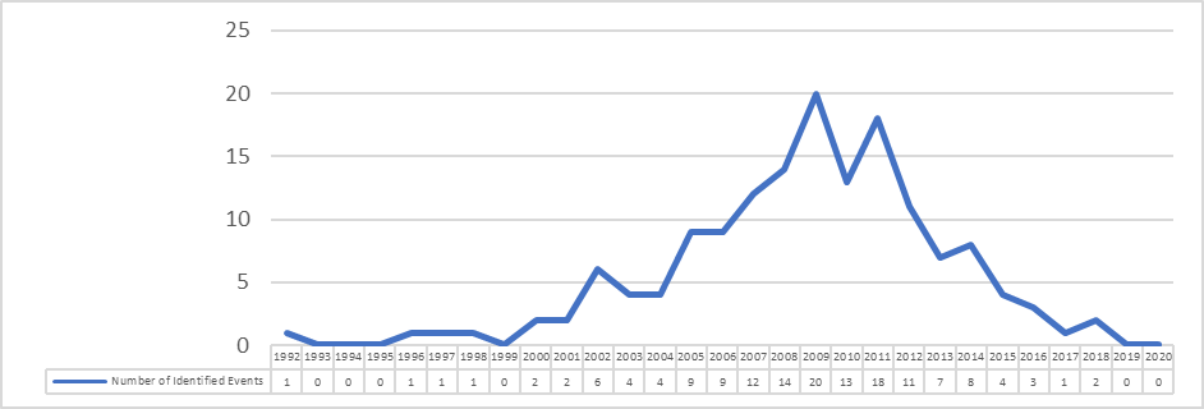
8.1 Specifying Identified Incidents in Contentious Coverage

8.1.1 Historical Trajectory of Identified Incidents

In line with a traditional rationale of protest event analysis, this section shifts the focus to the landscape of identified incidents documented in the party press. To capture the whole picture of identified incidents in the eyes of the state, the historical trajectory of specific protest events

that successfully caught the attention of the party-state during the harmonious society-building era needs to be delineated in the first place. As mentioned in previous chapters, a total of the 180 identified incidents were retrieved from 371 articles that explicitly covered at least one protest event on the ground in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*. The historical distribution of these 180 identified incidents has been outlined in Figure 1, but three points need to be stressed before the detailed demonstration. First, the date shown in the figure is not the publication date of the event getting reported but refers to the reported date of its actual occurrence. Second, 27 of the 180 identified incidents did not receive the coverage explicitly indicating the date of the occurrence, so there were only 153 events included in the figure. Third, as stressed repeatedly in previous chapters, the historical trajectory of identified incidents shown in the figure cannot be considered a representative or mirrored image of the reality of social unrest in China during the harmonious society-building era but a visible landscape of identified incidents in the eyes of the state, based on discursive responses from the state to protesting signals sent from the grassroots.

Figure 8-1 Historical Trajectory of Identified Incidents with Reported Date in the Party Press



As shown in Figure 1, in the state-initiated contentious public sphere constructed by *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020, it was in 1992 that the earliest identified incident took place on the ground and a total of 18 identified incidents were reportedly staged earlier than 2004, the year the harmonious society-building era started. Since

2004, the number of incidents covered in the party press increased steadily and climbed to its first peak in 2009 with an annual number of 20 incidents in total. After a decline in 2010, it reached another peak in 2011 with a total of 18 identified incidents. Since then, the journalistic presence of protest events in the party press gradually declined and finally dropped to zero in the last two years, i.e., in 2019 and 2020. Although, as mentioned above, the historical trajectory of identified incidents shown in Figure 1 is not representative of the reality of local contentions on the ground, researchers can still take advantage of such a 'media bias' rooted in the political nature of the party press to examine the relationships between the state and protest events staged during the harmonious society-building era, because the journalistic presence and identification of mass incidents in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* can serve as a crucial bridge linking the attention of the party-state and the protesting signals sent from the grassroots. Therefore, the following discussion in this section is expected to further embrace the media bias of the party press and outline the journalistic portrayal of social unrest in the eyes of the party-state during the harmonious society-building era with more details.

8.1.2 Visible Components of Identified Incidents

This section directly tackles a very basic question, i.e., what kinds of protest events successfully caught the party-state's attention. In line with a '3A' framework of the essential components of protest events introduced in previous chapters, a total of 371 articles mentioning all identified incidents were examined to detect whether the number of *actors* involved, the severity of *action* taken, and the type of *appeal* claimed by protest events were reported explicitly in the coverage. As a result, a whole picture of identified incidents in the party press can be depicted through a coding process of detecting visible essential components of each identified incident in contentious coverage. As presented in Table 1, the numbers shown in the table suggest how many and what percentage of identified incidents fall into various

component-based categories. It shows not only a detailed overview of public visibility of identified incidents in the party press but also an overall landscape of identified incidents in the party-state's view.

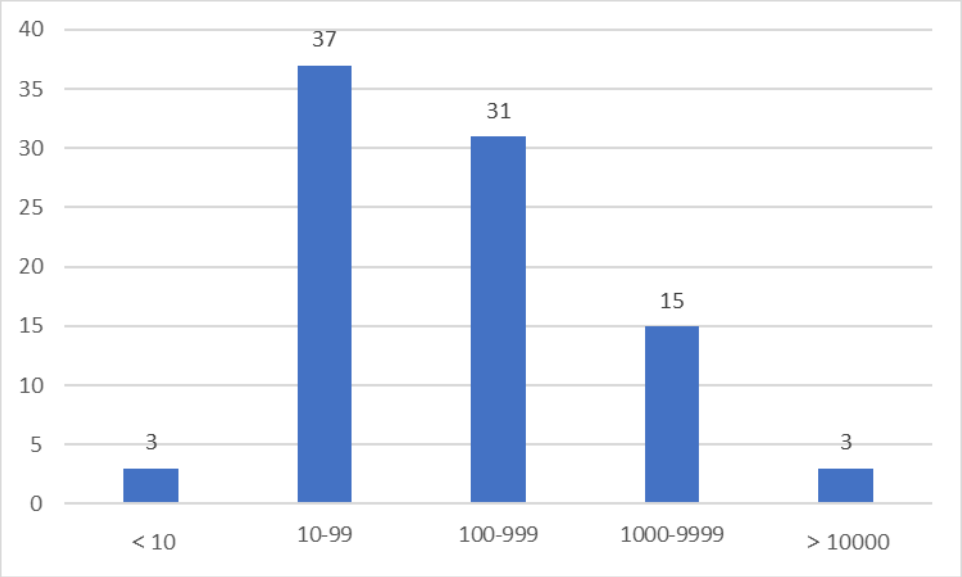
Table 8-1 Reported Components of Identified Incidents

3A' Components of Protest Covered in the Party Press			
Actor: Number	< 10	3	2%
	10-99	37	21%
	100-999	31	17%
	1000-9999	15	8%
	> 10000	3	2%
	Not Mentioned	91	51%
	Total	180	100%
Action: Violence	Assertive	51	28%
	Disruptive	37	21%
	Confrontational	29	16%
	Devastating	36	20%
	Not Mentioned	27	15%
	Total	180	100%
Appeal: Issue	Accidental Death; Damage	25	10%
	Environment-related Issue: Pollution; NIMBY	27	11%
	Labour-related Issue: Wage; Pension; Laid-off	32	13%
	Business-related Issue: Fraud; Industrial Reform	24	10%
	Land-related Issue: Expropriation; Agriculture	29	12%
	Property-related Issue: Demolition; Immigration	32	13%
	Ethnicity; Religion-related Issue	9	4%
	Medical Dispute-related Issue	11	4%
	Cadre-related Issue: Misbehavior; Corruption; Law Enforcement	31	13%
	Natural Resrouce-related Issue: Fishery; Forestry; Mining	14	6%
	Political Claims	4	2%
	Not Mentioned	7	3%
	Total	245	100%

According to Table 1, first, regarding the reported number of actors involved, six categories were established and a total of the 180 identified incidents were accordingly assigned to the categories based on whether the scales of the events were explicitly covered in two newspapers. Noted, a total of 91 identified incidents, accounting for 51% of the total, were assigned to the category of not mentioned. This means that more than half of the 180 identified incidents did not receive contentious coverage explicitly on the number of people involved in the event. For

the other 89 identified incidents, the distributive pattern of the reported number of people involved resembles a normal distribution to some extent (Figure 2). Most events were assigned to the category of 10-99 people involved, with a total of 37 events. Following this, the number of identified incidents that reportedly involved either hundreds or thousands of people was 31 and 15, respectively. The numbers of incidents with less than 10 people and involving more than ten thousand people were the same smallest, and there were only three identified incidents falling into these two categories. In brief, what Figure 2 suggests is that, compared with the large-scale protest events, medium-scale and small-scale identified incidents enjoyed a high degree of visibility in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In other words, considerable state attention was paid to medium-scale and small-scale identified incidents.

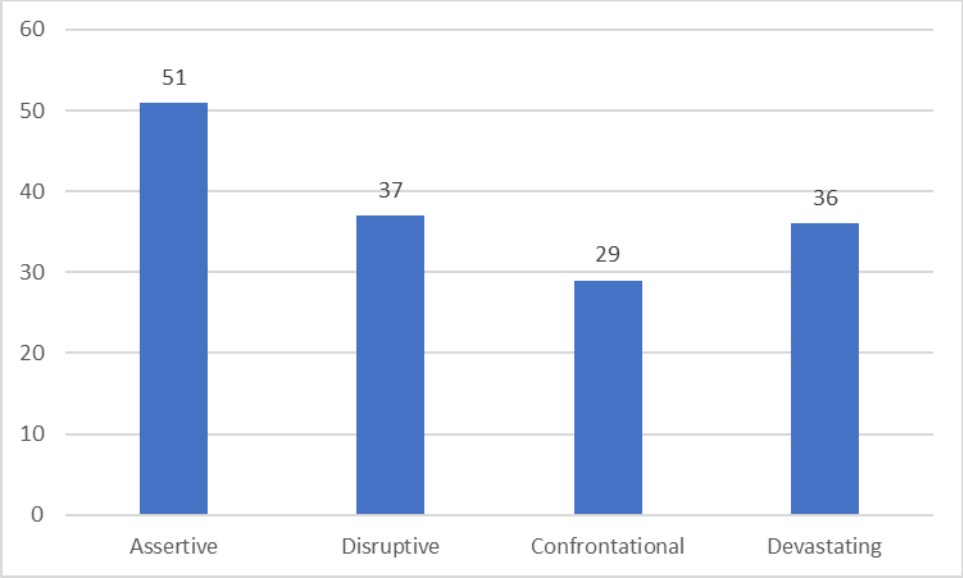
Figure 8-2 Identified Incidents with Actor: Number



Second, a total of five categories were established to document the visible severity of protesting actions and the reported seriousness of direct consequences led by identified incidents. Besides 27 events that did not receive any descriptive coverage of their actions and consequences, the remaining 153 events were assigned to the corresponding categories, accordingly. What the category of assertive action implies is moderate actions (e.g., gatherings and sit-ins) which were reportedly adopted by the dissatisfied mass and did not lead to any reported serious

consequences. As depicted in Table 1, 51 events fell into this category and took up the largest 28% of the total. Disruptive action implies a toolbox of a bit more aggressive moves like blocking the road and obstructing the construction that did have actual disruptive impacts on normal daily life but did not reportedly have physical contact with other actors nor make direct damages to the public property. In *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily*, a total of 37 identified incidents were labelled as disruptive and accounted for 21% of the total. The category of confrontational action contains those events which were reportedly described as physical conflicts between various actors involved, with specific terms like 'attack', 'push' and so on, but, again, did not reportedly lead to serious consequences. There were 29 identified incidents selected from contentious coverage in the party press and classified into events adopting confrontational strategies. Lastly, the most notable distinction between the fourth category of devastating action and former three categories lies in the journalistic presence of serious consequences like the loss of property or the death of people accompanied by the coverage of violent actions in the party press. A total of 36 identified incidents were classified into the category of devastating action and occupied 20% of the total. Based on the illustration above, in brief, unlike an emerging normal-like distribution of the visibility of Actor: Number in the party press, the visibility of Action: Violence to some degree shows a U-shaped distribution. As shown in Figure 2, it is those identified incidents with either moderate moves or extremely serious consequences that enjoyed a high degree of visibility in contentious coverage and successfully caught a larger amount of the party-state's attention.

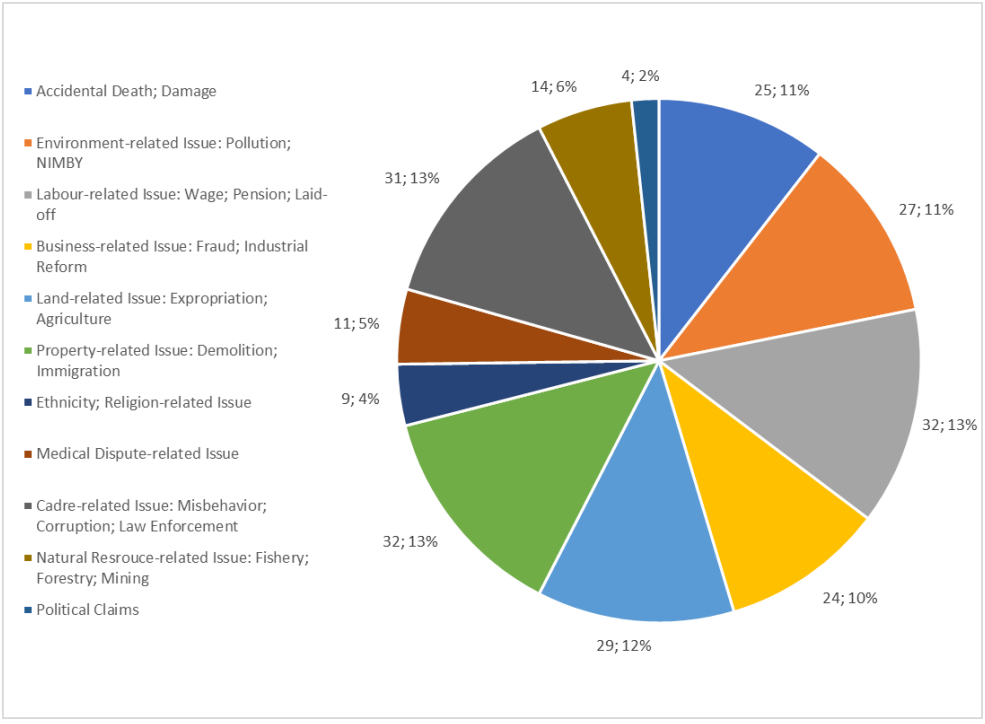
Figure 8-3 Identified Incidents with Action: Violence



Finally, for the reported issues, a total of 12 categories, including the category 'not mentioned', were proposed. As depicted in Table 1, there were only seven identified incidents that were not explicitly reported on their demands in the party press and the remaining 173 identified incidents were assigned to the corresponding categories based on visible issues, accordingly. As a result, the distribution of all appeals channelled through identified incidents in contentious coverage has been depicted in Figure 4. Before the illustration of the results in detail, one more point needs to be noted here. Given the fact that one protest event might have multiple reported issues, the total number of Appeal: Issue listed in Table 1 suggests is a cumulative number of 245 various combinations of one specific incident and one specific issue found in contentious coverage. Thus, it is necessarily higher than the actual total number of protest events covered in the party press, i.e., 180 identified incidents in total. Next, based on the intuitive observation of Table 1 and Figure 4, the distribution of issues claimed by identified incidents did not show one single issue that was significantly dominant in the state-initiated contentious public sphere during the harmonious society-building era. Instead, many issues signalled by protest events received a comparably equal share of the party-state's attention in terms of the number of relevant protest events covered in the party press. As Table 1 and Figure 4 suggest, of 11

categories of appeals, nine categories contain more than 10 identified incidents separately and seven categories account for more than 10% of the total respectively. To be more specific, both categories of labour issues and property issues contain the same largest number of identified incidents. There were 32 identified incidents journalistically regarding these two issues, respectively. The cadre-related issue is another important category of appeal covered in the party press. A total of 31 protest events were covered to promote the visibility of cadre's misbehaviours or 'bad governance' in general. Following these three crucial types of appeals, the categories of land, environment, accidental death, and business-related issues contain more than 20 identified incidents respectively and thus also made solid contributions to the public visibility of social problems channelled through social unrest during the harmonious society-building era. Last but not least, although the results show that local contentions fuelled by political motivations were not entirely invisible to the public in the party press, merely four identified incidents with political claims had access to the party press and occupied the smallest share of the total with only 1%.

Figure 8-4 Identified Incidents with Appeal: Issue



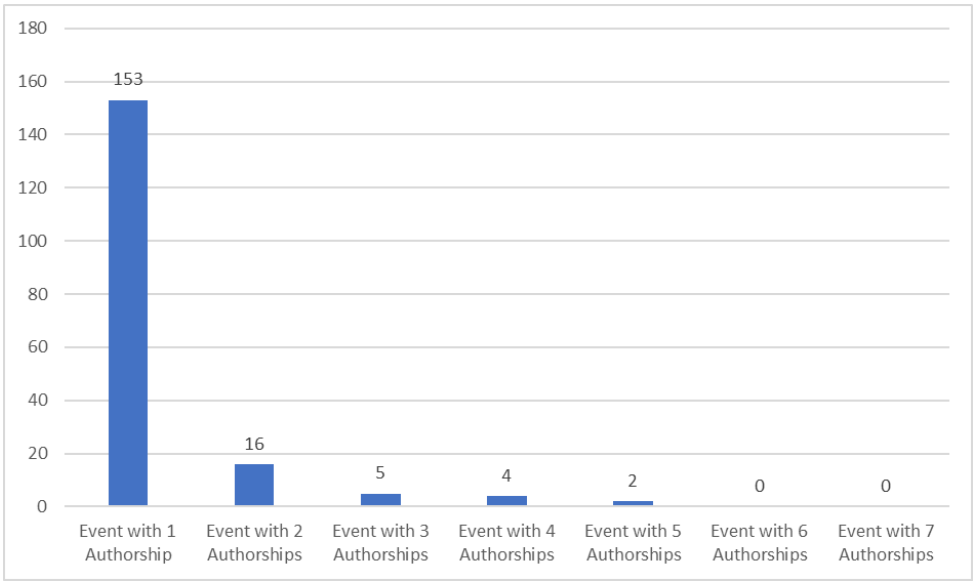
8.1.3 Authorships of Contentious Coverage with Identified Incidents

This section aims to address who talked about and published articles about local contentions in the party press during the period of building a harmonious society. In line with the classification of authorships in previous chapters, the authorships were divided into seven main categories in this chapter as well and a total of the 180 identified incidents were assigned to corresponding categories. Table 2 and Table 3 show the distribution of identified incidents across various categories of authorship from two different perspectives. Table 2 and Figure 5, on the one hand, underline the question of how many different groups of authors explicitly mentioned the same identified incident in the party press and, Table 3 and Figure 6, on the other hand, tackle the question of how many identified incidents were reported by each group of authors. Finally, before the demonstration of the results, two more points need to be stressed here. First, the numbers shown in the following tables and figures do not refer to the number of news reports regarding identified incidents but to the number of identified incidents falling into each category. Second, given the fact that one specific identified incident might be covered by multiple groups of people, the total number listed in Table 3 is a cumulative total number of 226 various combinations of one specific incident and one specific type of author, such that it is reasonably bit higher than the total number of identified incidents listed in Table 2, i.e., a total of 180 protest events covered in the party press.

Table 8-2 Number of Various Groups of Authors That Identified Incidents Received

Number of Authorship	Event with 1 Authorship	Event with 2 Authorships	Event with 3 Authorships	Event with 4 Authorships	Event with 5 Authorships	Event with 6 Authorships	Event with 7 Authorships	Total
Number of Identified Incidents Getting Reported	153	16	5	4	2	0	0	180
Proportion of Identified Incidents Getting Reported	85.00%	8.89%	2.78%	2.22%	1.11%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%

Figure 8-5 Distribution of Authorship Numbers Received by Identified Incidents

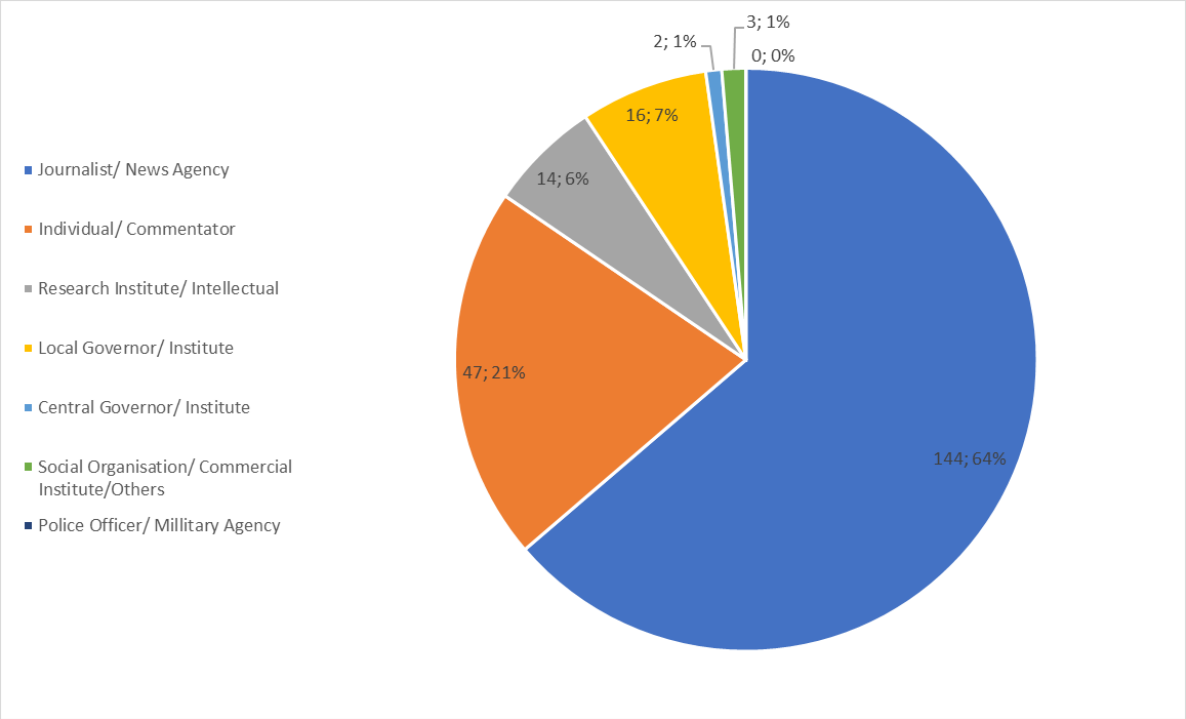


According to Table 2 and Figure 5, 153 of 180 protest events covered in the party press, the majority of identified incidents in other words, merely caught the attention of one type of author, accounting for 85% of the total. In addition, the results suggest that an increase in the number of various authors involved was accompanied by a decrease in the total number of identified incidents falling into the category. There were only two identified incidents that were covered by five different types of authors simultaneously during the harmonious society-building era. Moreover, there was no identified incident catching the attention of over five types of authors in the party press at all. In brief, such a finding implies that most identified incidents in the party press were not journalistically situated in a broad discussion across various sectors represented by the standing authors in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, and the cross-institutional dialogue on local contentions was very limited during the harmonious society-building era.

Table 8-3 Number of Identified Incidents Covered by Various Types of Authorships

Categofy of Authorship	Journalist/ News Agency	Individual/ Commentator	Research Institute/ Intellectual	Local Governor/ Institute	Central Governor/ Institute	Social Organisation/ Commercial Institute/ Others	Police Officer/ Millitary Agency	Total
Number of identified incidents	144	47	14	16	2	3	0	226
Proportion of Identified Incidents	63.72%	20.80%	6.19%	7.08%	0.88%	1.33%	0.00%	100.00%

Figure 8-6 Distribution of Event Numbers Covered by Specific Authors



As depicted in Table 3 and Figure 6, the group of journalists remained the most important contributor to the production of contentious coverage in the party press, followed by the group of individual commentators. 144 protest events were reported by journalists, accounting for 64% of the total, and 47 identified incidents were covered by individual commentators, taking up 21%. The group of local governors and intellectuals took the third and fourth positions and they reported 16 and 14 identified incidents in the party press, respectively. Both graphs also suggest that there were only three protest events successfully catching the attention of social and business actors and only two protest events receiving the direct responses from the central state through the mouthpiece of the party. Lastly, another very interesting finding presented in Table 3 and Figure 6 is that none of the 180 identified incidents was explicitly covered by the group of police officer or military agency who directly faced the dissatisfied mass and the angry grassroots on the front lines.

8.1.4 Journalistic Overview of Identified Incidents in the Party Press

Table 8-4 Overview of '3A' Components and Authorships of Identified Incidents

'3A' Components of Identified Incidents		Journalist/ News Agency	Individual/ Commentator	Research Institute/ Intellectual	Local Governor/ Institute	Central Governor/ Institute	Social Organisation/ Commercial Institute/ Others	Police Officer/ Millitary Agency
Actor: Number	< 10	2	1	2	0	0	0	0
	10-99	33	6	3	0	0	0	0
	100-999	27	3	0	1	0	0	0
	1000-9999	10	9	0	2	0	1	0
	> 10000	3	1	1	1	0	1	0
	Total Mentioned	75	20	6	4	0	2	0
	Not Mentioned	69	27	8	12	2	1	0
	Mentioned %	52.08%	42.55%	42.86%	25.00%	0.00%	66.67%	0.00%
Action: Violence	Assertive	44	7	1	2	0	0	0
	Disruptive	29	8	2	5	0	1	0
	Confrontational	22	7	1	1	0	0	0
	Devastating	28	17	6	6	2	2	0
	Total Mentioned	123	39	10	14	2	3	0
	Not Mentioned	21	8	4	2	0	0	0
	Mentioned %	85.42%	82.98%	71.43%	87.50%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Appeal: Issue	Accidental Death/Damage	18	8	3	2	0	1	0
	Environment-related Issue: Pollution/NIMBY	24	10	5	2	0	0	0
	Labour-related Issue: Wage/Pension/Laid-off	28	5	0	0	0	0	0
	Business-related Issue: Fraud/Industrial Reform	22	4	1	1	0	0	0
	Land-related Issue: Expropriation/Agriculture	22	8	2	5	0	0	0
	Property-related Issue: Demolition/Immigration	24	8	4	5	0	2	0
	Ethnicity/Religion-related Issue	7	3	0	3	2	1	0
	Medical Dispute-related Issue	8	3	0	0	0	0	0
	Cadre-related Issue: Misbehavior/Corruption/Law Enforcement	20	19	10	6	0	1	0
	Natural Resrouce-related Issue: Fishery; Forestry; Mining	13	2	1	2	0	1	0
	Political Claims	4	2	1	3	2	1	0
	Total Mentioned	190	72	27	29	4	7	0
	Not Mentioned	4	2	1	1	0	0	0
	Mentioned %	97.94%	97.30%	96.43%	96.67%	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%

To fully capture and further explore the journalistic overview of identified incidents in contentious coverage, a contingency table between visible '3A' components and standing authorships in the party press was constructed. The use of colour scale was to specify the important values and cells in each sub-table constructed between specific authorships and various components. Before a detailed illustration of the results presented in Table 4, one more point needs to be stressed. The numbers listed in Table 4 refer to the numbers of identified incidents rather than the number of articles involving different visible components of identified incidents across various categories of authors. So, what the table basically tackles is the question of how many protest events with a specific visible component were covered by a specific group of people in the party press. Again, given the fact that one specific protest event might reportedly have multiple demands, the numbers shown in the row of Appeal: Issue are a bit higher than those in the rows of Actor: Number and Action: Violence.

First, the total number of identified incidents mentioned by each category of authors shows that journalists and individual commentators were two major contributors to the visibility of all essential components of identified incidents in the party press. To be more specific, for identified incidents with reported numbers of actors involved, a total of 75 and 20 protest events were covered by journalists and individual commentators, respectively. For identified incidents with reported severity of their actions, there were 123 and 39 identified incidents falling into the category of journalists and individual commentators, separately. For the issues covered, the cumulative number of identified incidents explicitly regarding specific issues was 190 for the group of journalists and 72 for individual commentators. On the contrary, as mentioned above, there was no specific protest event directly covered in the news articles that were written by the actors facing the dissatisfied mass and the angry grassroots on the front lines, i.e., the group of police officer and military agency, during the harmonious society-building era. For the other four types of authors (Table 4), compared with the central agencies and social and business actors, local agencies and researchers made more contributions to the visibility of the components of identified incidents in the party press.

Next, for the reported number of actors involved in identified incidents, the intuitive observation of Table 4 starts with the read of the numbers shown in the rows of Mentioned % for each category of the authorship. This proportional figure can suggest how many and what percent of identified incidents were explicitly covered with the scale of the event among all protest events covered by a specific group of authors. As depicted in the table, the central agencies directly responded to two protest events but did not mention the number of people involved at all, such that the number of Mentioned % for the category of central agencies as the author is zero. On the contrary, it is social and business actors who enjoyed the highest number of Mentioned %, i.e., 66.67%. To be more specific, two of the three identified incidents

covered by this type of author were reported with a clear number of people involved as well. For the other four types of authors, the figures of Mentioned % range from 25% to 52.08%. Such findings also relate to the results presented above. As depicted in Table 1, more than half of the 180 identified incidents did not receive the coverage explicitly on the number of people involved. Following this finding, the results listed in Table 4 suggest that there was no dominant category of authorship showing a strong intention to report the scale of identified incidents in the party press. Moreover, taking a closer look at the distribution of the reported number of actors across the categories of authorships, a divide in the reporting preference of various authors can be detected. Researchers showed their interest in reporting small-scale protest events, because five of six identified incidents covered by this group of people were assigned to the categories of either '< 10' or '10-99'. Likewise, most protest events covered by journalists fall into the categories of small-scale and medium-scale, with 33 and 27 incidents for the category of '10-99' and '100-999', respectively. On the contrary, it is individual commentators, local officials, and social and business actors who shared a similar reporting preference. What caught individual commentators' most attention is those identified incidents falling into the category of '1000-999', with a total of nine protest events. In addition, the numbers suggest that the other two groups of people, i.e., local officials and social and business actors, were only interested in medium-scale and large-scale protest events and, more importantly, ignored small-scale incidents completely. Lastly, those articles issued from central agencies did not mention the scale of local contentions at all, but there were only two identified incidents covered by the central state in total.

Moving to the visibility of Action: Violence in the party press, two interesting points about the documented severity of actions across various categories of authorship need to be emphasised here. First, it is central agencies and social and business actors who were inclined to report the

direct consequences of protesting actions. As depicted in Table 4, the violent actions of all identified incidents covered by these two types of authors were explicitly documented as well in the party press, thanks to the numbers of 100% shown in the cells of Mentioned %. On the contrary, the group of researchers, compared with other authors, showed the least interest in journalistically describing the violent actions of protests in the party press. 10 of 14 identified incidents mentioned by researchers received the coverage of their actions, with the lowest 71.43% of Mentioned %. For the other three types of authors, the proportional figures of Mentioned % range from 82.98% to 85.42%, at a significantly high level. Second, as depicted in Table 4, it is devastating action that dominates, whereas an 'outlier' needs to be noted. It is easy to find that 44 of 123 protest events covered by journalists fall into the category of assertive actions and this means the actions of most identified incidents covered by journalists were reportedly moderate. On the contrary, as for the remaining five types of authors, the numbers of identified incidents with reported devastating actions were the largest for each of them. In particular, the focus of central agencies was entirely on those protest events with devastating actions, despite a very small total number of two identified incidents covered by the centre. Also, as for individual commentators, researchers, local agencies, and social and business actors, nearly half of the identified incidents covered by them were such a kind of protest events with reported devastating actions and serious consequences. Besides, identified incidents with disruptive actions were another focus of news articles written by local agencies, with a total of five protest events.

Turning to the visibility of the final main component of the protest event, i.e., Appeal: Issue, first of all, for all types of authors, there were only a few identified incidents that did not receive the coverage of their claimed demands and appealed issues. In other words, most identified incidents journalistically mentioned by different groups of authors were covered with clear

issues as well in the party press. As depicted in Table 4, for each type of author, the number of identified incidents with reported issues accounts for more than 95% of a cumulative number of identified incidents assigned to a total of 12 categories of issues, including the category of not mentioned. In particular, all incidents mentioned by the central state and social and business actors were journalistically linked to specific issues in the party press. Moreover, taking a close look at the distributive pattern of visible issues across various types of authors, first, for journalists, no single dominant issue was detected. Instead, there were a total of six categories of issues containing more than 20 identified incidents respectively covered by journalists in the party press. Among them, labour issue was reportedly related to the highest number of identified incidents, with a total of 28 protest events. In contrast, ethnicity and religion-related issues, medical dispute-related issues, and political claims that caught the least amount of journalist's attention, and they were found in less than 10 identified incidents covered by journalists for each. Second, as for individual commentators, researchers and local agencies, they paid the most amount of their attention to the cadre-related issue. A total of 19, 10, and six identified incidents were journalistically linked to the cadre-related issue by these groups of people, respectively. However, local agencies also paid a comparable amount of attention to the issues of land and property, differing from individual commentators and researchers who arguably concentrated on this issue. As depicted in Table 4, a total of 10 identified incidents covered by local agencies were journalistically related to these two issues and there were five events for each type of issue. Fourth, social and business actors paid the largest amount of their attention to the issue of property, but noted, there were only two identified incidents falling into this category in total. Last but not least, the reported appeals of those identified incidents covered by central agencies were very different from the aforementioned widely covered issues like cadre, property, land, and labour-related ones. Instead, identified incidents that

successfully caught the central state's attention and received direct responses from the centre were entirely about political and religious claims.

8.2 The Highlight and the Spotlight of State Attention

8.2.1 The Highlight: Measuring Contentious Coverage of Identified Incidents

After selecting 180 identified incidents from contentious coverage and portraying a whole journalistic picture of protest events in the party press, this section turns the focus to the amount of media coverage received by each identified incident and to further detect the variation in the individual receptions of contentious coverage at the level of identified incident. A thorough examination of 371 news articles involving protest events not only enables researchers to understand the media attainment, or the journalistic impact in other words, of each identified incident in terms of the visibility in the party press, but also enables researchers to construct complicated relationships between the party-state and protest events by tracing the journalistic responses to the protesting signals sent from the grassroots. More importantly, such a comprehensive understanding of contentious coverage received by each identified incident sets a solid foundation for the detection of high-profile cases in the eyes of the party-state. Questions such as: which identified incidents were most visible in the party press and which were considered the vital protest event by the state can be answered by measuring and comparing the total number of relevant articles received by identified incidents.

By viewing contentious coverage with identified incidents as an institutional outcome produced by the party press and influenced by protest events on the ground, this section follows the rationale of the mediation model illustrated in previous chapters and argues that the *quantity* of relevant news articles received by each identified incident during the harmonious society-

building era is the key to a deep understanding of the extent to which each identified incidents made the journalistic impact on the state-initiated contentious public sphere in the party press and to what extent each identified incident successfully caught the attention of the party-state. The rationale of such an additive approach to the status differentiation of identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state is quite straightforward. For identified incidents, the more coverage received, the more visibility they enjoyed in the party press, thus the more important position taken in the eyes of the state. Such a measure of the quantity of media coverage obtained by protest events has been widely applied in the field of social movement study, and it is arguably the most traditional and fundamental approach to the study of media-protest relations. In this chapter, such a *cumulative, direct and absolute* individual reception of media coverage at the level of identified incidents is termed as the *highlight* of contentious coverage in the party press, or the *highlight* of state attention. In brief, the quantity of media coverage achieved by identified incidents enables researchers to locate the 'highlight' of state attention on local contentions during the harmonious society-building era.

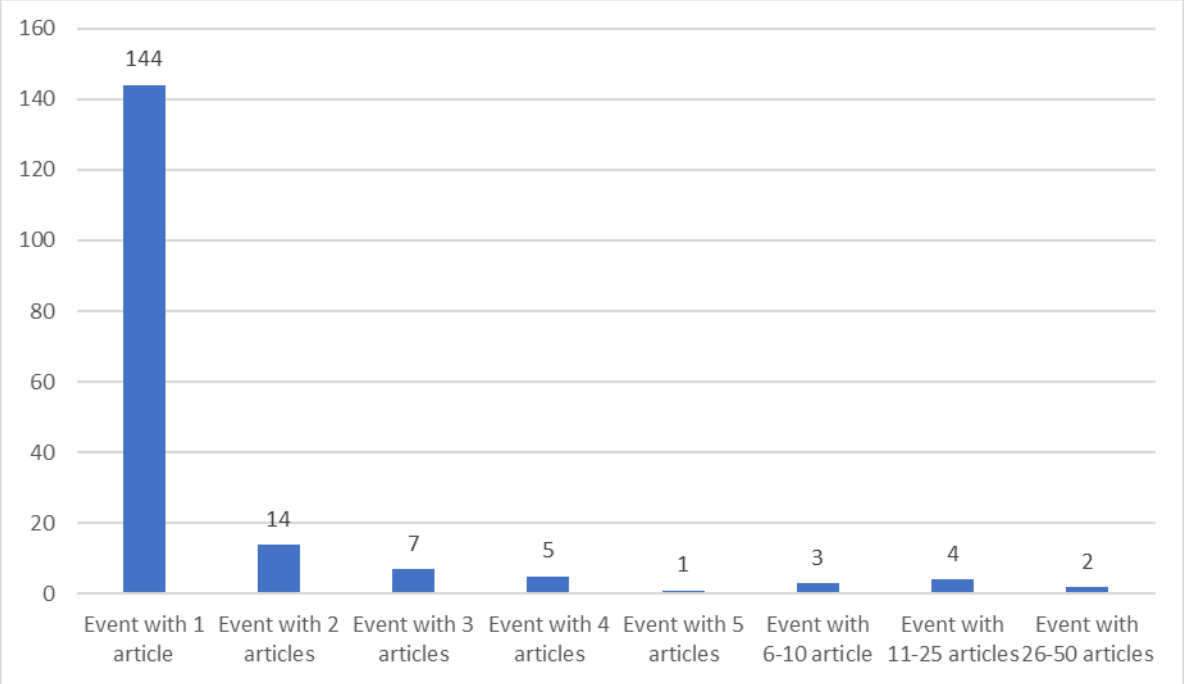
In the rest of this section, an overview of individual receptions of contentious coverage at the level of identified incidents will be presented and the distribution of state attention on local contentions will be 'highlighted' as well. Based on the cumulative measure of the quantity of contentious coverage received by each identified incident, the classification of a total of 180 identified incidents is presented in Table 5 and Figure 7. Both graphs suggest that most identified incidents were merely mentioned in a few articles in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and only a handful of identified incidents successfully attracted a relatively large amount of attention in the party press. The dominant majority of identified incidents had access to five or fewer reports in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* and all protest events receiving at least five articles in the party press merely constituted about 5% of the total. To be

more specific, 144 of the 180 identified incidents received only one article during the harmonious society-building era and occupied 80% of the total. 14 identified incidents achieved visibility in two news reports in the party press, accounting for 8% of the total. On the contrary, for those 'high-profile' identified incidents, only two and four protest events received more than 10 articles in the party press and fell into 'Event with 26-50 Articles' and 'Event with 11-25 Articles', respectively.

Table 8-5 Amount of Contentious Coverage Received by Identified Incidents

Reception of Contentious Coverage	Event with 1 article	Event with 2 articles	Event with 3 articles	Event with 4 articles	Event with 5 articles	Event with 6-10 article	Event with 11-25 articles	Event with 26-50 articles	Total
Number of Events	144	14	7	5	1	3	4	2	180
Proportion of Events	80%	8%	4%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	100%

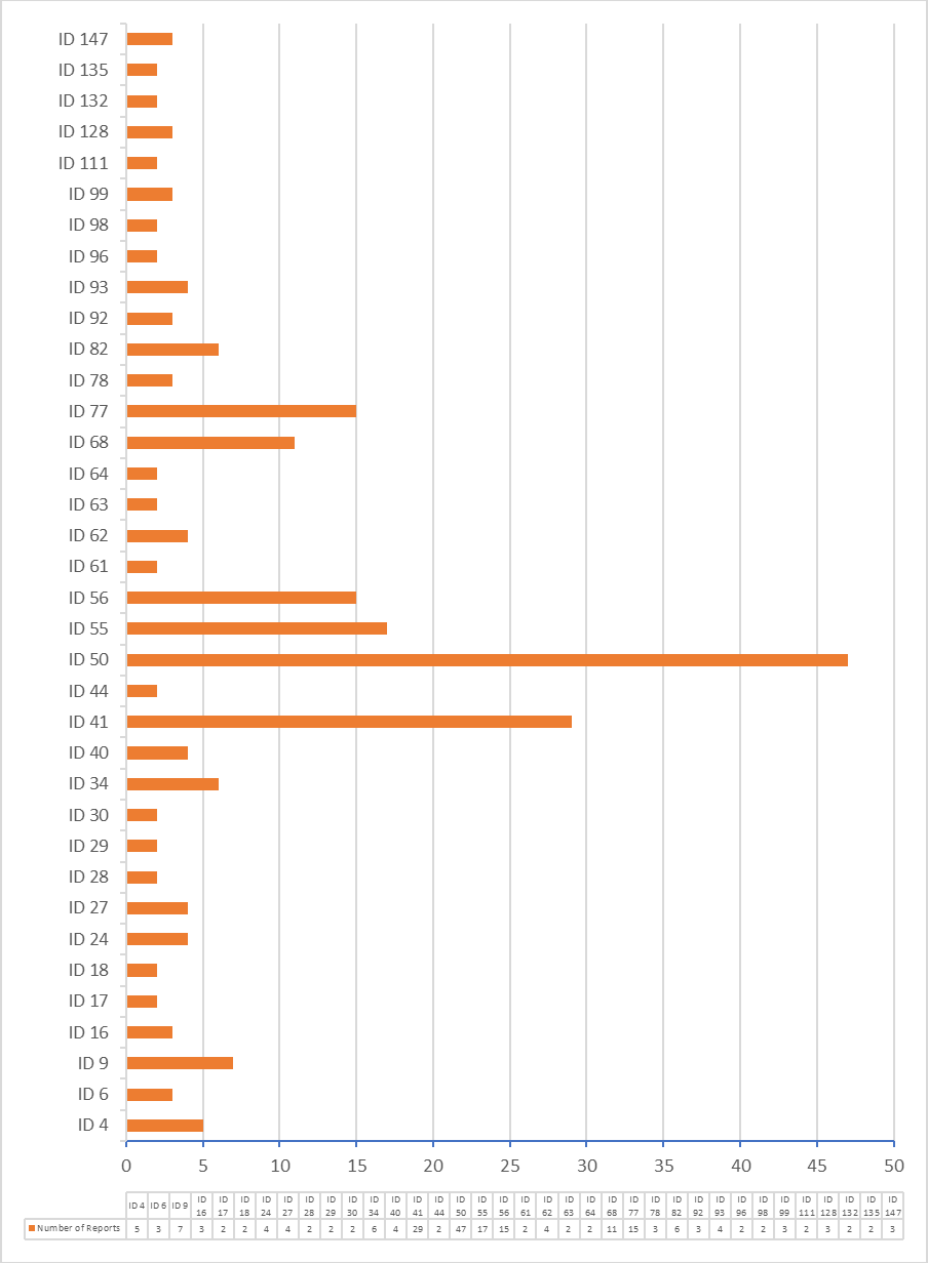
Figure 8-7 Amount of Contentious Coverage Received by Identified Incidents



Furthermore, for a more detailed and in-depth investigation, 36 identified incidents that received at least two articles in the party press were selected from a total of 180 identified incidents. The most notable finding is an extraordinary but unsurprising unequal distribution of the party-state's attention on these identified incidents, even though a total of 144 events receiving only one article have been excluded and removed from the figure. The identified

incident that received the largest amount of contentious coverage is Weng-an ‘6.28’ incident labelled as ID 50, with a total of 47 articles. Another important identified incident that caught a great amount of contentious coverage is Menglian ‘7.19’ incident labelled as ID 41, receiving 29 relevant news reports in total. Besides, four other identified incidents successfully had access to more than 10 articles in the party press. Accordingly, based on the cumulative measure of the quantity of contentious coverage received by identified incidents, these six protest events were detected as the ‘high-profile’ protest events which achieved the most notable visibility in the party press. So, arguably, these six identified incidents can be considered the ‘highlight’ of state attention and more details about these six ‘high-profile’ incidents are further listed in Table 6.

Figure 8-8 Overview of Identified Incidents Receiving At least Two Articles



According to Table 6, these six 'high-profile' identified incidents took place in different areas but occurred either in 2008 or 2009. Taking a close look at the visibility of essential components of these protest events in the party press, first, it is easy to find a 'missing actor', which means, compared with the other two essential components, the number of people involved in these incidents is the least visible in the party press. As depicted in Table 6, four of six protest events did not receive any news articles explicitly reporting the scale of the event. But for the remaining two 'high-profile' protest events with visible Actor: Number, i.e., Weng-

an ‘6.28’ incident and Longnan ’11.17’ incident, the reported scales of these two events were quite large. Another interesting finding is related to the visibility of Action: Violence. For all these six protest events, their actions were not only covered in the party press but unanimously reported as devastating, which journalistically indicates a similar high-level severity of their actions and the seriousness of their direct consequences. Last, for Appeal: Issue, all ‘high-profile’ identified incidents were journalistically linked to multiple demands and dissatisfied sources. Weng-an ‘6.28’ incident had the most reported claims with a total of four issues. Menglian ‘7.19’ incident was reportedly driven by three major issues, ranking the second place. In addition, as depicted in Table 6, the cadre-related issue was the most frequently reported one, and it was shared by four identified incidents in total. For the other two ‘high-profile’ protest events which were not reportedly related to cadre-related issues, i.e., Lhasa ‘3.14’ incident and Urumqi ‘7.5’ incident, both were reportedly documented with more sensitive issues (e.g., political, ethnical, and religious claims). It is interesting and surprising that none of these high-profile events was journalistically related to labour issues, which was detected as one of the most three crucial issues of identified incidents in contentious coverage (Table 1 and Figure 4).

Table 8-6 High-profile Identified Incidents Receiving More Than 10 Articles

Case ID	Event Label	Place	Year	Actor: Number	Action: Violence	Appeal: Issue 1	Appeal: Issue 2	Appeal: Issue 3	Appeal: Issue 4
41	Menglian '7.19' Incident	Yunnan	2008		Devastating	Cadre-related Issue	Land-related Issue	Business-related Issue	
50	Weng-an '6.28' Incident	Guizhou	2008	> 10000	Devastating	Accidental Death/Damage	Cadre-related Issue	Natural Resrouce-related Issue	Property-related Issue
55	Lhasa ‘3.14’ Incident	Tibet	2008		Devastating	Ethnicity/Religion-related Issue	Political Claims		
56	Urumqi '7.5' Incident	Xinjiang	2009		Devastating	Ethnicity/Religion-related Issue	Political Claims		
68	Longnan '11.17' Incident	Gansu	2008	1000-9999	Devastating	Property-related Issue	Cadre-related Issue		
77	Shishou '6.17' Incident	Hubei	2009		Devastating	Accidental Death/Damage	Cadre-related Issue		

8.2.2 The Spotlight: Structuring Contentious Coverage of Identified Incidents

In the previous section, a conventional measure of the quantity of contentious coverage received by each identified incident in the party press was adopted to detect the ‘high-profile’ protest events in the eyes of the state, i.e., the so-called ‘highlight’ of state attention. This

section further argues that the complexity of either protest-media relations or mediated relations between the state and local contentions cannot be fully captured or comprehensively understood by such a single-dimensional examination of contentious coverage involving identified incidents. Therefore, besides the aforementioned cumulative approach, an alternative approach to the visibility of identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and the detection of important identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state will be introduced in the following.

This section offers a structuring approach as an alternative to the conventional cumulative approach to the measure of contentious coverage involving identified incidents and argues that such an innovative approach is a useful complement to both conceptualisation and operationalisation of media attainment achieved by identified incidents in the party press during the harmonious society-building era. As mentioned above, a cumulative approach stress is an accumulation of state attention received by each identified incident in terms of the general visibility achieved by them in the party press. In other words, it is the quantity of media coverage received by identified incidents and a cumulative, direct and absolute individual reception of state attention at the level of identified incidents that determine whether they can be considered the high-profile protest events in the eyes of the party-state, i.e., the highlight of state attention. By contrast, a structuring approach proposed here instead treats state attention as an informational *flow* which journalistically connects identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In line with this logic, this chapter argues that a journalistic co-presence of identified incidents in the same news article in the party press can be understood as that protest events share a similar position in the view of the party-state and thus can be journalistically linked to each other. By adopting such a relational perspective, an informational

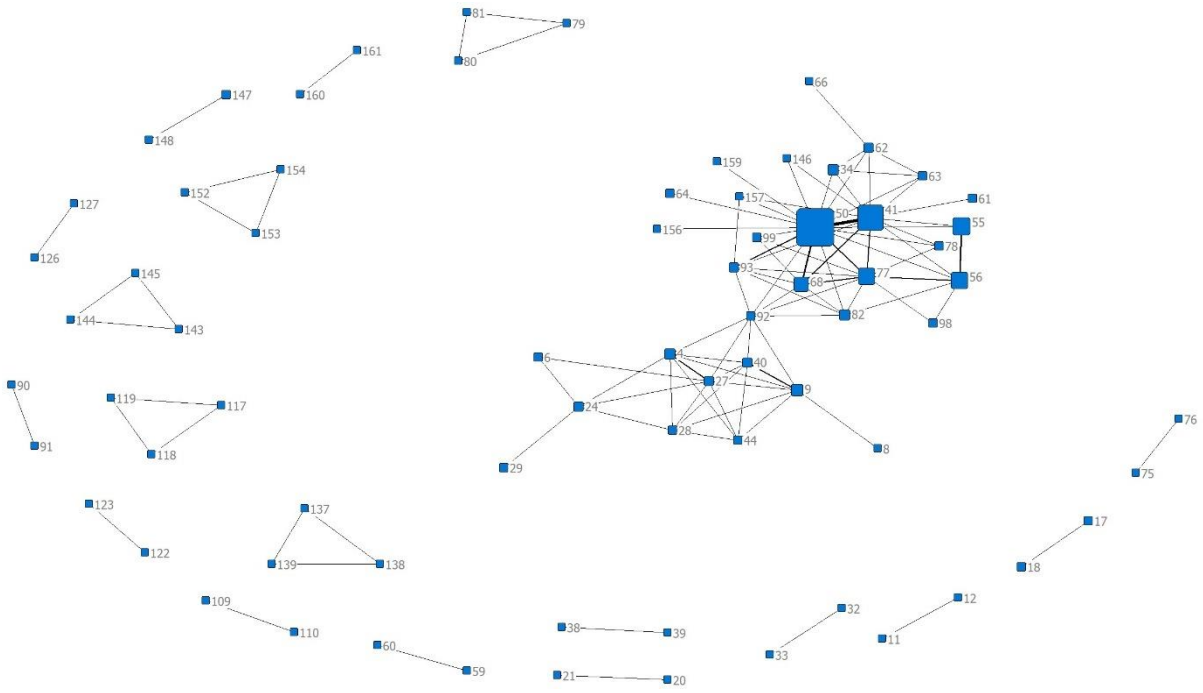
network of identified incidents can be constructed *within* contentious coverage by tracing the flow of state attention on local contentions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

Another important and fascinating feature of this structuring approach to contentious coverage of identified incidents is that the establishment of such an informational network of identified incidents within contentious coverage is an *unintentional* outcome collectively produced by various groups of authors through *intentional* individual efforts. In plain English, each news report involving protest events is intentionally written by standing authors with various purposes, but the structure of all identified incidents within contentious coverage is an unintentional consequence of their collective efforts and has to be revealed through an in-depth investigation. Accordingly, such a relational view of state attention emphasises the *emerging* structure of identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state and enables researchers to locate each identified incident in a particular position within contentious coverage. Accordingly, unlike the highlight of state attention which is based on the intentional construction of the relationships between the party-state and identified incidents in the party press, such a structuring approach offers another deep layer of analysis to explore the latent relationships between the party-state and protest events during a specific period. So, the structural position occupied by identified incidents is termed as the *spotlight* of state attention and proposed as an alternative type of media attainment obtained by identified incidents in the party press. Unlike the *highlight* of state attention which refers to a *cumulative, direct,* and *absolute* individual reception of state attention in terms of the quantity of media coverage received by each identified incident, the *spotlight* of state attention emphasises a *relational, latent,* and *relative* position of media visibility occupied by each identified incident within contentious coverage as the institutional outcome.

As mentioned above, based on the illustration of a relational view of state attention, the flow of state attention is expected to be observed in the journalistic site commonly shared by identified incidents in the party press. Therefore, instead of measuring the quantity of contentious coverage received by each identified incident, structuring contentious coverage of identified incidents from a relational perspective is dependent on the formation of the journalistic network of identified incidents. Operationally speaking, the co-presence of identified incidents in the same article serves as a valuable lens of observation and, to locate the spotlight of state attention on local contentions during the harmonious society-building era, UCINET, a software programme for social network analysis created by Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman (2002) was employed to map out the structural portrayal of identified incidents within contentious coverage in the party press. As shown in Figure 9, each node represents one protest event covered in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* between 2004 and 2020, and the tie linking the nodes refers to a journalistic co-presence of two protest events in the same article. The strength of ties indicates the total number of news articles involving both protest events, i.e., the frequency of co-presence of two identified incidents within contentious coverage in the party press. Basically, such a contentious network of identified incidents built within contentious coverage not only directly tackles the question of to what extent identified incidents were simultaneously mentioned and journalistically connected in the party press but also shows a whole contentious landscape of identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state. Moreover, despite a distinction between individual reception of state attention in terms of the amount of contentious coverage and a relational view of state attention as flow addressed here, it does not mean that such a structuring approach entirely lacks the cumulative analytical perspective of contentious coverage and is not operationally able to take the highlight of state attention into account. Instead, the highlight of state attention based on individual reception of contentious

coverage is presented in Figure 9 as well. As shown in the figure, the size of node indicates the total number of news articles received by one specific identified incident in the party press. In brief, the bigger the node, the larger the amount of attention received by the incident, and so the greater the 'highlight' in the eyes of the party-state. Lastly, the edge length does not have any special meaning and the structure of this contentious network means everything.

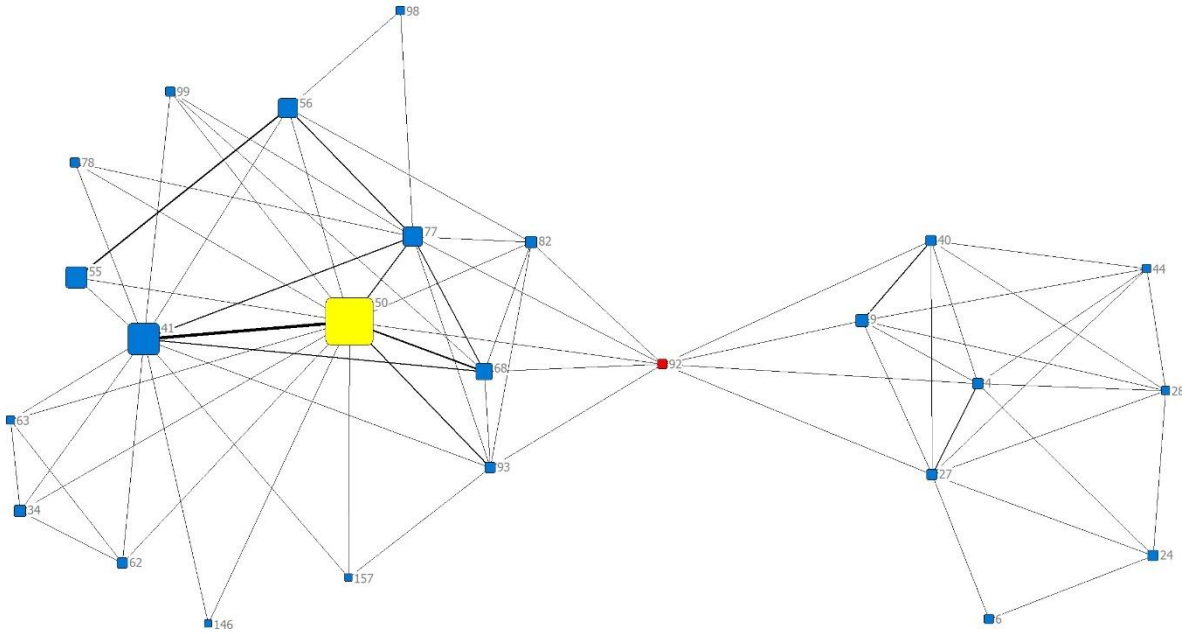
Figure 8-9 Contentious Network of Identified Incidents in the Party Press



As a result, the whole contentious landscape of identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere is presented in Figure 9. First, the majority of identified incidents, i.e., 107 of 180 protest events, were discursively isolated and failed to be journalistically linked to other protest events in the eyes of the state through the mouthpiece of the party. Thus, these isolated nodes were wiped out and excluded from the network analysis shown in the figure. The remaining 73 identified incidents were reportedly connected to at least one protest event in at least one article and thus formed complex contentious networks, with a total of 216 edges, in the state-initiated contentious public. As shown in Figure 9, the networks consist of several independent components. A total of 13 dyads and five closed triad were detected. Dyad means

a direct connection between two nodes, the simplest structure of a network, and the triad is made up of exactly three nodes. Besides, a main component consisting of 32 nodes was identified as well. Based on the intuitive observation of whole networks shown in Figure 9, the ties with solid strengths and the nodes with large sizes were all situated in the main component. So, arguably, this main component of the contentious network and all identified incidents taking positions within such a structure can be considered the major focal points of state attention in the eyes of the party-state. To further observe and fully understand this main component of contentious networks emerging from contentious coverage of identified incidents in the party press, the structure of the main component without pendants, which refer to the nodes with degree one, is presented in Figure 10. In line with the same rationale of mapping out the whole contentious networks of identified incidents in the party press, the node represents one specific identified incident, the size of node indicates the total number of articles received by each protest event, and the strength of tie means the frequency of journalistic co-presence of any two identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In addition, the colour of yellow was used to indicate the node with the largest degree centrality, i.e., the largest total number of ties possessed by a specific node, and the red was used to locate the node with the largest betweenness centrality, i.e., the largest number of times a node lies in the shortest path between other nodes. As a result, Figure 10 presents the structure of the main component with a total of 25 nodes.

Figure 8-10 Main Component of Spotlight-centred Networks



Taking a close look at the main component without pendants, it is clear that two major subgroups can be detected within the structure. One subgroup with eight nodes is on the right and another larger subgroup with 16 nodes is on the left. Both subgroups were connected dependently via the presence of the node labelled as ID 92, i.e., Panyu 'waste incineration' incident. In addition, for the amount of contentious coverage received by each identified incident, it is the subgroup on the left that consists of most high-profile protest events covered in the party press (e.g., Weng-an '6.28' incident with ID 50, Menglian '7.19' incident with ID 41, Lhasa '3.14' incident with ID 55, Urumqi '7.5' incident with ID 56, Longnan '11.17' incident with ID 68, and Shishou '6.17' incident with ID 77). By contrast, the solid ties between two identified incidents can be observed in both subgroups, even though the nodes on the left still take dominant positions in terms of the journalistic co-presence frequency in the party press. For instance, the strongest tie was detected between Weng-an '6.28' incident with ID 50 and Menglian '7.19' with ID 41 incident within the subgroup on the left. The journalistic co-presence of these two protest events can be found in a total of 15 news articles in the party

press. In addition, there were eight news articles simultaneously reporting Weng-an ‘6.28’ incident with ID 50 and Longnan ‘11.17’ incident with ID 68, ranking the second strongest tie within the structure of the main component. Taking a look at the subgroup on the right, the strength of the connection between the events with ID 40 and ID 9 and the connection between the events with ID 4 and ID 27 are pretty solid as well, with a frequency of journalistic co-presence at four and three, respectively. More details regarding the pairs of nodes with a tie strength greater than two are listed in Table 7. As depicted in Table 7, of 11 pairs of nods sharing solid journalistic connections, there were four pairs involving Weng-an ‘6.28’ incident and Shishou ‘6.17’ incident, respectively. Following these two identified incidents, Menglian ‘7.19’ incident and Longnan ’11.17’ incident can be found in three pairs of nodes, respectively.

Table 8-7 Strength of Ties in Main Contentious Component

Node ID	Identified Incident	Node ID	Identified Incident	Strength of Tie
50	Weng-an '6.28' Incident	41	Menglian '7.19' Incident	15
50	Weng-an '6.28' Incident	68	Longnan '11.17' Incident	8
55	Lhasa ‘3.14’ Incident	56	Urumqi '7.5' Incident	6
41	Menglian '7.19' Incident	68	Longnan '11.17' Incident	5
50	Weng-an '6.28' Incident	77	Shishou '6.17' Incident	5
40	Qidong '7.28' Incident	9	Shifang 'NIMBY' Incident	4
56	Urumqi '7.5' Incident	77	Shishou '6.17' Incident	3
68	Longnan '11.17' Incident	77	Shishou '6.17' Incident	3
41	Menglian '7.19' Incident	77	Shishou '6.17' Incident	3
4	Dalian 'PX' Incident	27	Xiamen 'PX' Incident	3
50	Weng-an '6.28' Incident	93	Chongqing 'Taxi Strike' Incident	3

From an individual perspective of the structural position occupied by each identified incident, two different centrality measures of all 25 nodes in the main component without pendants are listed in Table 8. The colour scale was applied in each column to specify the notable cells. Three identified incidents need to be particularly noted here. First, it is Weng-an ‘6.28’ incident, labelled as ID 50, that occupied a very central position in the eyes of the state, thanks to the significant numbers in both degree and betweenness centrality measures. Second, the case with ID 41, i.e., Menglian ‘7.19’ incident, enjoyed a very high level of degree centrality and this

means that Menglian '7.19' incident was journalistically connected to a great number of protest events within contentious coverage in the party press. Third, by contrast, Panyu incident against a local major waste incineration project, labelled as ID 92, had the highest level of betweenness centrality. This means that Panyu 'waste incineration' incident took the most crucial 'cut-point' position within the main component of contentious networks. Thus, arguably, Panyu 'waste incineration' incident was the case with the strongest bridging capability in the eyes of the party-state and was unintentionally situated in a broad discussion of local contentions that reached a wide range of identified incidents and bridged two major subgroups in the state-initiated contentious public sphere (Figure 10).

Table 8-8 Centrality of Nodes in Main Contentious Component

Case ID	Spotlight of State Attention	
	Normalised Degree Centrality	Normalised Betweenness Centrality
4	29.17	6.52
6	8.33	0.00
9	25.00	3.08
24	16.67	0.36
27	33.33	14.13
28	25.00	0.36
34	16.67	0.00
40	25.00	3.08
41	54.17	9.90
44	20.83	0.00
50	62.50	34.64
55	12.50	0.00
56	25.00	2.15
62	16.67	0.00
63	16.67	0.00
68	29.17	2.19
77	41.67	12.07
78	12.50	0.00
82	25.00	1.27
92	37.50	46.38
93	29.17	3.01
98	8.33	0.00
99	16.67	0.00
146	8.33	0.00
157	12.50	0.00

Table 8-9 Focal Identified Incidents Taking up the Central Positions within Contentious Coverage

Case ID	Event Label	Place	Year	Actor: Number	Action: Violence	Appeal: Issue 1	Appeal: Issue 2	Appeal: Issue 3	Appeal: Issue 4
27	Xiamen 'PX' Incident	Fujian	2007			Environment-related Issue	Cadre-related Issue		
41	Menglian '7.19' Incident	Yunnan	2008		Devastating	Cadre-related Issue	Land-related Issue	Business-related Issue	
50	Weng-an '6.28' Incident	Guizhou	2008	> 10000	Devastating	Accidental Death/Damage	Cadre-related Issue	Natural Resrouce-related Issue	Property-related Issue
77	Shishou '6.17' Incident	Hubei	2009		Devastating	Accidental Death/Damage	Cadre-related Issue		
92	Panyu 'Waste Incineration' Incident	Guangdong	2009			Environment-related Issue			

Finally, based on the structural position taken by each identified incident within contentious coverage in the party press, a total of five protest events with degree centrality greater than 30 and betweenness centrality greater than 10 were selected, as listed in Table 9 with details. Arguably, these five protest events listed in the table were the 'spotlight' of state attention on local contentions during the harmonious society-building era, due to the evidence-supported central positions occupied by them in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In other words, it is these five protest events that unintentionally emerged from contentious coverage in the party press as the focal points in the eyes of the party-state. As depicted in Table 9, these five protest events took place between 2007 and 2009. The number of people involved in these events was not well-documented. There was only one identified incident receiving the coverage of its large scale of the event and it is Weng-an '6.28' incident that reportedly involved more than ten thousand people. Regarding the reported severity of their actions, three identified incidents were reported as devastating and the remaining two protest events did not receive any news reports regarding their actions and direct consequences. For appeals and demands, four of five identified incidents were reportedly linked to multiple issues and only Panyu 'waste incineration' incident focused on the single issue. To be more specific, for the focal protest events in the eyes of the party-state, the cadre-related issue was the most important issue, because this issue was shared by four of five identified incidents in the spotlight of state attention.

8.3 The Distinction between the Highlight and the Spotlight

The highlight and the spotlight of state attention on local contentions during the harmonious society-building era have been detected above. The next crucial but very basic question is whether these identified incidents catching the state's attention in two different ways are identical to each other. In plain English, a question is raised about whether the highlight and

the spotlight are the same in the eyes of the party-state. This section aims to tackle this question and starts with a simple intuitive observation of the similarity and dissimilarity between both. Based on the findings presented above, two tables were constructed for a comparison between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention. A total of 25 identified incidents that were situated in the main component of the contentious network has been listed in Table 10, with a detailed presentation of the results of both centrality and quantity-centred measures of contentious coverage for each of them. The use of colour scale was to specify the notable numbers in each column. In addition, based on the detection of high-profile protest events and focal points in the eyes of the party-state (Table 6 and Table 9), table 11 was constructed to present the overview of all important identified incidents that were viewed by the party-state as the highlight and the spotlight of the attention during the harmonious society-building era. Those identified incidents exclusively falling in the highlight of state attention were marked in blue. By contrast, those exclusively placed in the spotlight of state attention were marked in yellow. The rest of identified incidents without the emphasis on any colours were simultaneously detected as the high-profile events and the focal points in the eyes of the party-state. As a result, arguably, these identified incidents can be claimed as the most important protest events in the view of the party-state in the harmonious society-building era.

Table 8-10 Comparison between the Highlight and the Spotlight of State Attention

Case ID	Spotlight of State Attention		Hihglight of State Attention
	Normalised Degree Centrality	Normalised Betweenness Centrality	Total Number of Articles Recevied
4	29.17	6.52	5
6	8.33	0.00	3
9	25.00	3.08	7
24	16.67	0.36	4
27	33.33	14.13	4
28	25.00	0.36	2
34	16.67	0.00	6
40	25.00	3.08	4
41	54.17	9.90	29
44	20.83	0.00	2
50	62.50	34.64	47
55	12.50	0.00	17
56	25.00	2.15	15
62	16.67	0.00	4
63	16.67	0.00	2
68	29.17	2.19	11
77	41.67	12.07	15
78	12.50	0.00	3
82	25.00	1.27	6
92	37.50	46.38	3
93	29.17	3.01	4
98	8.33	0.00	2
99	16.67	0.00	3
146	8.33	0.00	1
157	12.50	0.00	1

As depicted in Table 10, the complicated and multi-faceted relationships built between the state and protest events were disclosed by detecting the highlight and spotlight of state attention, and the short answer to the question of the distinction between both is that identified incidents in the highlight and spotlight of state attention were not entirely the same but did share an overlapping area. As Table 10 suggests, the distribution of state attention on identified incidents was not only uneven but also varied. Some identified incidents were found that they established solid relationships with the party-state across all analytical dimensions, some identified incidents dominated a partial aspect of state attention, while some others, though on the radar of the party-state, were very peripheral and trivial in the eyes of the party-state. To be more specific, three identified incidents need to be stressed further as follows.

8.3.1 ID 50: The Weng-an '6.28' Incident

First, the Weng-an '6.28' incident, labelled as ID 50, was not only the most visible 'high-profile' protest event in the party press but also emerged as the focal point which occupies the most central position in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, thanks to the largest amount of contentious coverage it received and the remarkable results of centrality measures within contentious networks. The very first news article that introduced the Weng-an '6.28' incident to the emerging state-initiated contentious public sphere was published in *the People's Daily* on July 5, 2008, with the title of *Guizhou continues to seriously investigate the responsibilities of cadres involved in the '6.28' incident: Weng-an County Party Committee Secretary and County Mayor were dismissed* [89]. During the harmonious society-building period from 2004 to 2020, the last news report involving the Weng-an incident was published in *the Guangming Daily* on January 29, 2014. Interestingly, the article concluded with a direct quote from Xi Jinping, the incumbent General Secretary of the CCP, 'the experience of Weng-an once again uncovered that only by maintaining flesh-and-blood ties with the people and putting the interests of the people as the priority can our party win the trust of the people and never lose'[90].

The Weng-an '6.28' Incident received many news articles describing its outbreak. As reported in the very first relevant article published on July 5, 2008, 'from the afternoon of June 28 to the early morning of June 29, some people in Weng-an County, Guizhou Province were dissatisfied with the investigation of a female student's death and thus gathered at the building of the county government and that of the county public security bureau. This further triggered a large-scale mass gathering to surround the governments and the incident of smashing, looting, and burning

[89] The Original in Chinese: 《贵州继续严肃追究"6.28"事件干部责任 瓮安县委书记、县长被免职》*The People's Daily*, July 5, 2008

[90] The Original in Chinese: "瓮安的经验再次揭示，我们的党只有保持与人民群众的血肉联系，把人民群众的利益放在至高的地位，才能赢得永不失落的信任。" *The Guangming Daily*, January 29, 2014

staged by a few outlaws'[91]. On October 24, 2011, *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* published the same article titled as *Reborn from the Ashes after Painful Lessons* and the incident was portrayed as 'due to the relevant parties' improper handling of the case of a middle school girl drowned …… seven days ago and the wide spread of various rumours, the strong dissatisfaction of the deceased's family and the public triggered a large-scale mass incident which eventually led to a huge fire burned down the office buildings of the County Public Security Bureau, County Party Committee, and County Government'[92]. On January 29, 2014, the last news article involving the Weng-an incident reported, 'in the centre of Weng-an, where many high-rise buildings stand now, a place with dilapidated houses and overgrown weeds is particularly eye-catching. It was once the seat of the Weng-an County Party Committee and the county government. On June 28, 2008, different versions of rumours surrounding the accidental drowning of a female middle school student spread wildly in the county. Although most of them were later proven to be untrue, long-suppressed dissatisfaction among the masses exploded. Angry crowds attacked the offices of party and government offices, the building of the county party committee building was set on fire, and the workplaces of the county government and county public security bureau were seriously damaged. The "Weng-an Incident" had then become an example of mass incident across the country at that time'[93]. In addition, some news articles particularly stressed and publicised the illegality of the Weng-an incident. For example, an article published in *the People's Daily* on August 6, 2010 referred to

[91] The Original in Chinese: "6 月 28 日下午至 29 日凌晨，贵州省瓮安县部分群众因对一名女学生死因鉴定结果不满，聚集到县政府和县公安局，引发大规模人群聚集围堵政府部门和少数不法分子打砸抢烧突发事件。" *The People's Daily*, July 5, 2008

[92] The Original in Chinese: "2008 年 6 月 28 日，因 7 天前一名中学女生在县城西门河大堰桥处溺水身亡，有关方面处置不当，加之各种谣言四起，引起死者亲属和群众强烈不满，进而引发大规模群体事件，直至一场大火烧向县公安局、县委、县政府的办公大楼。" *The People's Daily*, October 24, 2011

[93] The Original in Chinese: "在瓮安高楼林立的城中心，一片荒草颓垣格外扎眼，这里就是曾经的瓮安县委、县政府。2008 年 6 月 28 日，围绕着一名女中学生的意外溺亡，各种版本的说法在县城疯传，尽管大多数后来都被证明并非事实，但长期积压在群众心中的不满情绪爆发了：愤怒的人群冲击党政机关，烧毁了县委大楼，县政府、县公安局严重受损，'瓮安事件'也成为当时全国群体事件的样本。" *The Guangming Daily*, January 29, 2014

'104 juvenile delinquents in the Weng-an Incident'[94]. Another article published in *the People's Daily* on September 25, 2009, strongly claimed that, 'regarding the incidents of taxi drivers strike in Chongqing and other places, the mass incident in Weng-an County, Guizhou …… these influential incidents had shown time and time again …… incidents that blatantly violate the Constitution …… and other basic rights did exist. This not only endangered social stability, but also undermined the dignity of the Constitution'[95].

The articles received by the Weng-an incident also reflected on how and why it occurred and thus covered a wide range of possible causes behind the scenes. For example, the speech of Shi Zongyuan, the then secretary of the Guizhou Provincial Party Committee, was directly quoted in the article published on July 5, 2008. As Shi Zongyuan stated, 'the superficial reason and direct trigger of the '6.28' incident in Weng-an was the dispute over the cause of Li Shufen's death. But the deep cause was that the interests of the masses were frequently violated in the process of mineral resource development, demolition, resettlement and other works at the local level. The approaches and measures taken in handing these social conflicts and incidents were too forceful and over-simplistic and even police force was easily used at will. As the result, all these inevitably lead to the tensions between the people and the local authority' [96]. On September 28, 2011, the article published in *the Guangming Daily* stated that 'immigration relocation had been a serious issue affecting the social harmony and stability of Weng-an

[94] The Original in Chinese: "目前，'瓮安事件'中 104 名违法青少年整体实现了校园、家庭、社会'三个平稳回归'。" *The People's Daily*, August 6, 2010

[95] The Original in Chinese: "重庆等地出租车停运事件、贵州瓮安县群体性事件 …… 这些影响性的宪法事件一次又一次地表明，…… 公然违反宪法 …… 等基本权利的事件依然存在。这不仅危害了社会稳定，也使宪法尊严荡然无存。" *The People's Daily*, September 25, 2009

[96] The Original in Chinese: "瓮安'6.28'突发事件，表面的、直接的导火索是李树芬的死因争议，背后深层次原因是当地在矿产资源开发、移民安置、建筑拆迁等工作中，侵犯群众利益的事情屡有发生。而在处置这些矛盾纠纷和群体事件过程中，一些干部作风粗暴、工作方法简单，甚至随意动用警力，导致干群、警民关系紧张。" *The People's Daily*, July 5, 2008

county. Coupled with the long-standing social conflicts like mining disputes, demolition, and resettlement, the fatal drowning of a middle school student eventually triggered the outbreak of a large-scale mass incident' [97]. Another article published in *the People's Daily* on October 24, 2011, specifically emphasised that 'the uncle of the deceased who had an argument with the police was then beaten by gang members ordered by the police was the most critical "milestone" on the causal path that led to the escalation of the situation' [98] and further admitted that 'the land acquisition and house demolition are the most thorny tasks in the process of urban transformation and can easily lead to social conflicts if not handled properly. The occurrence of the Weng-an incident was very closely related to this this'[99].

Some other articles further discussed about the relationships between the outbreak of the Weng-an incident and the level of economic development in the locality. On October 21, 2010, Fang Ning (房宁), the then Director of the Institute of Political Science of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, published a signed article in *the People's Daily*. He pointed out that 'economic development and wealth accumulation would not necessarily bring about social harmony and stability. The emergence of many social problems and contradictions was precisely related to the issues deeply rooted in rapid development. In recent years, some places where social conflicts had intensified and mass incidents had occurred, such as Weng-an in Guizhou and Yihuang in Jiangxi, were not poor or deprived areas, but the ones with rapid economic

[97] The Original in Chinese: "移民搬迁是影响瓮安县群众和谐、社会稳定的突出问题,加之矿群纠纷、拆迁安置等社会矛盾积聚，2008 年 6 月 28 日,一位中学生的溺水身亡,引发了大规模群体性事件,严重损害了党和政府形象。" *The Guangming Daily*, September 28, 2011

[98] The Original in Chinese: "'6.28'事件中，死者叔叔被与他发生口角的民警指使黑帮成员殴打一事，就是整个事态演变因果链条中最为关键的'多米诺骨牌'。" *The People's Daily*, October 24, 2011

[99] The Original in Chinese: "征地拆迁难是城市改造中最棘手的问题，搞不好就会引发社会矛盾冲突。瓮安事件的发生，就与此关系密切。" *The People's Daily*, October 24, 2011

growth'[100]. On October 18, 2012, in an interview with *the People's Daily*, Sha Xiangui (沙先贵), the then secretary of the Weng-an County Party Committee, also mentioned the relationship between the level of economic development and social stability and raised the idea of 'the pain of transformation'. Sha Xiangui pointed out that Weng-an county had to keep a healthy balance between 'quickly achieving economic growth and meeting ever-increasing needs of improving the people's wellbeing …… [and] there were too many debts for people's wellbeing and the long-standing neglects of the people's right and interests at the local level, which led to the accumulation of social problems and public grievances'[101]. Interestingly, according to these two articles, its seems that Weng-an incident even inspired a touch of reflection that to some extent hinted at the potential shift of social contention in China to post-materialism and new social movements.

Besides, the Weng-an incident also received a substantial amount of media coverage with a narrow focus on the issue of local officials. On November 28, 2008, *the People's Daily* published an article written by Zhong Zuwen (仲祖文), the pseudonym of the Organisation Department of the CCP. The article stated that, 'in June this year, a large-scale mass incident occurred in Weng-an County, Guizhou Province. The important reason for this incident is that a small number of cadres were irresponsible and ineffective in their works'[102]. Furthermore, in 2009, a series of news articles focusing on the misbehaviours and the incompetency of local

[100] The Original in Chinese: "同时，也应清醒地看到，经济发展、物质财富的增加，不一定会必然带来社会和谐与稳定，许多问题和矛盾的出现恰恰与快速发展中存在的种种问题有关。近年来，一些矛盾激化、群体性事件发生的地方，如贵州瓮安、江西宜黄等，并不是贫困落后的地方，而恰恰是经济迅速崛起的地方。" *The People's Daily*, October 21, 2010

[101] The Original in Chinese: "与经济发达地区相比，瓮安遭遇着更复杂的两难困境：底子薄、实力弱，既要迅速实现经济上的跨越发展，又要满足不断提高的民生需求。反思瓮安事件，最大症结还在于民生欠账太多，对群众权益长期忽视，导致问题扎堆、民怨累积，最终一发不可收拾。" *The People's Daily*, October 18, 2012

[102] The Original in Chinese: "今年 6 月，贵州省瓮安县发生一起大规模群体性事件。引发这一事件的重要原因，是少数领导干部不负责任、工作不力。" *The People's Daily*, November 28, 2008

officials got published in *the Guangming Daily*. For example, the speech of Yang Weifu (杨维富), a researcher at the Development Research Centre of the State Council, was quoted in an article published on January 9. Regarding the Weng-an incident, Menglian incident and Longnan incident, he believed, 'the occurrence of these major incidents was not only related to the increasing public awareness of rights protection, but also related to the incompatibility of some cadres' approaches and capabilities of governance with the state of social development' [103]. According to another article published on March 27, it had been clearly described in the book titled as *A New Viewpoint of Mass Incident* and written by Liu Zifu (刘子富), the former president of the Guizhou branch of Xinhua News Agency, that 'since the mass gathered, none of the main leaders of the Weng-an County Party Committee and County Government showed up to have a talk with the people and thus missed the opportunity to contain the situation in time. Even after the government building was set on fire, leading cadres were still holding the meetings in their offices and waiting for the instructions from the above' [104].

The cadre-related issues covered in the articles that mentioned the Weng-an incident also include the accountability of local officials as a crucial topic. 'The Weng-an incident has shocked the country and abroad, causing a very bad impact. As the person in charge of Guizhou Province, I should bear the responsibility'[105], said Shi Zongyuan in the article published in *the People's Daily* on March 13, 2009. Some other news articles further discussed about the issue

[103] The Original in Chinese: "2008 年 6 月 28 日，贵州瓮安事件；7 月 19 日，云南孟连事件；11 月，甘肃陇南事件。'出现这些重大事件，既与公众的维权意识提升有关，也与一些领导干部的执政能力、执政方式和社会发展不适应有关' 国务院发展研究中心东方公共管理综合研究所副所长杨维富博士说。" *The Guangming Daily*, January 9, 2009

[104] The Original in Chinese: "新华社贵州分社原社长刘子富日前所出的新书《新群体事件观》在总结去年瓮安'6.28'事件时就指出，群众聚集起来之后，瓮安县委县政府主要领导无一人赶到现场和群众对话，错过了及时控制局面的机会，甚至当政府大楼被点燃后，相关领导还在办公室里闭门开会研究，层层请示等待。" *The Guangming Daily*, March 27, 2009

[105] "'瓮安事件惊动了境内外，造成很不好的影响。作为贵州省的主要负责人，我是有责任的。' 省委书记石宗源代表坦然回答记者提问。" *The People's Daily*, March 13, 2009

of holding local officials accountable. For example, the article published on July 17, 2009 praised the progress in accountability. As it stated, a positive signal was sent through the removal of both Weng-an County Party Committee Secretary and County Mayor, because 'prior to the Weng-an incident in Guizhou, …… it was often administrative governors who were held accountable, while the leaders of the party committee were often exempted'[106]. However, meanwhile, considering the fact that 'Wang Qin (王勤), the former secretary of the Weng-an County Party Committee who was dismissed during the Weng-an incident in Guizhou, was quietly transferred to the deputy director of the Qiannan Prefecture Finance Bureau...', this article also expressed concern about this ineffective implementation of accountability, by directly quoting the saying of Yang Weifu that 'such a kind of "vacation-like accountability" characterised by high-profile accountability here and low-key comeback there had seriously damaged the government's credibility'[107]. The same doubts about this 'symbolic' accountability can be also found in two other articles both published in 2009 and respectively titled as *High-profile Accountability Cannot be a Low-key Comeback*[108] and *The Covert Return of Officials Holding Accountable Undermines Public Trust in the Government*[109].

Furthermore, it is the cadre-related issue that reportedly connected the Weng-an incident with other instances of social contention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and thus set the solid ground for the Weng-an incident to be the focal point of state attention as well. For example, the article published in *the Guangming Daily* on January 15, 2009, emphasised on

[106] The Original in Chinese: "在贵州瓮安事件问责之前，在一些重大安全事故或群体性事件的处置中，被问责的常常是行政领导，而党委主要领导则往往被免责。" *The Guangming Daily*, July 17, 2009
[107] The Original in Chinese: "在贵州瓮安群体事件中被免职的瓮安原县委书记王勤也悄然调任黔南州财政局副局长 …… '但这种这边高调问责，那边低调东山再起的'休假式问责'，已然严重降低了政府的公信力。'杨维富博士不无忧虑地表示。" *The Guangming Daily*, July 17, 2009
[108] The Original in Chinese: 《高调问责，不能低调复出》 *The People's Daily*, March 27, 2009
[109] The Original in Chinese: 《问责官员隐蔽复出损害公众对政府的信任》 *The Guangming Daily*, April 2, 2009

'the lack of local cadres' emergency response capabilities, which had been shown in the recent mass incidents such as the Weng-an incident, Menglian incident, Longnan incident, Shishou incident, and Tonggang incident' [110]. The two articles published in *the People's Daily* on May 17 and July 1, 2011, repeatedly stated that 'after the outbreaks of a series of mass incidents such as the Weng-an incident in Guizhou Province and the Longnan incident in Gansu Province, "emergency management of mass incidents and urgent incidents" had become an important task in building the capabilities of governance'[111]. In the same year, the article published in *the People's Daily* on November 3 further reported that, 'regarding the mass incidents that took place in different places in recent years, such as the Menglian incident and the Weng-an incident that happened a few years ago and the Zengcheng incident and the Zhili incident that occurred this year …… the trigger behind the scenes was often the public's lack of trust in local governments and staffs'[112]. As reported in another article published in *the People's Daily* on January 17, 2012, 'regarding the Weng-an incident in Guizhou Province, the Menglian incident in Yunnan Province and the recent Wukan incident in Guangdong Province, they all originated in controllable social conflicts. However, due to the failures of local leaders to make quick decisions and to take effective measures, "small problems were magnified and big problems were exploded" and thus led to a serious mass incident. Therefore, the county party committee secretary's ability to navigate complex situations and handle emergencies is directly related to the stability of a county' [113].

[110] The Original in Chinese: "近年来相继出现的瓮安事件、孟连事件、陇南事件、石首事件、通钢事件等群体性事件，反映出干部应急能力的虚弱。" *The Guangming Daily*, January 15, 2010

[111] The Original in Chinese: "贵州瓮安事件、甘肃陇南事件等一系列群体性事件之后，'群体性事件和突发事件应急管理'成为执政能力建设的重要课题。" *The People's Daily*, May 17, 2011; July 1, 2011

[112] The Original in Chinese: "历数近些年来各地发生的群体性事件，无论是几年前的孟连事件、瓮安事件，还是今年以来发生的增城事件、织里事件，…… 其背后的诱因，往往是群众对当地政府及其工作人员缺乏信任。" *The People's Daily*, November 3, 2011

[113] The Original in Chinese: "从贵州瓮安事件、云南孟连事件到最近的广东乌坎事件，最初都源于可控的社会矛盾，但由于当地领导议而不决，没有及时采取应对措施，结果'小事拖大，大事拖炸'，酿成严重的群体性冲突。因此，县委书记驾驭复杂局面、处理突发事件的能力，直接关系着一个县的稳定大局。" *The People's Daily*, January 17, 2012

Given above-mentioned media coverage on the lack of governance capabilities at the local level, the training programme designed for local officials had been accordingly publicised in the news articles received by the Weng-an incident. As the article published in *the People's Daily* on February 2, 2010 reported, 'since the Weng-an incident and Longnan incident, a total of 500 county party secretaries across the country had finished the intensive training and learning on how to correctly handle different conflicts over interests and properly deal with the emergencies in the Central Party School. Shortly afterwards, the Ministry of Public Security convened the county police chiefs from all over the country to Beijing for the training as well'[114]. The article titled as *Cadre Training: Focusing on 'Scientific' and Seeking for 'Developmental'* and published in *the Guangming Daily* on March 26, 2010 further stated, 'the occurrences of grassroots mass incidents like the Weng-an incident, the Longnan incident …… immediately aroused the high-ranking party leaders' concerns about local governance'[115]. As a result, 'the theme of "maintaining social stability and handling emergencies" had become the content of training programme for the cadres responsible for stability maintenance'[116], so did another theme of 'being aware of treating, using and managing the media well and improving the ability of dealing with the media'[117]. Similarly, on September 8, 2009, the article published in *the People's Daily* stated that, 'in the course titled as Experiences and Thoughts on the

[114] The Original in Chinese: "瓮安事件、陇南事件发生以后，来自全国的 500 名县委书记走进中央党校集中培训，学习'如何正确处理各种利益矛盾，妥善处置突发事件'。随后不久，公安部又把全国的县公安局长叫到北京来培训。" *The People's Daily*, February 2, 2010

[115] The Original in Chinese: "当以瓮安事件、陇南事件 …… 为代表的多起基层群体性事件和重大事故发生后，立马引起了高层领导对基层社会管理工作的担忧。" *The Guangming Daily*, March 26, 2010

[116] The Original in Chinese: "'维持社会稳定及突发事件处理'这样的主题就成为了与维稳相关的干部培训的内容之一。" *The Guangming Daily*, March 26, 2010

[117] The Original in Chinese: "为了切实增强各级领导干部重视新闻舆论、重视舆论引导和善待媒体、善用媒体、善管媒体的意识，切实提高各级领导干部与媒体打交道的能力和水平，在各类干部培训班上，'如何与媒体打交道'也成了一门主要课程。" *The Guangming Daily*, March 26, 2010

Handling the Menglian Incident and the Weng-an Incident, …… how to deal with public opinion and news media had become an important module of the training' [118].

Indeed, many news articles received by the Weng-an incident paid their attention to the increasingly important linkages between social contention and the media, or the information in a more general sense. For example, the article published in *the People's Daily* on March 13, 2009, directly quoted the original words of the then Guizhou Provincial Party Committee Secretary Shi Zongyuan, that is, 'relevant Information [about the Weng-an incident] should be disclosed to the media as soon as possible, [to] support the supervision from the public'[119]. In the same year, in another article titled *Not Knowing the Truth, or Not Giving the Truth* written by an anonymous netizen and published in *the People's Daily* on August 21, Shi Zongyuan's speech was directly quoted once again. As he stated, 'the view of mass incidents as staged by the people who do not know the truth and instigated by a few bad guys need to be changed …… thus, [the author believed] the old 'cover-up' approach needs to be shifted to the instant publicity of the truth, in order to protect the people's right to know and supervise'[120]. Moreover, in an article published in *the People's Daily* on January 14, 2010, Guo Yuhua (郭于华), a professor of Sociology at Tsinghua University, stated that 'the mass incidents such as the "Weng-an Incident" and the "Shishou Incident" that took place in recent years were almost all related to the ways in which the information was released, disseminated, and received. This

[118] The Original in Chinese: "'孟连事件、瓮安事件的处置经验与思考'一课。…… 如何面对社会舆论和新闻媒体，成为此次轮训的一个重要内容。" *The People's Daily*, September 8, 2009

[119] The Original in Chinese: "省委书记石宗源代表坦然回答记者提问，并表示：应在第一时间向媒体披露信息，支持舆论监督。" *The People's Daily*, March 13, 2009

[120] The Original in Chinese: "'瓮安事件'发生时，贵州省委书记石宗源曾一针见血地指出，要打破群体性事件是'不明真相的群众在少数坏人的煽动下'发生的思维模式，…… 因此，我们要改改'捂盖子'的陈旧思维，该公开的真相及时公开，保障群众的知情权和监督权。" *The People's Daily*, August 21, 2009

also further illustrates the importance of information disclosure'[121]. Zhu Xinhua (祝华新), an expert from the Public Opinion Monitoring Office at the People's Daily Online, also said in another article published in *the People's Daily* on January 21, 2010 that 'since the Weng-an incident, many places had learned lessons on how to maintain media relations in the handling of mass incidents. The key is twofold. The first is whether it [the incident] can be publicised in a timely manner …… the second is whether the real problems can be faced with a sincere and responsible attitude, the public and the media can be faced with a candid attitude'[122].

In line with this train of thought, the media-related issue had constituted another 'bridge' connecting the Weng-an incident with other different incidents. For example, a further comparison between the Weng-an incident and the Shishou incident had been conducted from an informational perspective in the article published in *the People's Daily* on June 24, 2009. As Shi Zongyuan, the then Secretary of the Guizhou Provincial Party Committee, stressed in the news article, 'at the beginning of the Weng-an incident, there were many rumours on the Internet. However, after the truth about the incident was revealed through the media, the questions raised by the public were answered. The insistence on information transparency was the most important reason for quickly quelling the Weng-an incident' [123]. In contrast with the Weng-an incident, 'the murder of a young hotel chef in Shishou City, Hubei Province,

[121] The Original in Chinese: "近年发生的'瓮安事件'、'石首事件'等群体性事件几乎都与信息的发布、传递、接受的方式有关。这也进一步说明了信息公开的重要性。" *The People's Daily*, January 14, 2010

[122] The Original in Chinese: "自瓮安事件以来，不少地方在突发事件的媒体关系处理上，积累了一些经验和教训。关键有两点：一是能不能及时公开，迅速披露信息，抢占发声先机，至少不要迟滞太久。…… 二是能不能以真诚负责态度面对问题，以坦诚态度面对公众和媒体，不回避工作中的失误，勇于与个别违法乱纪的干部'切割'，切实维护群众利益。" *The People's Daily*, January 21, 2010

[123] The Original in Chinese: "贵州省委书记石宗源在总结瓮安事件时说，瓮安事件发生之初，网上有许多谣言。但是通过媒体披露事件真相后，群众的质疑得到了回应。坚持信息透明是迅速平息瓮安事件的最重要原因。" *The People's Daily*, June 24, 2009

eventually led to the confrontation, because of the spread of various rumours'[124]. As the article further stated, 'faced with many doubts, the police's explanations failed to convince the family of the deceased and the public. For about 80 hours, on the one hand, the government's press releases were vague; on the other hand, netizens used informal channels to communicate and explore the truth. …… The Shishou incident once again reminded the government departments and party cadres that [they] should properly deal with the new situation of multi-channelled and interactive information dissemination and opinion expression in the society nowadays' [125].

Another article published in *the Guangming Daily* on January 8, 2009 discussed the Weng-an incident, the Menglian incident, and the taxi driver strike incident in Chongqing at the same time as follows. 'After the occurrence of Weng-an incident, a team of forensic experts commissioned by the Guizhou Provincial Public Security Department immediately conducted the third inspection of the deceased's body. The entire process was witnessed by the relatives of the deceased and the representatives of local villagers. Subsequently, the inspection report was released to the public. What had been proved is that releasing information in a timely and accurate manner and speaking out with the facts were strong measures …… in response to mass incidents' [126]. As for the Menglian incident, the saying of Li Jiheng (李纪恒), the then deputy secretary of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee, was quoted in the article as follows, 'a responsible government had nothing to hide from the public'[127]. In this article, the

[124] The Original in Chinese: "湖北石首市一名酒店青年厨师的命案，在种种传言的发酵下酿成冲突。" *The People's Daily*, June 24, 2009

[125] The Original in Chinese: "石首案再次提醒有关政府部门和领导干部，如何妥善应对当今社会信息传播和意见表达多渠道、互动性的新局面。" *The People's Daily*, June 24, 2009

[126] The Original in Chinese: "瓮安事件发生后，由贵州省公安厅委托的司法鉴定专家组，立即对死者遗体进行了第三次检验，整个过程由死者亲属和当地村民代表现场见证。随后，检验报告向社会公布。事实证明，及时准确地发布信息，用事实说话，是 …… 应对群体性事件的有力举措。" *The Guangming Daily*, January 8, 2009

[127] The Original in Chinese: "正如孟连事件发生后，在现场主持处置工作的云南省委副书记李纪恒所言：'谣言止于真相。一个负责任的政府,没有什么可以向公众隐瞒的。'" *The Guangming Daily*, January 8, 2009

taxi driver strike incident in Chongqing was cited as 'a good example of solving problems through the mechanisms of dialogue and consultation. On the one hand, there were rational expressions and legitimate demands. On the other hand, there were public and immediate responses from the government. Thus, the handling of mass incidents had even become brighter' [128].

8.3.2 ID 41: The Menglian '7.19' Incident

Second, the Menglian '7.19' incident enjoyed a considerable amount of visibility in the party press, in terms of the numerical reception of contentious coverage, and shared solid journalistic connections with other reported protest events but lacked a strong bridging capability in the eyes of the party-state. This means that, as shown in Figure 10, the Menglian '7.19' incident was merely mentioned very frequently within a small cluster of identified incidents but was seldom used by the party-state as a typical bridging tool to discursively reach a wide range of different identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

The very first article covering the Menglian incident was published in *the People's Daily* on September 18, 2008. As reported, 'on July 19, a serious confrontation between civilians and the police occurred in Menglian County, resulting in the death of two villagers and shocking the whole country' [129]. Furthermore, 'on the third day after the Menglian "7.19" mass incident, the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee quickly made a decision to launch a special training programme with the Marxist view of the mass and the party's mass line as the main contents

[128] The Original in Chinese: "11 月初，在天气阴冷的重庆发生的出租车停运事件，就是通过对话协商机制解决问题的范例。一边是理性的表达方式、正当的利益诉求，一边是政府公开及时的回应，群体性事件处置也由此变得阳光起来。" *The Guangming Daily*, January 8, 2009

[129] The Original in Chinese: "11 月 19 日，云南省普洱市孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县发生的警民冲突事件，造成 2 名村民死亡，震惊全国。" *The People's Daily*, September 18, 2008

for the party members and cadres across the province' [130]. On December 15 of the same year, *the Guangming Daily* issued its first article involving the Menglian incident and linked it to other different incidents for the first time. The article not only stated that 'the confrontations between civilians and the police that took place one by one this year, such as the incident in Weng-an, Guizhou on June 28, the incident in Fugu, Shaanxi on July 3 and the incident in Menglian, Yunnan on July 19, raised a society-wide concern' [131] but also called for 'correctly understanding and scientifically handling mass incidents. [In this sense,] resolving problems and stabilising people had become a major issue of lawful governance facing party committees and governments at all levels'[132]. In fact, these two news articles can be viewed as having successfully set the basic tones for the party press to cover the Menglian incident.

In the following reports, the economic issues behind the outbreak of the Menglian incident had been uncovered and stressed. On March 7, 2011, Bai Enpei (白恩培), the then secretary of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee, published a signed article in *the People's Daily* and stated that, 'in 2008, the "7.19" incident that took place in Menglian County was due to the interest disputes between rubber farmers and rubber companies'[133]. In the same year, Guo Chongwei (郭崇伟), the then member of the Standing Committee of the Menglian County Party Committee and Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Committee of Menglian County, also published a signed article in *the People's Daily* on June 28 and reiterated that 'the main

[130] The Original in Chinese: "孟连'7.19'群体性事件发生后第三天，云南省委就迅速做出决定，在全省党员干部中开展一次以马克思主义群众观和党的群众路线为主要内容的专题教育活动，先期举办两期领导干部专题研讨班。" *The People's Daily*, September 18, 2008

[131] The Original in Chinese: "今年以来，接连发生的贵州瓮安'6.28'、陕西府谷'7.3'、云南孟连'7.19'等警民冲突事件，引起社会各界广泛关注。" *The Guangming Daily*, December 15, 2008

[132] The Original in Chinese: "正确认识和科学处置群体性事件，事要解决，人要稳定，已成为当前各级党委和政府面临的重大法治课题。" *The Guangming Daily*, December 15, 2008

[133] The Original in Chinese: "2008 年，我省孟连县因胶农与橡胶公司的利益纠纷引发了'7.19'群体性事件。" *The People's Daily*, March 7, 2011

reason for the outbreak of the '7.19' incident was that the interests of rubber farmers were seriously damaged'[134]. Additionally, there were two more articles explicitly mentioning the economic issue behind the scenes. An article published in *the People's Daily* on April 4, 2010 discussed 'the issue of rubber property rights that rubber farmers were most concerned about'[135] and another article published in *the Guangming Daily* on July 14, 2011 referred the incident to 'the problem caused by the damages to the interests of rubber farmers'[136].

The article published in *the People's Daily* on July 19, 2011 was the first time for the Menglian incident to be reportedly connected to both economic issues and cadre issues. As reported, 'the corruption was often hidden behind mass incidents and the rubber farmers' claims for the interests had not been resolved for a long time. After the "7.19" incident, the Yunnan Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection set up a task force to conduct in-depth investigations and uncovered a series of [corruption] cases'[137]. Another article published on October 24, 2011 stated that 'the conflicts between rubber farmers and rubber companies had been existing for a long time. …… In local cadres' opinions, on the surface, it seems that the Menglian incident was a confrontation between civilians and the police, but it was essentially the strong dissatisfaction of rubber farmers against the local party committees and governments, which

[134] The Original in Chinese: "'7.19'事件之所以发生，主要症结就在于胶农利益严重受损。" *The People's Daily*, June 28, 2011
[135] The Original in Chinese: "针对胶农最为关心的橡胶产权问题。" *The People's Daily*, April 4, 2010
[136] The Original in Chinese: "2008 年 7 月下旬，由于胶农利益受到了伤害，出现了问题。" *The Guangming Daily*, July 14, 2011
[137] The Original in Chinese: "群体性事件背后往往藏匿着腐败，胶农的利益诉求长期得不到解决，云南省纪委在'7.19'事件发生后成立了专案组深入展开调查，挖出了一系列串案窝案。" *The People's Daily*, July 19, 2011

had gradually evolved from the grievances deeply rooted in the long-standing unresolved economic disputes' [138].

Obviously, the cadre issues had also inevitably become the main theme of contentious coverage on the Menglian incident. The article simultaneously published in *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* on January 8, 2010 publicised the direct cadre-related outcomes of the incident. It was reported that, 'in response to mass incidents like the "7.19" incident in Menglian County, Yunnan Province, the corruption cases of Hu Wenbin (胡文彬), the former secretary of the County Party Committee of Menglian County, Dao Lifu (刀立富) and others were investigated and processed'[139]. Qin Guangrong (秦光荣), the then Secretary of the Yunnan Provincial Committee of the CCP, also stated in his signed article published in *the People's Daily* on February 14, 2012, that 'nowadays, a small number of cadres in some places were indifferent to the masses and insensitive to the masses' sufferings, which had eventually led to the tensions between the local authorities and the masses and the frequent outbreaks of mass incidents as well'[140]. Another article published in *the People's Daily* on May 24, 2013 described the situation in more detail as follows: 'the former secretary of the county party committee of Menglian County, Yunnan Province, only went to the countryside [for field study and inspection] 26 times a year, and always returned to the county on the same day; the leading cadres of townships mostly lived in the county and normally they went to the countryside on Mondays and returned home on Fridays. The relationship between local cadres and the masses

[138] The Original in Chinese: "孟连胶农和橡胶公司的矛盾由来已久。…… 当地干部认为，'孟连事件'表面上看是警民冲突，实质上是胶农与企业之间的经济纠纷长期得不到解决，致使胶农对橡胶公司的积怨，逐步演变为对基层党委政府的强烈不满。" *The People's Daily*, October 24, 2011

[139] The Original in Chinese: "针对云南孟连'7.19'等群体性事件，查处了孟连县原县委书记胡文彬、刀立富受贿等腐败案件。" *The People's Daily*, January 8, 2010

[140] The Original in Chinese: "现在一些地方的少数干部对群众感情冷漠，对群众疾苦漠不关心、麻木不仁，导致党群干群关系紧张、群体性事件屡屡发生。" *The People's Daily*, February 14, 2012

was tense [because of the lack of connection and communication], which eventually led to the outbreak of mass incident' [141].

The cadre-related issues had also become the main channel for the Menglian incident to be journalistically connected with other reported incidents, including the aforementioned Weng-an incident. For example, as the article published in *the People's Daily* on February 6, 2009 stressed, 'major mass incidents such as the one in Weng-an in Guizhou Province, Menglian in Yunnan Province, and Longnan in Gansu Province had seriously impacted the harmony and stability of society and damaged the image of the party-state as well. The occurrence of these incidents was not accidental but closely related to the improper approach and misbehaviours of some local cadres' [142]. On January 13, 2011, the article published in *the People's Daily* stated that, 'social conflicts and disputes still stood in some places and mass incidents occurred frequently, especially like the influential and shocking mass incidents in Menglian, Yunnan Province, Weng-an, Guizhou Province, Shishou, Hubei Province and Yihuang, Jiangxi Province. …… fundamentally speaking, it was because the interests of the local people had not been safeguarded properly, and had even been harmed; the relationship between local cadres and the masses had been indifferent and alienated for a long time, and even been antagonistic'[143]. Gao Xinmin (高新民), a professor at the Central Party School, stressed in an article published in *the People's Daily* on January 17, 2012 as follows: 'behind a series of

[141] The Original in Chinese: "云南省孟连县原县委书记，一年内只下乡 26 次，且都是当天返回；乡镇主要领导多住在县城，周一下乡，周五回家。干群关系紧张，最后酿成了群体事件。" *The People's Daily*, May 24, 2013

[142] The Original in Chinese: "贵州瓮安、云南孟连、甘肃陇南等重大群体性事件，严重影响了社会和谐稳定，损害了党和政府形象。这些事故和事件的发生不是偶然的，而与一些领导干部作风不正密切相关。" *The People's Daily*, February 6, 2009

[143] The Original in Chinese: "一些地方矛盾纠纷不断，群体性事件频发，尤其是云南孟连事件、贵州瓮安事件、湖北石首事件、江西宜黄事件等社会震动很大。…… 说到底还是因为当地群众利益没有得到维护，甚至受到损害，干群关系长期冷漠疏远，甚至出现对立。" *The People's Daily*, January 13, 2011

grassroots mass incidents such as the Weng-an incident in Guizhou Province and the Menglian incident in Yunnan Province, it was difficult to see the grassroots party organs …… functioning as either a buffer or a mediator for social conflicts' [144].

In response to the cadres' lack of governance capabilities, training programme was also reported in the news articles mentioning the Menglian incident in the party press. For example, an article published in *the People's Daily* on April 21, 2009 reported, 'given the occurrences of mass incidents such as the Weng-an incident, the Longnan incident, and the Menglian incident, how to deal with such incidents and how to solve complex problems had become the pressing issues especially facing the young local cadres' [145]. Taking another example, 'after the Weng-an incident and the Menglian incident, Bianmin (边民), as a senior netizen, was invited to the Yunnan Provincial Government …… to deliver a training course on the characteristics of online information dissemination and how to use the internet to respond to emergencies', [146] as reported in the article published in *the People's Daily* on February 9, 2010. According to another article published in *the People's Daily* on August 16, 2011, it was reported that 'the Menglian County Party Committee, by viewing the "7.19" Incident as a typical case, had organised party members and cadres to conduct an in-depth analysis of the causes for the incident, in order to address the issues of …… simple approaches and forceful measures taken by some cadres'[147].

[144] The Original in Chinese: "在过往的一系列如贵州瓮安、云南孟连等基层事件背后，都难以看到 …… 基层党组织在缓冲或调节社会矛盾方面的作用。" *The People's Daily*, January 17, 2012

[145] The Original in Chinese: "随着瓮安事件、陇南事件、孟连事件等突发事件的发生，如何处理这类事件，如何解决复杂问题，成为年轻干部成长过程中备受关注的问题。" *The People's Daily*, April 21, 2009

[146] The Original in Chinese: "在瓮安事件、孟连事件发生后，作为资深网民，边民曾被请到云南省政府，为省里处级以下干部做培训，讲网络信息传播的特点和如何利用网络应对突发事件。" *The People's Daily*, February 9, 2010

[147] The Original in Chinese: "孟连县委将'7.19'事件作为典型案例，组织党员干部深入剖析事件发生的原因，着力解决部分干部 …… 工作方法简单粗暴的问题。" *The People's Daily*, August 16, 2011

8.3.3 ID 92: The Panyu 'Waste Incineration' Incident

Third, for identified incidents that were placed in the area labelled as the spotlight but in combination with the 'low-light' in the eyes of the state, the most notable example is the Panyu 'waste incineration' incident, labelled as ID 92. For this interesting reported protest event, despite a very small amount of state attention received, merely three articles in total, the Panyu 'waste incineration' incident still occupied the most crucial 'cut-point' position, due to the highest number of betweenness centrality measure. Thus, the Panyu 'waste incineration' incident needs to be understood as the case with incredible bridging capability in the eyes of the party-state and unintentionally used by the party-state in a certain bridging way to channel the flows of state attention through various identified incidents in the party press.

There are two articles that deserve further elaboration here. The first article was published *in the People's Daily* on January 18, 2013. The article was dedicated to environmental issues and thus covered a wide range of environmental mass incidents, including the Panyu 'waste incineration' incident. As stated in the article, 'the number of "environmental mass incidents" had increased by an average of 30% every year and this had already made environmental mass incidents the most pressing concern for local governments at all levels'[148]. Moreover, by formally introducing the concept of 'risk society', the article mentioned a series of environmental mass incidents that occurred 'in a "risk-sensitive" era of right awareness increasingly awakened and demands gradually diversified, such as the incident in Shifang, Sichuan Province, the incident in Qidong, Jiangsu Province, the disturbances triggered by

[148] The Original in Chinese: "'环境群体性事件'年均三成的涨幅，已经让环境问题成为各级地方政府绷得最紧的弦。" *The People's Daily*, January 18, 2013

chemical plant projects construction in Xiamen, Dalian and other places, and the local residents' opposition against the building of a waste incineration plant in Panyu'[149].

By contrast, another article published on February 2, 2010 particularly focused on how new media function as a double-edged sword in the process of mass mobilisation and social governance. On the one hand, the article stated that, 'behind the Kunming "Luosiwan" Incident, …… the Shishou Incident in Hubei Province …… [and] the Panyu "Waste Incineration" Incident, the emerging new media commonly served as a common ground'[150]. 'Because the message can be disseminated through mobile phones …… [and] spreads extremely fast, …… [thus] social media played an important role in …… the occurrence of the Shihou Incident in Hubei Province and Panyu Incident in Guangzhou City' [151]. On the other hand, the article also emphasised on how new media can facilitate immediate and timely responses from local authority to the incidents. The article took the Kunming 'Luosiwan' Incident for an example and reported, 'on the morning of November 21, 2009, due to the issue of demolition, thousands of traders in Luosiwan Market, Kunming City, collectively occupied the streets and blocked the road. …… At around 3:00 p.m., the police held an online press conference on Yunnan.com and other websites to brief about the situation of the incident. …… The information released by the government spread on social media and was widely circulated in QQ groups, BBS forums and other online websites. …… It was precisely because of proper handling and timely disclosure of information that the gathering of thousands of people was

[149] The Original in Chinese: "这样的'风险社会'，还正好遇到了权利日益觉醒、诉求逐渐多元的'风险敏感'时代。…… 从四川什邡到江苏启东，很多案例说明了这一点。…… 曾在厦门、大连等地引来环境风波的化工项目 …… 番禺的垃圾焚烧厂可能也不会在居民的反对声中叫停。" *The People's Daily*, January 18, 2013

[150] The Original in Chinese: "在 …… 昆明'螺蛳湾'事件、 …… 湖北石首事件、 …… '番禺垃圾门'事件的背后，频现新兴媒体的身影。" *The People's Daily*, February 2, 2010

[151] The Original in Chinese: "由于可以通过手机发布信息， …… 传播速度极为迅速。在 …… 湖北石首事件、广州番禺事件中，微博客都发挥了重要作用。" *The People's Daily*, February 2, 2010

quickly handled, the spread of rumours and public panic after the forceful suppression of the incident was avoided, and serious street riots like the Weng-an incident and the Longnan incident was avoided as well'[152]. Interestingly, it seems that this article was expected to deliver an idea that, in the party-state's eyes, forceful suppression and information transparency were not mutually exclusive but complementary to each other.

Table 8-11 Eight Major Identified Incidents in the Highlight and Spotlight of State Attention

Case ID	Event Label	Place	Year	Actor: Number	Action: Violence	Appeal: Issue 1	Appeal: Issue 2	Appeal: Issue 3	Appeal: Issue 4
27	Xiamen 'PX' Incident	Fujian	2007			Environment-related Issue	Cadre-related Issue		
41	Menglian '7.19' Incident	Yunnan	2008		Devastating	Cadre-related Issue	Land-related Issue	Business-related Issue	
50	Weng-an '6.28' Incident	Guizhou	2008	> 10000	Devastating	Accidental Death/Damage	Cadre-related Issue	Natural Resrouce-related Issue	Property-related Issue
55	Lhasa '3.14' Incident	Tibet	2008		Devastating	Ethnicity/Religion-related Issue	Political Claims		
56	Urumqi '7.5' Incident	Xinjiang	2009		Devastating	Ethnicity/Religion-related Issue	Political Claims		
68	Longnan '11.17' Incident	Gansu	2008	1000-9999	Devastating	Property-related Issue	Cadre-related Issue		
77	Shishou '6.17' Incident	Hubei	2009		Devastating	Accidental Death/Damage	Cadre-related Issue		
92	Panyu 'Waste Incineration' Incident	Guangdong	2009			Environment-related Issue			

Last, after illustrating aforementioned three prominent cases, to conclude this section, the similarity and dissimilarity between the spotlight and the highlight of state attention need to be further outlined through simply comparing those identified incidents labelled as the high-profile protest events with those emerging as the focal points in the eyes of the state. According to Table 11, two identified incidents coloured in yellow were exclusively positioned in the spotlight of state attention and three identified incidents coloured in blue were exclusively positioned in the highlight of state attention. For Xiamen 'PX' incident and Pany 'waste incineration' incident, as the spotlight rather than the highlight of state attention, they were both environmental protest events and did not receive any news reports on their actions and serious direct consequences. For the other three incidents that were exclusively detected as the highlight rather than the spotlight of state attention, namely the Lhasa '3.14' incident, the Urumqi '7.5' incident and the Longnan '11.17' incident, the common things reportedly shared

[152] The Original in Chinese: "2009 年 11 月 21 日上午，昆明螺蛳湾市场因拆迁问题发生上千商户集体上街堵路事件。…… 下午 3 时许，昆明警方就在云南网等网站召开网络新闻发布会，通报事件情况。…… 政府发布的消息在微博客中传播开来，并且在 QQ 群、BBS 论坛等网络载体中广为流传。…… 上千人聚集，正是因为处置得当，信息披露及时，才得以迅速化解，避免了群体性事件被强行压制下去后的谣言四起、人心惶惶，避免了瓮安事件、陇南事件那样严重的街头骚乱。" *The People's Daily*, February 2, 2010

by them were multiple demands claimed and their devastating actions. By contrast, it is Weng-an '6.28' incident, Menglian '7.18' incident and Shishou '6.17' incident that took the overlapping area of the spotlight and the highlight. An interesting finding about this 'overlapping area' in the eyes of the state is that all these three identified incidents that reportedly had multiple demands and shared the same important cadre-related issue. To summarise, aforementioned findings simply suggest that the spotlight and the highlight of state attention was not entirely the same but indeed shared the overlapping areas.

8.3.4 QAP: A Networked Approach to the Relationship between the Highlight and Spotlight

This section systematically explores the relationship between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention on local contentions during the harmonious society-building era and, more importantly, examines whether both typical distributions of state attention are interdependent with each other. So, to achieve the goal, UCINET was employed to conduct QAP analysis to systematically investigate the correlated relationship between the highlight and the spotlight in the eyes of the state. QAP, which stands for quadratic assignment procedure (Krackhardt, 1988), provides a classic analytical tool based on non-parametric alignment to test the correlation between various networks and thus has been widely applied in the research area of social network analysis. In brief, as stated in the handbook of UCINET, the purpose of QAP is to compute the correlation between entries of two square matrices and assess the frequency of random measures as large as actually observed. Thus, the employment of QAP is principally to identify the correlation between various networks with the same numbered set of nodes. The algorithm proceeds in two steps. In the first step, the question of what kind of correlation can be identified between networks is expected to be tackled. To achieve the goal, QAP computes Pearson's correlation coefficient between corresponding cells of the two data matrices.

Following the first step, the question of whether the result of observed correlations is reliable and statistically significant needs to be answered. QAP randomly permutes rows and columns, synchronously, of one matrix and recomputes the correlation. The next step is carried out hundreds of times to compute the proportion of times that a random measure is larger than or equal to the observed measure calculated in step one. As a result, a low proportion, i.e., the P-value shown in the QAP results smaller than 0.05, suggests a significant correlation between the matrices that is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Last but not least, the number of correlations to compute between the observed data matrix and the randomly permuted structure matrix matters. The larger the number of random permutations, the better the estimates of standard error and 'significance'.

QAP analysis offers a special networked approach to the understanding of the relationship between the highlight and spotlight of state attention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. Nevertheless, before the employment of QAP analysis in line with this networked rationale of investigation, two suitable data matrices (i.e., a highlight-centred network and a spotlight-centred network) need to be constructed, respectively. A spotlight-centred data matrix, which addresses the journalistic co-presence of identified incidents in the party press, has been derived and constructed, thanks to the employment of network analysis illustrated above, such that the spotlight-centred 180 * 180 square matrix is accessible to QAP analysis and can be processed by UCINET directly. However, on the other hand, the dataset regarding the highlight of state attention needs to be transformed from raw data into a square matrix. Thus, the construction of a highlight-centred matrix is the key to data preparation of QAP analysis here**.** However, it is known that the highlight of state attention (Table 8) was represented in the absolute total number of relevant news articles received by each identified incident. By contrast, a matrix dataset, from a relational perspective, is constituted to show either similarity-based or

dissimilarity-based relations within a group of nodes. So, based on the raw data regarding the amount of contentious coverage received by identified incidents, all 180 identified incidents need to be considered the nodes of a highlight-centred network in the first place and then linked to each other in line with reasonable transformative logics. To avoid selective and constructive bias rooted in different rationales for data transformation, both similarity-based and dissimilarity-based logics of data transformation were applied, respectively, to construct two independent data matrices and thus map out the highlight-centred networks from two different perspectives.

To be more specific, first, in line with a dissimilarity-based rationale of data transformation, a pair of identified incidents were linked to each other by an absolute difference in their numerical receptions of relevant news articles. As a result, a 180 * 180 square matrix which indicates the dissimilarity between identified incidents based on the difference in their individual receptions of contentious coverage was constructed and it was labelled as the Highlight: Difference. Second, from a similarity-based perspective of data transformation, identified incidents falling into the same category regarding the highlight of state attention (Table 5 and Figure 7) were linked to each other. Accordingly, a 180 * 180 square matrix was constructed to indicate the similarity between identified incidents based on the same, or similar, amount of contentious coverage received at the level of identified incidents and it was labelled as Highlight: Group. Next, the spotlight-centred and two highlight-centred square matrices were processed by UCINET, while their correlated relationships with a total of 5,000 permutations were explored through QAP correlation analysis. The results of QAP analysis are presented in Figure 11.

Figure 8-11 QAP Analysis: Correlation between the Highlight and the Spotlight

```
QAP CORRELATION
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
# of Permutations:            5000
Random seed:                  16352


QAP Statistics


QAP Correlations

                                  Highlight:Group  Highlight:Difference
                                        ------           ------
             Spotlight:Connection       -0.037            0.110


QAP P-Values

                                  Highlight:Group  Highlight:Difference
                                        ------           ------
             Spotlight:Connection        0.007            0.005
```

As depicted in Figure 11, the results of QAP analysis should be interpreted carefully. These results can be accepted only if significant correlations without any logical contradictions are detected in all tests. First, the P-value is checked, which can indicate to what extent the observed correlation happened randomly. As illustrated above, if the P-value is higher than 0.05, the observed correlation between the networks has to be considered as statistically insignificant since it is likely to occur by chance. If the P-value is lower than 0.05, it means the observed correlation is less likely to take place randomly. In other words, the networks are less likely to be independent of each other. More likely, they are associated with each other. As shown in Figure 11, P-values for observed correlations between the spotlight-centred network and two types of highlight-centred networks were 0.007 and 0.005, respectively, and both were lower 0.05. This means that, only 0.7% and 0.5% of the 5,000 random permutations produced an observed correlation as large as actually observed, respectively. In brief, it is extremely low chance that the observed correlations between the spotlight and the highlight of state attention

took place randomly and thus the observed correlations between the spotlight-centred network and two types of highlight-centred networks are statistically significant.

The second step is to interpret the observed correlations between the networks shown in Figure 11. Taking a look at the relationship between the spotlight-centred network and the similarity-based network built for the highlight of state attention in the first place, it can be found that there was an observed negative correlation between both. Such a finding can be interpreted as that a pair of identified incidents sharing a similar amount of contentious coverage were less likely to be covered in the same articles. Turning to the results of QAP analysis involving the dissimilarity-based network built for the highlight of state attention, the same finding can be found. According to Figure 11, the absolute difference in the amount of contentious coverage received by identified incidents is positively associated with the journalistic connections established between identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In plain English, for identified incidents, the more different the number of relevant news articles received, the more likely they shared journalistic connections with others. Both findings show logical consistency and collaboratively suggest a significant and systematic distinction between the highlight and spotlight of state attention. In summary, protest events which received a large amount of contentious coverage in the party press cannot be naturally assumed as the focal points which were situated in the central position of the discussion on local contentions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. Instead, the traditional cumulative measure and alternative structuring approach offer different but complementary perspectives of examining contentious coverage of identified incidents in the party press and thus enable researchers to achieve a multi-faceted understanding of mediated state-protest relations in the state-initiated contentious public sphere at different analytical layers.

8.4 The Formation of the Highlight and the Spotlight

8.4.1 Mediation Model: Multiple Signals and Selective Responses

In previous sections, the distinction between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention has been well illustrated. To further understand the whole picture of mediated state-protest relations in terms of the distinctive distributions of state attention on local contentions in the party press, the formation of the highlight and the spotlight during the harmonious society-building need to be examined as well. More importantly, this section is expected to identify potential rationales for the emergence of the highlight and the spotlight of state attention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In other words, this section aims to tackle the questions of whether the highlight and the spotlight of state attention were formed in line with the same logics and, to be more specific, in which ways identified incidents were placed in various positions and viewed so differently in the eyes of the party-state. To answer these questions, this chapter aligns with a series of empirical studies authored by Amenta and his colleagues, which suggest the idea of the 'mediation model' for causal exploration proposed by them. As illustrated in previous chapters, according to the mediation model in social movement outcome study, it is not protest events themselves that produce the outcome directly, but the formal institutions influenced by protest events that produce protest-related outcomes. Therefore, the mediation model further suggests, to either assess the impact of specific protests on the institution or identify the sources of changes led by protests, it is necessary and important for researchers to take institutional conditions within the formal process into account carefully.

Following such an idea of mediation model, this chapter argues that it is necessary to locate the sources of the formation of the highlight and the spotlight of state attention *within* the news-

making process in the party press. In other words, it is the journalistic drives that fuelled the distribution of state attention in the party press. So, this chapter further argues that such a journalistic dynamic is rooted in the complex interactions between the protest events and the party-state in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. To be more specific, it is the party-state that received the *multiple* signals sent by protest events on the ground and *selectively* responded to them in the form of media coverage published in the party press. Accordingly, contentious coverage of identified incidents can also be considered important cultural-political types of institutional outcomes produced by the party press but led by the protest events during the harmonious society-building era. Therefore, the formation of the highlight and the spotlight of state attention has to be situated in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and examined through the lens of the complex interactions between multiple protesting signals and selective discursive response from the party-state, in line with various rationales for journalistic practice within the formal news-making process in the party press, according to the mediation model**.**

8.4.2 A Networked Approach to Multi-faceted Contentious Public Sphere

So, an important prerequisite for such a delicate exploration of journalistic drives of the formation of the highlight and spotlight of state attention in the party press is a systematic understanding of the complexity of the state-initiated contentious public sphere as a result of the interactions between the multiplicity of protesting signals and the selectivity of state responses and this chapter suggests an operationalisation of the state-initiated contentious public sphere as a multi-faceted structure of networks. To start with, the interaction between protest events and the party-state in the party press needs to be further elaborated. On the one hand, for the multiplicity of protesting signals, it is the essential components of protest events that serve as fundamental sources of these signals. This means, for identified incidents, all their actors, actions, appeals, and the spatial and temporal sites of their occurrences are independent

sources of protesting signals and thus have the potential to be covered in the party press. However, on the other hand, there is no guarantee that all these multiple signals are able to successfully catch the attention of the party-state and then lead to institutional responses in the form of contentious coverage. As depicted in Table 1, the amount of contentious coverage was very unequally distributed across the essential components of protest events in the party press, and this means that it is the party-state that selectively chose to establish specific journalistic and discursive relations with identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. For example, for some protest events which only receive action-focused contentious coverage, the discursive and journalistic relations built between the party-state and identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere arguably is entirely dependent on their actions, because the action serves as the only source of protesting signal that successfully get responded to from the party-state. Taking those protest events which receive media coverage mentioning all their essential components for another example, it is clear and safe to argue that well-rounded relations between the party-state and identified incidents have been discursively and journalistically established and can be observed as well in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. For those identified incidents failing to receive contentious coverage mentioning any essential components, it means that, from a perspective of journalistic practice, none of their component-based protesting signals successfully catch the attention of the party press and thus no further complicated relations established between the state and these identified incidents can be detected in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

Above all, as a result of such complicated interactions between multiple protest signals serving as the journalistic sources and selective responses from the state in various forms of contentious coverage in the party press, this chapter argues that such complicated component-centred relationships journalistically built between the party-state and identified incidents in the party

press constitute the complexity of the state-initiated contentious public sphere and suggests that the state-initiated contentious public sphere is better to be operationalised as a multi-faceted structure of networks of contentious coverage in the party press. Viewing identified incidents as the nodes, for example, some protest events which receive the same actor-centred contentious coverage can be linked to each other and thus constitute an actor-centred network of contentious coverage in the party press. By contrast, for those events failing to receive any coverage of their specific components, they do not belong to any specific component-centred networks of contentious coverage and thus can be considered the 'outliers', or the 'isolators', in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. In addition, more importantly, what needs to be stressed is that all these different types of component-centred contentious networks emerging in the state-initiated contentious public sphere are independent but intertwined. For example, for those protest events which receive action-centred and appeal-centred contentious coverage in the party press, they should not only be situated in two independent component-centred contentious networks as the nodes, separately, but also collaboratively constitute the overlapping structures of these two different types of contentious networks. Another point needs to be addressed here is that, again, the reception, response or representation of various protesting signals within contentious coverage in the party press cannot be simply treated as the mirrored reflections of protest events' factual features in reality but merely a type of journalistic and discursive construct created through the formal news-making process in the party press. Fortunately, these journalistic constructions of component-based contentious networks are exactly what this chapter expects to take into account as the institutional conditions facilitating, or constraining, the formation of the highlight and spotlight of the state attention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

8.4.3 Homophily as Journalistic Drive

Such an operationalised understanding of the state-initiated contentious public sphere, serving as a complex of multiple independent but intertwined contentious networks, offers a crucial observatory site for researchers to explore structural relations between multiple contentious networks. In line with this, this section further argues that the journalistic rationales and constructive drives of the emergence of highlight-centred network and spotlight-centred networks can be detected in the state-initiated contentious public sphere from a very classic sociological perspective in social network analysis, i.e., the homophily. The idea of homophily was coined in 1954 by social scientists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton and it can be simply understood as the '[s]imilarity breeds connection' (McPhersone et al, 2001: 415). In plain language, this empirically well-supported argument suggests the tendency of individuals or other types of actors to associate and bond with similar others. So, in this case, this chapter adopts this classic sociological theory to examine the journalistic rationales hidden in the structural relationships between multiple contentious networks and argues that identified incidents which caught the party-state's attention in similar ways were more likely to be placed in similar positions in the eyes of the party-state. To be more specific, it is the similarities between the individual receptions of component-centred contentious coverage at the level of identified incidents in the party press that serve as the journalistic drives of the formation of the highlight and the spotlight of state attention. For example, for a pair of identified incidents that are not only covered in the same article but also receive coverage of the similar consequences led by their actions, the co-presence of these two identified incidents in the party press is arguably driven by the actor-centred journalistic rationale in the formal news-making process. Taking another pair of identified incidents that receive a similar amount of contentious coverage but do not share any similar component-centred coverage in common, it is safe to conclude that there is no strong evidence for researchers to claim that, for these two protest events, the similar individual reception of contentious coverage is logically correlated with

component-centred distribution of state attention. In brief, the theoretical foundation set for the following investigation is that homophily matters. To answer the question of whether identified incidents sharing similar visible components in the party press were more likely to be viewed by the party-state in similar ways and explore the logical pathways by which the highlight and the spotlight of state attention were formed in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, this chapter argues that the highlight- and spotlight-centred networks should be situated in a macro multi-faceted structure of contentious networks and the journalistic drives of the formation of the highlight and spotlight have to be examined through a lens of the structural relationships between multiple independent but intertwined networks of contentious coverage in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

8.4.4 Preparation for QAP Analysis

To investigate the formation of the highlight and the spotlight of state attention in a multi-faceted structure of contentious networks in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, QAP analysis is expected to further explore the correlated relationships between various contentious networks emerging from the coverage in the party press and the results must be interpreted following the idea of homophily. Nevertheless, before the employment of QAP analysis, the component-centred contentious networks, i.e., the square matrices for Actor: Number, Action: Violence, Appeal: Issue, Location, and Date, need to be constructed respectively in the first place. Following the same logic and procedure of transforming the raw data regarding the highlight of state attention into two types of square matrix illustrated above, similarity- and dissimilarity-centred rationales were adopted to transform the ordinal and numerical data regarding Actor: Number, Action: Violence and Date into square matrices. In brief, for actor-, action-, and date-centred network of contentious coverage, a pair of nodes were linked to each other either by an absolute difference in the values regarding their reported components or the

same category of visible components shared by them in the party press. For appeal- and location-centred networks of contentious coverage, only a similarity-based rationale of data transformation was applied, due to the categorical nature of raw data. Those identified incidents either sharing the same claimed issues or the same reported place of their occurrences were linked to each other and thus two independent contentious networks were constructed in line with the logic of the similarity, respectively. As a result, a total of eight contentious networks regarding five essential components of identified incidents were obtained as square matrices. The following sections will illustrate the journalistic rationales for the formation of the highlight and the spotlight of state attention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere respectively based on the presentation and the interpretation of QAP analysis results.

8.5 Exploring the Formation of the Highlight

To explore the journalistic rationales for the formation of highlight-focused networks, QAP correlation analysis was employed to examine the correlated relationships between the highlight-centred networks and all component-centred networks of contentious coverage, with a total of 5,000 permutations. The results of QAP analysis for each pair of contentious networks have been shown in Figure 12. Before the interpretation of the results, what needs to be noted is that, as illustrated above, due to the employment of similarity- and dissimilarity-centred rationales for data transformation from raw data to square matrices in the construction of multiple contentious networks, all relevant P-values and observed correlations need to be checked carefully. The results of QAP analysis can be accepted only if significant correlations between relevant contentious networks are detected with logical consistency and theoretical plausibility in all tests.

Figure 8-12 The Results of QAP Analysis for the Formation of the Highlight

```
QAP CORRELATION
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
# of Permutations:            5000
Random seed:                  19477


QAP Statistics


QAP Correlations

                                Actor:Group  Actor:Difference  Action:Group  Action:Difference  Appeal  Year:Group  Year:Difference  Place
                                     ------            ------        ------            ------  ------      ------           ------  ------
                    Highlight:Group   0.057            -0.224         0.066            -0.112  -0.064      -0.048            0.118  -0.007
                Highlight:Difference  -0.057            0.281        -0.012             0.100   0.139       0.031           -0.098  -0.020


QAP P-Values

                                Actor:Group  Actor:Difference  Action:Group  Action:Difference  Appeal  Year:Group  Year:Difference  Place
                                     ------            ------        ------            ------  ------      ------           ------  ------
                    Highlight:Group   0.037             0.001         0.004             0.000   0.011       0.001            0.005   0.290
                Highlight:Difference  0.030             0.001         0.273             0.000   0.000       0.030            0.000   0.062
```

First, taking a close look at all P-values regarding the observed correlations between the actor- and the highlight-centred networks, the results of QAP analysis suggest that they are all less than 0.05, with 0.037, 0.030, 0.001, and 0.001, respectively, unanimously suggesting the statistical significance of observed correlations between both. Then, for the observed correlations between the individual reception of actor-centred contentious coverage and the individual reception of general contentious coverage at the level of identified incidents in the party press, the results of QAP analysis can be interpreted as follows:

1) identified incidents sharing the same reported number of people involved were more likely to receive the same amount of contentious coverage;

2) identified incidents sharing the same reported number of people involved were less likely to show a difference in the individual reception of contentious coverage;

3) identified incidents sharing a difference in the reported scales of the events were less likely to receive the same amount of contentious coverage;

4) identified incidents sharing a difference in the reported scales of the events were more likely to show a difference in the individual reception of contentious coverage.

Based on the interpretations of these findings, no logical contradictions can be detected. Thus, it is safe to argue that in line with the idea of homophily, the similarity of identified incidents' reported number of people involved was positively correlated with the similarity of the amount of contentious coverage received by identified incidents in the party press.

Next, the P-values for the observed correlations between the appeal-centred network of contentious coverage and two types of the highlight-centred networks are lower than 0.05, statistically suggesting the significance of observed correlations. The results shown in Figure 12 can be interpreted as follows:

1) identified incidents sharing the same reported issues were less likely to receive the same amount of contentious coverage;

2) identified incidents sharing the same reported issues were more likely to show a difference in the individual reception of contentious coverage.

Based on these interpretations of observed correlations between the highlight of state attention and the appeal-centred network of contentious coverage, the results reject the idea of homophily and instead suggest that the similarity of the amount of contentious coverage received by identified incidents was negatively correlated with the similarity of the reported issues shared by them. Therefore, in brief, there is a statistically significant correlation observed between the highlight of state attention and the visible issues channelled through the contention in the party press. In other words, the results of QAP analysis do not provide solid evidence to suggest that the similar salient positions occupied by identified incidents in the highlight of state attention were journalistically dependent on the coverage of the same issues claimed by them.

Likewise, all P-values regarding the observed correlations between the reported dates of identified incidents and the highlight of state attention are lower than 0.05 and thus suggest statistical significance. As depicted in Figure 12, the observed correlations can be interpreted as follows:

1) identified incidents that reportedly happened in the same year were less likely to receive the same amount of contentious coverage;

2) identified incidents that reportedly happened in the same year were more likely to show a difference in the amount of contentious coverage received by them;

3) identified incidents that reportedly happened in different years were more likely to receive the same amount of contentious coverage;

4) identified incidents that reportedly happened in different years were less likely to show a difference in the amount of contentious coverage received by them.

However, again, the observed correlations between the highlight of state attention and the reported date of identified incidents refuse the idea of homophily and suggest that the theory does not apply in this context and example. In brief, the results of QAP analysis do not provide solid evidence to suggest that the similar salient positions occupied by identified incidents in the highlight of state attention were journalistically dependent on the coverage of the similar reported dates of their occurrences.

Lastly, as depicted in Figure 12, the P-value for the observed correlation between the dissimilarity-driven network of the highlight and the similarity-driven network of action-centred contentious coverage is 0.273, higher than 0.05, suggesting a statistically insignificant observed correlation between both. Likewise, the P-Value for the observed correlation between

the similarity-driven network of the highlight and the place-centred network of contentious coverage is 0.29, suggesting a statistical insignificance of the observed correlation between both. Therefore, in plain language, the results of QAP analysis suggest that the observed correlations between the highlight of state attention and either the reported actions or the reported locations of identified incidents are likely to occur by chance. To conclude, based on all findings illustrated above, in brief, only reported Actor: Number matters. In line with the idea of homophily, the similarity of the reported number of people involved was detected as the only significant journalistic drive of the formation of the highlight of state attention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

8.6 Exploring the Formation of the Spotlight

This section turns to the search for potential journalistic rationales driving the formation of the spotlight in the eyes of the party-state. Similar to the exploration of journalistic drives of the formation of the highlight of state attention above, QAP analysis was employed to detect significant correlations between the spotlight-centred network and various component-centred networks of contentious coverage in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, with a total of 5,000 permutations. The results of QAP analysis shown in Figure 13 indicate the P-values and observed correlations for each pair of relevant contentious networks. Again, before the interpretation of the results with details, it is noteworthy that since similarity- and dissimilarity-centred logics of data transformation from raw data to square matrices were employed to construct multiple component-centred contentious networks, all relevant P-values and observed correlations need to be checked carefully. The results of QAP analysis can be accepted only if significant correlations between relevant contentious networks are detected with logical consistency and theoretical plausibility in all tests.

Figure 8-13 The Results of QAP Analysis for the Formation of the Spotlight

```
QAP CORRELATION
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
# of Permutations:            5000
Random seed:                  19477


QAP Statistics


QAP Correlations

                                Actor:Group  Actor:Difference  Action:Group  Action:Difference  Appeal  Year:Group  Year:Difference  Place
                                     ------            ------        ------            ------  ------      ------           ------  ------
            Spotlight:Connection      -0.001            -0.003         0.040            -0.033   0.129       0.102           -0.058   0.034


QAP P-Values

                                Actor:Group  Actor:Difference  Action:Group  Action:Difference  Appeal  Year:Group  Year:Difference  Place
                                     ------            ------        ------            ------  ------      ------           ------  ------
            Spotlight:Connection       0.600             0.473         0.001             0.002   0.000       0.000            0.000   0.004
```

As depicted in Figure 13, the first notable finding is that the P-values for the observed correlations between actor-centred networks of contentious coverage and the spotlight-centred network exceed 0.05. Unlike the results of QAP analysis for the formation of the highlight discussed earlier, the results of QAP analysis shown in Figure 13 indicate statistically insignificant correlated relationships between the spotlight of state attention and the coverage of the reported number of people involved and suggest the observed correlations between are likely to take place by chance. As depicted in Figure 12, the actor-centred network of contentious coverage was detected by QAP analysis as the only significant journalistic rationale of the formation of the highlight of state attention, in line with the idea of homophily. Interestingly, on the contrary, according to Figure 13, the coverage of the number of people involved in identified incidents was revealed by QAP analysis as the only statistically insignificant journalistic drive of the formation of a spotlight in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, given the fact that all P-values for the observed corelations between the spotlight-centred network and other types of component-centred networks are lower than 0.05.

To be more specific, first, the results of QAP analysis indicate a statistically significant association between action-centred networks of contentious coverage and the spotlight-centred

network of identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. The correlations suggested by the results of QAP analysis can be interpreted as follows:

1) identified incidents with the same reported level of violence were more likely to be covered in the same articles;

2) identified incidents that show a difference in the reported severity of violence were less likely to be covered in the same articles.

Second, another statistically significant association is detected between the spotlight-centred network and the appeal-centred network. As shown in Figure 13, the significant correlation between both can be interpreted as identified incidents sharing the same reported issues were more likely to be journalistically linked to each other. Third, for the statistically significant correlations between the spotlight-centred network and the date-centred networks of contentious coverage, the results of QAP analysis suggest:

1) identified incidents that reportedly happened in the same year were more likely to be covered in the same articles;

2) identified incidents that reportedly took place in different years were less likely to be covered in the same articles.

Lastly, the results of QAP analysis also suggest that identified incidents that reportedly happened in the same place were more likely to be covered in the same articles.

In summary, compared with the results of QAP analysis regarding the journalistic rationales for the formation of the highlight of state attention, the results interpreted above suggest a solid journalistic presence of the homophily in the party press for the formation of spotlight-centred network. In plain language, those identified incidents sharing similar visible components in the

party press were more likely to be covered in the same articles. Therefore, in other words, the co-presence of identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere can be arguably attributed to the sharing of reported components like the same reported location and date of occurrence, the same reported severity of violence and direct consequences, and the same reported issue claimed by the challengers. Besides, according to Figure 13, no statistically significant but theoretically irrelevant correlation was detected between the spotlight of state attention and multiple component-centred networks. To conclude the section, the most important finding here is that, for the co-presence of identified incidents in the party press, Actor: Number does not appear to matter. The formation of spotlight-centred networks was not journalistically associated with the reported scales of the events, i.e., the reported number of people involved. Moreover, compared with the other three reported components, the reported appeals shared by identified incidents had the most positive impact on the chance of identified incidents being covered in the same article, due to the highest coefficient value of the observed correlation with 0.129 (Figure 13). In other words, identified incidents sharing similar issues, i.e., the co-presence of reported issues claimed by protest events in contentious coverage, are more likely to be journalistically linked with others in the party press.

8.7 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complexity of mediated relations between the party-state and identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere by systematically examining contentious coverage of identified incidents during the harmonious society-building era. Instead of the exploration of the geographical distribution of state attentions at the provincial level in previous chapters, this chapter not only follows a conventional rationale of protest event analysis to delineate the overview of identified incidents in the party press but, more importantly, advances the multi-faceted understanding of how protest events were viewed by

the party-state in many ways. Three main questions, i.e., what, which and how, were answered. First, to answer what kinds of identified incidents successfully caught the party-state's attention, this chapter offers a thorough investigation of the landscape of identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state particularly through a lens of the visibility of protest events' various essential components in the party press. As a result, an in-depth delineation of the whole picture of identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state was presented. Next, this chapter turns the focus to the individual reception of contentious coverage at the level of identified incidents and tackles the question of which identified incidents were viewed by the party-state as important protest events during the harmonious society-building era. To answer the questions, this chapter distinguishes a conventional amount-based measure of the quantity of contentious coverage received by identified incidents from an alternative *structuring* approach to the complexity of journalistic relations built between identified incidents within contentious coverage. To be more specific, this chapter argues that a cumulative approach to the media attainment of identified incidents enables researchers to identify the 'highlight' of state attention which emphasises the incident's *accumulative*, *direct*, and *absolute* reception of contentious coverage in terms of the number of relevant articles received. By contrast, a structuring approach views the position unintentionally taken by each identified incident within contentious coverage as the institutional outcome obtained by the events and thus enables researchers to locate the 'spotlight' of state attention which refers to a *relational*, *latent* and *relative* view of media attainment of protest events in the party press.

Furthermore, based on intuitive observation and QAP analysis, this chapter finds that the highlight and the spotlight of state attention were not entirely the same but did share overlapping areas. Consequently, this chapter argues that the employment of a traditional amount-based measure of the quantity of contentious coverage received by identified incidents

and an alternative structuring approach to contentious coverage of identified incidents are complementary to each other and collaboratively contribute to a multi-faceted understanding and multi-layered examination of mediated relationships between the state and local contentions in China during the harmonious society-building era. Regarding the last important question about the journalistic pathways by which these identified incidents were viewed by the party-state as the high-profile cases and the focal points, this chapter follows the mediation model of causal exploration which emphasises the formal news-making process and journalistic drives of the scenes and finds that the highlight and the spotlight of state attention were formed in line with different journalistic rationales. For the highlight of state attention, the reported number of people involved matters. In other words, those identified incidents sharing a similar reported number of people involved were more likely to receive a similar amount of contentious coverage in the party press. For the spotlight of state attention, the reported type of issues matters most. In brief, those identified incidents sharing similar reported claims in the party press were most likely to be covered in the same news articles. More details and implications about these interesting findings will be discussed below.

As mentioned above, one of the most notable contributions made by this chapter is to distinguish the highlight and the spotlight of state attention in the party press and offer an innovative methodological suggestion of not only measuring media coverage of protest events but also *structuring* it. This chapter argues that a networked perspective of contentious coverage, which stresses the journalistic linkages between identified incidents, as an alternative and complementary to the traditional amount-based measure of contentious coverage, enables researchers to trace the flow of state attention on local contentions and thus capture the complexity of mediated relationships between the state and protest events in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. The most fascinating feature of such a structuring approach lies in

the fact that the spotlight-focused network of identified incidents *within* contentious coverage is constructed *unintentionally but collectively* by various types of authors with all relevant news articles published in the party press during the harmonious society-building era. Thus, it is the spotlight of state attention that indeed *emerges* from contentious coverage.

Moreover, another interesting feature is that such a structuring approach not only prioritises the journalistic importance of identified incidents within contentious coverage by locating specific structural positions occupied by them at the individual level, but also stresses the emerging collectivity of identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state. In the previous chapters, the collectivity of identified incidents has been emphasised from a perspective of geographical proximity, but the structuring approach adopted in this chapter stresses the complexity of journalistic connections between identified incidents in the party press, i.e., the discursive proximity in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. Therefore, compared with the conventional amount-based measure of contentious coverage, such a structuring approach enables researchers to detect the variation in the bridging capacity of identified incidents in the eyes of the party-state and thus disclose the deeply mediated relationships between the state and local contentions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. Finally, these two approaches are complementary to each other and collaboratively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of contentious coverage of identified incidents in the party press.

Besides the conceptual clarification of the difference between the highlight and the spotlight and the methodological distinction between cumulative measure and flow-centred capture of contentious coverage, more importantly, this chapter offers empirical evidence to address the

significant and fundamental distinction between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention on identified incidents. In brief, the distribution of state attention on identified incidents in the party press is split and the state's sight of local contentions can be divided into various areas. As depicted in Table 12, in a combinatory view, a simple classification of mediated relations between the state and identified incidents is presented based on the distinction between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention. For those identified incidents which not only received a large amount of contentious coverage but also occupied a central position within contentious coverage, they indisputably occupied the most crucial positions in the eyes of the state and established strong relations with the state through the mouthpiece of the party. On the contrary, identified incidents that received a small amount of contentious coverage and merely occupied the marginal positions within contentious coverage can be considered peripheral and trivial cases in the eyes of the state though they indeed successfully caught the attention of the state and get covered in the party press. Besides, there were also some identified incidents catching the state's attention in an 'either-or' way. For example, the Lhasa '3.14' incident that was not under the spotlight but was considered the highlight in the eyes of the party-state and, conversely, Panyu 'waste incineration' incident was not highlighted by the party-state but instead occupied a very crucial central position in the eyes of the party-state. In brief, as depicted in Table 12, the distribution of state attention on identified incidents is split, unequal, and varied in the party press.

Table 8-12 The Split in State Attention

State Attention Contentious Coverage		Spotlight	
		High	Low
Highlight	High	e.g., ID 50 Weng-an Incident	e.g., ID 55 Lhasa Incident
	Low	e.g., ID 92 Panyu Incident	……

Furthermore, as mentioned above, this chapter also reveals the distinctive journalistic rationales for the formation of the spotlight and the highlight in the eyes of the state through the

mouthpiece of the party. For the highlight of state attention, the findings suggest that it is the similar reported numbers of actors that journalistically determined whether identified incidents received a similar amount of contentious coverage in the party press. By contrast, the aforementioned findings show that the structural positions occupied by identified incidents within contentious coverage, i.e., the spotlight of state attention, were primarily in line with the similarity of the reported appeals shared by identified incidents in the party press. In addition, another interesting finding regarding the journalistic drives of the formation of the highlight and spotlight of state attention is the 'missing violence'. The findings presented in this chapter do not suggest that the distribution of state attention on identified incidents is logically associated with the similarity of reported severity of identified incidents' violent actions and direct consequences. However, to understand the idea of 'missing violence' accurately, two points need to be stressed. First, the 'missing violence' found in the state-initiated contentious public sphere does not mean the journalistic absence of identified incidents' violent actions in the party press but implies that there is no evidence implying that the emergence of the spotlight and the formation of the highlight in the eyes of the state was journalistically related to the coverage of protesting actions in the party press. Second, the finding of missing violence suggested by the results of QAP analysis in this chapter cannot be considered an empirical denial of the importance of violence which was prioritised in social movement studies and Chinese protest studies as a useful tactic taken by grassroots challengers to catch state attention and media coverage (e.g., Cai, 2010). This chapter argues there is no theoretical contradiction between the classic view of violence as a useful strategy and the new finding of missing violence proposed here. What previous studies and pioneering researchers suggest is that violence empowers the disadvantageous grassroots to have access to public visibility and obtain a variety of institutional responses. By contrast, what this chapter argues is that, in the state-initiated contentious public sphere, there is no evidence found to support any logical

associations between news articles particularly covering the violent actions of protest events and those articles mentioning specific protest events in general in the party press. Moreover, this chapter further argues that the idea of missing violence proposed here is complementary to the classic view of violence as a useful strategy of the grassroots**.** Both understandings of violence collaboratively capture a whole picture of the interactions between the party-state and protest events on the ground in China and it can be illustrated as follows. It is the strategic use of violence that widens the opportunity structure for the grassroots to catch the attention of the party-state successfully in China. Afterward, however, the institutional responses to their violent actions and serious consequence do not journalistically determine how the party-state views these protest events, and the visibility of violence in the party press is logically irrelevant to the systematic distribution of state attention on identified incidents. In brief, the findings presented in this chapter do not suggest action-focused media coverage as the news-making drive of the formation of the highlight and the spotlight in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

Although this chapter keeps stressing the systematic distinctions between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention on local contentions in different ways, the highlight and the spotlight are not entirely independent of each other but *intertwined* with each other. The interactions between the formation of the highlight and the spotlight can be observed in the discursive site offered by identified incidents. As depicted in Table 12, three exemplary cases are selected here to briefly demonstrate the complexity of interactions between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention during the forming process. First, the Panyu incident, which is labelled as case ID 92 and viewed by the party-state as the spotlight and the 'low-light' at the same time, is a good example of how a central position taken by an identified incident in the state-initiated contentious public sphere emerges from a limited space of contentious coverage.

The Panyu incident is a local NIMBY protest event that happened in 2009. It was staged by the dissatisfactory local inhabitants against a local waste incineration project which was locally regarded as harmful, and a possible source of cancer-causing emissions in Panyu, Guangdong. During the harmonious society-building era, the Panyu incident received merely three news articles covering the event in the party press but occupied an extraordinary central position in the eyes of the party-state (Table 10). The most crucial news report determining the bridging importance of Panyu 'waste incineration' incident in the state-initiated contentious public sphere was published on February 2, 2010 and headed with the title of *the Golden Four-hour Principle in Handling Emergent Incidents* (《处置突发事件的"黄金 4 小时"法则》). The most impressive feature of this news article is that it is not a traditional hard news story written by journalists but a round table-like commentary article containing multiple sources with rich factual information. The experts across various sectors like research institutes, internet companies and governments were invited to talk about the complicated interactions between the internet, local dissatisfaction, and state governance. In this article, the sources offered a handful of protest events as detailed examples to show how the internet facilitates the mobilisation on the ground on the one hand and how the government uses the internet to appease the unrest and achieve local stability on the other hand. The Panyu incident was one of these examples. The multiplicity and diversification of news sources to some degree activate the potential bridging capacity of identified incidents, such that a valuable discursive opportunity can be offered for identified incidents to be journalistically connected and to be situated in a broad discussion of local contentions in the same article. In brief, for the Panyu incident, multiple and diverse sources of voices across various sectors played crucial roles during the process of forming a remarkable spotlight in the eyes of the state within the limited space of contentious coverage.

In contrast with the Panyu incident, the Lhasa incident (case ID 55) is a typical example of identified incidents that was considered the highlight but placed in a marginal spot in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. So, the Lhasa incident is taken here to briefly demonstrate how an identified incident with a substantial amount of contentious coverage merely occupies a marginal position in the eyes of the state. The Lhasa incident particularly refers to the protest event staged by the monks and Tibetans in the capital of Tibet on March 14, 2008. For the nature of the incident, on the one hand, this violent protest was framed by Chinese authority as an unlawful rebellion-like incident of 'beating, smashing, looting and burning' (打砸抢烧事件), which was plotted by Tibetan separatists led by Dalai Lama; on the other hand, it was self-claimed and justified by Tibetan international community and the Central Tibetan Administration as the pursuit of Tibetan genuine autonomy and the fight for religious freedom rather than full independence of Tibet from China. During the harmonious society-building era, the Lhasa incident received a total of 17 news articles in the party press. Nearly half of the total, i.e., eight articles, were directly issued by central agencies and two articles were authored by local governments. However, despite a relatively large amount of contentious coverage received, unfortunately, many articles mentioning the Lhasa incidents did not provide informative in-depth stories of the incident, nor situated it in a broad discussion of local contentions in general, but mechanically kept repeating and publicising similar propagandist assertations. For example, the articles published in both *the People's Daily* and *the Guangming Daily* on December 7, 2008 emphasised 'handling the serious violent incident of beating, smashing, looting and burning in Tibet, legally, to secure the state's safety and stability'; The article published in *The People's Daily* on January 21, 2009 stressed that it is 'police and military forces that get involved in the handling of serious violence incident in Lhasa'; the article published in *The People's Daily* on September 30, 2009 reported that local government 'strictly implements the central government's decision and regulations on handling illegal and

criminal incidents of beating, smashing, looting and burning in Lhasa'. Clearly, as a result, a substantial amount of media coverage mainly coming from the governments at different levels ensured the Lhasa incident to be the highlight in the eyes of the state, whereas the propagandist nature of contentious coverage failed to create a wide range of discursive opportunity for the Lhasa incident to be journalistically connected to other identified incidents in the party press.

As mentioned above, the Weng-an incident labelled as case ID 50 is arguably the most important protest event in the eyes of the state, due to the highest number of relevant news articles received and the most central position taken in the state-initiated contentious public sphere in the harmonious society-building era. The Weng-an incident refers to the violent and large-scale protest event that took place in Guizhou Province on June 28, 2008. Tens of thousands of angry residents smashed government buildings and torched several police cars to protest against an alleged police cover-up of a girl's accidental death and local officials' misbehaviours. A few months after the occurrence of the Weng-an incident, the importance of the incident in the eyes of the party-state had been officially confirmed and publicly endorsed by *the Outlook*, a weekly newspaper published by Xinhua News Agency. The article published in *the Outlook* in September 2008 stated that the Weng-an incident can be considered an 'iconic sample' of the mass incidents that happened in China, given the large number of bystanders and participants involved in the incident and the severity of the damage caused by their protesting actions. The article also urged that the local governors on the ground everywhere to reflect on the Weng-an incident. Therefore, the Weng-an incident is a good example to briefly show how it became unquestionably *the* most important incident in the eyes of the state and, more specifically, how the highlight was intertwined with the spotlight of state attention in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

During the harmonious society-building era, a total of 47 articles covering the Weng-an incident were published between 2008 and 2014 in the party press and this is also the longest time span of reporting received by any identified incidents in the state-initiated contentious public sphere. To be more specific, the first news article involving the Weng-an incident was released in *the People's Daily* on July 5, 2008, just one week later than the occurrence of the incident on the ground and it was titled *Guizhou Continues to Seriously Investigate the Responsibility of Cadres in the "6.28" Weng-an Incident: the Secretary of the County Party Committee and the County Magistrate were Dismissed* (《贵州继续严肃追究"6·28"事件干部责任瓮安县委书记、县长被免职》). Clearly, as the headline suggests, the very first news report covering the Weng-an incident particularly focused on the issue of local cadre's misbehaviours and misconduct and showed how the centre holds the local accountable. Thus, this very first article also set the main tone of following stories received by the Weng-an incident in the party press. The last news article published in *the People's Daily* was on October 18, 2012. The article was authored by the then secretary of the County Party Committee of Weng-an County and was titled *New Governance Relieves the 'Pain of Transformation'* (《以"治理之新"纾解"转型之痛"——瓮安县委书记沙先贵谈"瓮安之变"的启示》). In this article, the local official introduced the innovation in local governance and the change in local policies that fuelled the transformation from the 'Weng-an Rebellion' to the 'Weng-an Revolution'. In addition, the then party secretary, from a personal point of view, also offered his reflection on the Weng-an incident that happened four years ago and shared his experiences of 'good governance' learned from the daily practice on the ground. Finally, the last article involving the Weng-an incident was published in *the Guangming Daily* on January 29, 2014 and titled *Regaining the Lost Hearts of the People in Weng-an* (《找回失落的民心》). This

final article concluded the discussion of the Weng-an incident in the state-initiated contentious public sphere by further publicising the positive and favourable changes at the local and fully attributed the transformation to the successful state-initiated campaign of accountability.

Clearly, the journalistic driving force of such a large amount of contentious coverage of the Weng-an incident with such a long time span of reporting was very political. In the view of the party-state, the Weng-an incident was framed and set as the best model of the centre's intervention in local contentions, just in line with the classic ruling logic of the governance in China, i.e., 'the good centre and the bad local'. Such a long-term state-initiated campaign of reflecting and learning from the Weng-an incident not only led to a large amount of relevant coverage produced in the party press but also widened the opportunity structure for the incident to be examined from various perspectives and at multiple levels. As a result, the Weng-an incident was situated in a very central position in the broad discussion of local contentions and thus placed in the very spotlight of state attention. In summary, this chapter has found that, for identified incidents, their various receptions of state attention had their pathways. The aforementioned three examples of identified incidents are selected to briefly illustrate complicated relationships between the highlight and the spotlight of state attention during the process of their formation in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS:

Beyond the Dynamics of Harmony and Contention

This chapter wraps up the long journey of examining the state-initiated contentious public sphere in harmonious society, by offering a critical review of the whole thesis and outlining the prospect for future research on the dynamics of harmony and contention in China. Being situated in social movement outcome study and fuelled by the knowledge of contentious politics in the field of China study, this thesis applies multiple research methods to systematically analyse the news articles selected from the party press and thus presents many in-depth findings relating to the understanding of mediated relationship between the state and social contention in China between 2004 and 2020. As a result, the thesis actively engages in the broader discussion of major research topics (e.g., the state-protest relations in China, the informational strategies used by the CCP for ruling, the measurement and evaluation of impact in social movement studies) and makes conceptual, empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions to the existing knowledge base in the fields.

This concluding chapter is divided into four parts. The chapter begins with a brief summary of research objectives and main findings presented in this thesis. Then, the chapter illustrates how these findings offer theoretical insights to the understanding of state-initiated contentious public sphere and make further implications for the cultural impacts of social contention in China. After clearly delineating the analytical boundaries and limitations of the thesis, the chapter raises more interesting and important questions for further investigation in the future.

Finally, this chapter moves the scope of research beyond the harmonious society-building and tentatively takes a quick look at the changes in the dynamics of harmony and contention in a new era of China. To conclude the thesis, the chapter ends with a call for more academic attention to the dynamics of harmony and contention in the broader context of harmonious and contentious politics in China.

9.1 Research Objectives and Main Findings

This thesis is devoted to exploring the complexity of state-initiated contentious public sphere arising in the harmonious society-building era. This thesis has produced ample empirical evidence to address three major research questions, namely 'what', 'how' and 'why', regarding the emergence of state-initiated contentious public sphere in China. Therefore, there are three main research tasks carried out in the thesis.

First, the thesis adopts a relational approach to systematically examine all relevant news articles published in the party press between 2004 and 2020, and thus depicts an overall picture of state-initiated contentious public sphere with observable multileveled and multifaceted structures. On the one hand, following a traditional logic of social movement outcome study, this thesis explores the complexity of media coverage achieved by various forms of social contention in the party press, from a perspective of grassroots mobilisation of social contention; on the other hand, from the state's stance, this study reveals the complexity of mediated relations established between the state and local contention on the basis of complicated interactions between the limited state attention and diverse protesting signals in the public. In short, the thesis addresses the question of what the state-initiated contentious public sphere looks like. Second, after delineating the rise of state-initiated contentious public sphere in

general, this thesis narrows the focus down to reported regions and identified incidents and aims to figure out how they journalistically emerge from such a state-initiated contentious public sphere. In other words, the way in which state-initiated contentious public sphere is constituted by the information specifically relevant to the provinces and events. As a result, the detailed landscape of state-initiated contentious public sphere is presented at the level of reported regions and identified incidents in this thesis. Third, the thesis sets out to explore the questions of why the state unequally distributes its attention to different regions and events in certain ways and why regions and events occupy different positions in state-initiated contentious public sphere. With an emphasis of causal complexity, the thesis reveals the deep mechanisms and drives behind the formation of such a multileveled and multifaceted state-initiated contentious public sphere during the period of building harmonious society. Overall, this thesis introduces a relationals approach to the investigation of media coverage as a cultural type of institutional outcomes led by social contention and advances the understanding of such a cultural impact of social contention in harmonious society through an analytical lens of state-initiated contentious public sphere.

The main findings of this thesis are threefold. First, the thesis descriptively establishes the emergence of state-initiated contentious public sphere as an empirical fact in China between 2004 and 2020. In plain language, the thesis finds that the party press, functioning as the mouthpiece on behalf of the party-state, did not ignore or avoid reporting the issue of social contention but produced a substantial amount of contentious coverage in the harmonious society-building era. Even more importantly, the findings presented in this thesis further indicate that:

1) the significant variation in the patterns of mediated relations built between the state and the issue of social contention at the level of reported region and identified incident and
2) the huge difference in the status of reported regions and identified incidents in state-initiated contentious public sphere.

Therefore, this thesis argues there has been an unequal distribution of state attention to social contention at the level of reported regions and identified incidents, respectively, that corresponds to a status differentiation of provinces and instances in a state's view of social contention in harmonious society.

Next, the thesis further makes important arguments for those reported regions and identified incidents which occupy various positions in the multifaceted state-initiated contentious public sphere. To explain under what conditions the provinces can be more visible in the state-initiated contentious public sphere in terms of receiving a great amount of contentious coverage, the thesis distinguishes four types of contentious coverage in the first place and views them as distinctive journalistic channels of establishing the mediated relationship between the state and social contention in the public. The findings suggest that:

1) a large number of protest events observed in a certain region does not logically lead the region to receiving extensive contentious coverage on the rise of local contention;
2) on the contrary, it is very likely for those provinces which witness intensive social contentions on ground to receive a large number of news reports about the demise of social contention in the regions and, in other words, to be 'harmonised';

3) the production of commentary articles relevant to the issue of social contention is in line with the logic of professional news-making process and is significantly conditioned by the media preference and concrete concern about potential mobilisation staged on the ground;
4) the prominent presence of strong local states capable of dealing and handling with local contentions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere is logically dependent on the highly developed economic conditions in the region.

As for those identified incidents which successfully have access to the state-initiated contentious public sphere, the thesis stresses the distinctions between the 'absolute' visibility, the highlight, and 'relative' visible position, the spotlight, that can be achieved by the instances and then detects the journalistic determinants of becoming the focal points and high-profile cases in the eyes of the state, separately. The thesis finds:

1) what journalistically determines whether protest events receive a similar amount of contentious coverage in the party press is the similarity of the reported number of people involved in the identified incidents;
2) by contrast, the similarity of reported issues shared by protest events is highlighted as the predominant journalistic drive behind the reporting networks of identified incidents emerging from the state-initiated contentious public sphere;
3) there is no evidence suggesting that the similarity of reported severity of identified incidents' violent actions determines their positions in the state-initiated contentious public sphere.

9.2 Theoretical Implications and Major Contributions

The empirical investigations of this thesis examine all news reports involving the issue of social contention in the party press and engage in the theoretical discussion of key research topics in the field of China study and social movement outcome study. First, the thesis advances the understanding of *state-protest relations* in China by paying serious attention to how state-controlled media reacted to protests. Thanks to a series of pioneering studies, state-protest relations has been developed from different research perspectives as one of the most important issues in understanding contentious politics in China. From the perspective of grassroots challengers, previous studies have shown that catching the attention of state and seeking the intervention especially from the central state or aligning their claims and actions with the state's discourse, interest and policy is the pivotal condition for challengers to achieve the goals and maximise their influences in China (e.g., Cai, 2010; O'Brien and Li, 2006) The importance of state-protest relations can be also understood from a macro perspective of CCP's ruling of China. In recent years, a growing body of literature (e.g., Lorentzen, 2013; 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Chen and Xu, 2017a; 2017b; Heurlin, 2016; Marquis and Bird, 2018) argues for a relationship of informational reciprocity established between state and non-state actors, social contention in particular, and demonstrates how the state informationally takes advantage of social contention for the purpose of maintaining the stability of the regime. In their views, the outpouring of social contention can be used as a non-institutional information-gathering tool by the state to detect social problems, respond to dissatisfied people, and supervise and discipline officials who have 'misbehaved'. However, despite strong evidence about the importance of state-protest relations in China, no study has attempted to capture the overall picture of state-protest relations in China. To my knowledge, this thesis, by exploring and analysing state-initiated contentious public sphere, is most likely the first study to map out the complexity of state-protest relations in China and, more importantly, the first to present how these relations are established differently at various levels.

Second, given another growing body of literature arguing more broadly how the Chinese state intentionally reshapes the information environment for the purpose of governance, this thesis also joins the discussion about the *informational strategies* adopted by the state to create an information environment ultimately in favour of the CCP's objectives. As many studies suggest, the Chinese government has shown the tendency to shift its strategies of information management from a traditional Leninist way of control and direct suppression to a more sophisticated approach of purposively constructing a 'porous' information environment which is not harmful but useful to the party-state. For example, the famous empirical study carried out by King, Pan and Roberts (2013) shows that the Chinese state to some degree allows the criticism of the state or CCP's ruling circulated in the public but particularly censors those information potentially facilitating the mobilisation of collective action. Roberts (2018) distinguishes the specific techniques used by the state, like information flooding and friction, to reshape the information environment to be more favourable and beneficial to the CCP's ruling. Chen and Xu's (2017b) study suggests the government allows public communication if, and only if, it perceives sufficient preference heterogeneity among citizens and thus disorganises citizens by revealing that citizens are divided. Gallagher and Miller's (2021) recent article argued the selectiveness of information control efforts is often reflected on who is voicing rather than on what they are voicing. So, in short, what this strand of research argues is that the Chinese state becomes more and more sophisticated in the manipulation of information and more and more capable of allowing the desired type of information circulated in the public. The findings presented in this thesis corroborate the sophistication of the Chinese state's strategies of intentionally reshaping the information environment and empirically presents how the state deliberately manipulates the information relating to the issue of social contention through the party press to serve different purposes. The best example shown in this

thesis is the finding of how the state intentionally promotes a 'harmonious' image of a 'contentious' place and tries to informationally harmonise the contention.

Third, this thesis also makes contributions to the literature of social movement outcome study in general and sheds the 'relational' light on the understanding of cultural impact of social contentions. A relational perspective of analysis is not entirely new in the field of social movement outcome studies (Diani, 1997; Tindall et al, 2012), but most of them focus on the changes in social capital of actors that involve the mobilisation of social contentions and fail to attract extensive attention in broader academia. To my knowledge, this thesis is arguably the very first empirical study specifically offering an alternative 'relational' understanding of media coverage as an important cultural outcome of social contention. Previous studies focusing on the media coverage achieved by social contention normally emphasise the quantity of media coverage obtained by social contention or determine to what extent the coverage is in favour of social contention, namely the quality of media coverage. By contrast, the exploration of contentious coverage in the party press in this thesis highlights the deep, covert, unintentionally created structures of complex relations either emerging from or reflected in the textual content. In short, this thesis discovers what social contentions potentially lead to is either the formation of various types of mediated relations in the public or the specific structural positions occupied by them in a broader networks of information flows. This thesis views such a relational assessment of social movement outcome as a very promising research approach which at least shows fourfold analytical advantages.

The use of such a relational approach, first, is not limited to the examination of media coverage or social capital. Instead, what a relational perspective actually provides is a new way of

thinking about the impact of social contention and it can be applied to study the formation of a wide range of *relational* outcomes potentially facilitated by social contention, such as the programme jointly initiated by social organisations, the cross-institutional policy collaborations, the flows of financial aids and funds, and so on. Second, thanks to the distinction between the ego and whole network in social network analysis, such a relational approach offers an opportunity to examine the impact of one individual event and the impact of a group of events simultaneously. As a result, the complex impact of social contention can be examined from a holistic perspective. Third, a relational approach provides an alternative standard for measuring and comparing the impact of social contention, that is, the broader the range of various forms of linkages emerging due to social contention, or the more prominent position occupied by specific forms of social contention, the greater the impact. Fourth, this relational approach also methodologically benefits the emerging trend of conducting a large-scale computer-assisted exploration of text data in the field of social movement study (e.g., Zhang and Pan, 2019). The emphasis on complex relations emerging from contentious coverage in this thesis not only echoes Leifeld's (2013; 2017; 2020) appliance of discourse network analysis in tracing policy debate in the public but also reminds us that while being capable of handling ever-increasing numbers of and a wide-ranging size of text data, the structural depth of text data, which includes enormous breadth, also needs to be given equal attention.

9.3 Limitation and Questions for Future Research

There are four main limitations of such an investigation on the relation-based structural overview either *of* or *within* the state-initiated contentious public sphere, which at the same time open up opportunities for future research. The first limitation relates to 'time'. What this thesis surveys are all news articles published in the party press between 2004 and 2020. Such

a methodological choice of viewing sixteen consecutive years as the site of observation offers sufficient time span to understand that the emergence of state-initiated contentious public sphere with complex observable structures led by social contentions. As Diani suggests '[t]he broader the movement whose impact is being analysed, the longer the period to consider [and] [i]f the focus were on social movements' impact over a society as a whole, then a reasonable choice would be a long wave of protest' (1997: 143). The insights derived from this thesis into the historical trajectory of such a state-initiated contentious public sphere's formation and the details about structural changes in the state-initiated contentious public sphere were constrained within this period of time. For example, this thesis does not touch on the questions like how the state-initiated contentious public sphere is structurally built step by step over such a long time span and what the 'snapshot' of the state-initiated contentious public looks like at different points in time. Similarly, the lack of a focus on the temporal change of state-initiated contentious public sphere also limits the investigation of reported regions and identified incidents at an individual level in this thesis and leaves some interesting research questions like how events and regions gradually emerge in the state-initiated contentious public sphere and establish the linkages with others over time and which events and regions have long-standing, rather than short-term, impacts on the formation of state-initiated contentious public sphere. Obviously, all these research questions are worthy of further investigation in the future.

Next, since this study innovatively adopts a relational research approach to the examination of media coverage, which is significantly different from previous studies, some research topics relating to the cultural impacts of social contention in traditional studies have not yet been fully discussed in this thesis due to limited time and space. First, this thesis, following a 'mediation thinking' of social movement outcome, shifts the focus from the mobilisation of social contentions to the change in institutional outcomes brought by social contentions. As a result,

this study does not pay much attention to research questions like whether the strategic choice of mobilisation and what kinds of specific tactics used by the grassroots challengers directly contribute to the achievement of obtaining media coverage, or not. Second, this thesis is dedicated to offering a relational exploration of media coverage brought by social contention as the alternative way to the research on the quantity and the quality of contentious coverage in the field of social movement outcome studies, so, unlike previous studies which focus on the frames, attitudes, narratives and meanings shown in the content of news reports, this study offers limited insights into how the media specifically cover various forms of social contentions, nor did it answer questions like whether the issues highlighted in the state-initiated contentious public sphere are exactly the real demands of the grassroots challengers and not the informationally fabricated ones. In short, this thesis does not offer an in-depth case study describing how individual protest event successfully catches the state's attention, or not, and lacks the detailed content analysis of how the news articles report various forms of social contention in the party press. However, what needs to be noted is that the fact of these research questions left undiscussed in this thesis actually shows that this research is committed to shifting the focus of research in the field of social movement outcome study and dedicated to exploring the cultural impact of social contention from an alternative relational perspective.

The third limitation of this thesis is rooted in the distinction between the state-initiated contentious public sphere and contentious public sphere (Lei, 2018). Besides those public opinions arising around the issue of social contention which eventually constitutes the state-initiated contentious public sphere, there is also the rise of public opinions involving the issue of social contention in the sphere spontaneously created by the non-state actors. Therefore, this final limitation of this thesis rests in the limited insights into the area outside of state-initiated contentious public sphere and particularly how two spheres interact with each other. As a result,

many interesting research questions are left undiscussed. For example, this thesis does not compare the similarities and differences in the emerging structures of public opinions arising around the issue of social contentions in the two public spheres, nor does it track how specific events and regions involving the issue of social contention have access to different positions in different spheres and, if possibly, how they informationally pass through the boundaries of two spheres.

The final concern lies in the constant struggle of Chinese newspapers, especially the party press, between being news agency and being propaganda apparatus. In other words, given this thesis potentially labelled as political sociological research on Chinese newspapers, the relationship between media representation of social contention in the party press and the reality in the external world and its potential impacts on this research need to be further clarified. As mentioned many times earlier, this issue actually is not only the challenge facing this thesis, but also a long-standing topic of heated debate in social movement studies. Since the classic work of Charles Tilly, *from Mobilization to Revolution* published in 1978, scholars have used newspaper coverage to collect data on the instances of social contention and a growing consensus in the academic community is the non-representativeness of these data. As Ortiz and his co-authors clarified, from a methodological perspective, the media-protest relations can be divided into three levels, namely all protest events in the reality, protest events in newspapers, and events in protest datasets (2005: 402). In Amenta and his co-authors' words, 'related scholarship has focused on whether newspaper accounts provided valid data on the events and claims of movements or whether these reports suffered from selection or description "biases"' (Amenta et al., 2017:2). Indeed, such an issue of media bias seems to be much more serious in studying Chinese newspapers, especially considering that party newspapers operate as party organs and follows party ideology as the guidelines for news-making. The gap between media

representation and the reality of social contention in China cannot be ignored for sure. Therefore, what must be emphasised here again is that *the mediated landscape of social contention presented in this thesis cannot be understood as a sample of the population of Chinese protest events but a cultural product constructed by the party-state for certain purposes.* So, the main task of this thesis is not to estimate the reality of social contention in China, but to answer why and how such a unique state-initiated contentious public sphere emerges in China by revealing the political rationales behind the scenes. In fact, what this thesis follows is another stream of social movement studies which addresses causal questions about the amount and quality of newspaper coverage of social contention. As Amenta and his co-authors argued, social protests' 'missions are not to provide data for scholars of movements …… [so, r]egardless of the quality of the data newspapers provide, coverage matters to movement actors, their causes, and constituents' (Amenta et al., 2017: 2). In short, readers must bear in mind that the use of newspaper data and the examination of news articles in this thesis is intended to capture the mediated distribution of state attention on social contention, rather than the external world of social contention in China. However, it does not mean that this thesis fully rejects further comparative studies regarding contentious coverage published in different types of newspapers, including those published in English, and the reality of social contention represented in other scientific ways. Instead, what is fully acknowledged here is that, outside the analytical boundaries clearly drawn for this research, the complexity of media-protest relations emerging in China that still remain unexplored.

All in all, this thesis does not cover all these interesting topics, given the limited time and textual space. However, these limitations also suggest that the idea of state-initiated contentious public sphere has a broad research scope and shows promising research prospects in further understanding contentious politics in the field of China study and advancing social movement

outcome study in general. Thus, while committing to revisit the state-initiated contentious public sphere in the future, this thesis also encourages more academic attention and invites more scholars to conduct empirical studies addressing aforementioned topics in order to offer further insights to the cultural impact of social contention in China during the period of building harmonious society.

9.4 The Chinese Politics of Contention and Harmony in a New Era

As introduced in the very beginning of this thesis, 'Building a Socialist Harmonious Society' is a major national policy proclaimed by the central state to deal with the increasingly pressing social unrest and grassroots contentions deeply rooted in the drastic social transformations since the reform and opening up. It was officially proposed in 2004 and explicitly stated the main goals and tasks of this political campaign to be realised by *2020*. However, until now, there is still no public discussion nor political documents formally evaluating the implementation of such a nationwide campaign of building harmonious society in accordance with the established goals and tasks. In this thesis, a sixteen-year period of building harmonious society is viewed as a continuation of a historical phase of CCP's ruling of China and is framed as the policy background and political context of investigating the rise of state-initiated contentious public sphere. Undoubtedly, this thesis provides a valuable retrospective study to wrap up this period of stability and turmoil in China which has been attracting a great amount of attention of many sociologists, political scientists, and China experts for so many years.

The emphases of this thesis on such a long-term policy framework of building harmonious society in China as the site of observation and the relational outcomes of social contention especially emerging in the form of a cultural construction between 2004 and 2020, is to remind

the researchers that contentious politics *is* a part of Chinese politics. This thesis believes the message that the pivotal relationships between contentious politics and Chinese politics in general should not be overlooked has been clearly delivered. In other words, the understanding of contentious politics cannot be completely detached from Chinese politics and, on the other hand, contentious politics offers an alternative approach to a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese politics as well. To be more specific, this thesis argues that contentious politics serves like a lens through which elite politics and institutional politics in China can be further observed.

With respect to the instances of social contentions occurring on the ground, a widely accepted and simple consensus in social movement studies is that they are essentially grassroots and non-institutional. However, it does not mean that mass incidents normally staged by the powerless in China are entirely irrelevant to elite politics and institutional politics. First, the empirical studies have suggested that many instances of social contention in China were led by or involved in different groups of local elites (Li and O'Brien, 2008; Wang et al., 2013; Steinhardt and Wu, 2016). Sometimes, they were even informally approved or motivated specifically by political elites at different levels (Ma, 2019; O'Brien et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2022). So, the party-state in authoritarian China cannot be simply viewed as a monolithic regime but a fragmented one filled with competition, division, contradictions and even antagonism, both hierarchically and horizontally. In this sense, studying the complex interactions between grassroots contention and elite politics paves an alternative way for understanding internal mechanisms within Chinese politics. Second, the theoretical division between institutional politics and contentious politics as non-institutional politics also constitutes a site of 'betweenness' for observing not only the interactions between both at the behavioural, organisational and institutional level but also, even more importantly, the

emerging outcomes led by the interactions. Therefore, this thesis argues that a research focus on the consequences, outcomes and impacts of social contention on established institutions in China can shed further light on how various decision-making processes institutionally works and evolves in China, how Chinese politics is institutionalised in response to social contention, and eventually how such a regime of contentious authoritarianism in China is resiliently stabilised over the past decades.

Besides retrospective research and historical examination of the dynamics of harmony and contention in China, social research certainly needs to be more sensitive to the ongoing changes in Chinese politics in general and accordingly pay attention to the present. Indeed, in recent years, the empirical evidence, including the data presented in this thesis, have revealed an undeniable fact that the concept of a 'harmonious society' has gradually become less visible in China's public sphere, and at the same time, the public discussion on the issue of social contention has also shown a downward trend especially in the second decade of the 21st century (Chen, 2020). From this point of view, it is not difficult to draw a straightforward conclusion that 'harmonious society' is already a political concept of a previous era in China, and the issue of 'social contention' no longer seems like a pressing social and political problem in China. Instead, what replaces the prominent position of 'harmonious society' in China's public sphere is the cheers, excitement and longing for a 'new era' of China, which is not only a new historical phase of CCP's ruling of China but better understood as a form of 'discourse power' that seeks to legitimise the centralisation of power around the CCP (Jones, 2022).

As Hugo Jones noted in his articles (2021; 2022) published in *The Diplomat* online, for the past six years, the term 'new era' (xin shidai/新时代) has appeared with increasing frequency in

China's white papers, propaganda, official speeches, and public diplomacy. Such a historical transformation from the harmonious society-building era to 'a new era' of China began in earnest with the 19th Party Congress in 2017 and Xi's keynote speech, in which a 'new era' was mentioned 46 times. It was in the same year that 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' was added to the CCP constitution. Since then, the 'new era' has been *retroactively* applied in official statements to refer to the period following the 18th Party Congress in 2012, equating the 'new era' to all of Xi Jinping's tenure as general secretary of the CCP.

Moreover, Jones further stresses the so-called 'period/era distinction' in CCP's official discourse to highlight the 'newness' of such a new era of China and its discontinuity with previous historical phases of CCP's ruling. As he stated, the CCP's third historical resolution issued under Xi Jinping in 2021 refers to 'periods' (shiqi/时期) for the achievements made under the former leaders' rule, and 'era' (shidai/时代) for those under Xi. Such a historical discontinuity can be also reflected in the differences between the interactive relationships between the state and social contention in new era and that in the period of building harmonious society. Briefly speaking, thanks to the centralisation of political control, the tightening of ideological discipline, the establishment of technologies-assisted surveillance state of immense scale, and the intolerance of citizen participation, social contentions have been shrinking in China since the mid-2010s, as many recent studies suggest (Fu and Distelhorst, 2018; Chen, 2020; Qiaoan and Teets, 2020).

With all due respect to the observation of all these factual changes in the new era of China, does this mean that the idea of 'harmony' has been removed from Xi's political agenda and the

research on the dynamics of harmony and contention is no longer important in the new era of China? The direct answer to this question is, no. Instead, what has been witnessed since Xi officially took office in 2012 is the increasingly sophisticated and complicated interactions between the state and social contention. Therefore, this thesis reminds us that we must be cautious of not holding a simplistic understanding of the interactions between the state and social contention as a sweeping one-way top-down repression, because the picture is rather complicated.

To be more specific, first, although the empirical data indeed suggest a downward trend of social contention happened in China in recent years, the evidence also indicate that the absolute number of various forms of social contention staged on the ground is still at a very high level. For example, the Wickedonna data set contains 67,502 protest events between June 2013 and June 2016 (Göbel, 2019; 2021) and the CASM-China programme identifies a total of 136,330 between January 2010 to June 2017 (Zhang and Pan, 2019). Second, in order to adapt to the increasingly and outsourcingly oppressive political environment in China (Ong, 2022), the mobilisation mode of social contention has been evolving to be more and more decentralised, disorganised, covert and flexible (Fu, 2018). Third, the concept of 'harmony' originally proposed in response to the surge of social unrest in China has also experienced a evolution from a political goal to a discursive instrument widely used by the state to 'harmonise' the allegedly 'disharmonious', *both* domestically and internationally. As Hagström and Nordin (2020) stated recently, the 'politics of harmony' in China can be understood as soft power campaigns in a form of political discourses which set a rhetorical trap to legitimise the elimination of 'disharmonious' voices other than that of the party-state as well as those who do not clearly disavow them through potential violent 'harmonisation'.

Last but not the least, the nationwide outburst of anti-lockdown protests in China at the end of 2022 must also be highlighted. This wave of protests, which is widely viewed by English media as the largest surge of social contention since 1989, profoundly demonstrates the changing pattern of interactions between the state and social contention in the new era of China. The outburst of nationwide social contention does not lead to a corresponding outburst of public opinion in the public, nor does it successfully have access to the media coverage in mainstream media. But what has been witnessed is that, on the one hand, the main demands for lifting the lockdown and changing the zero-Covid policy was quickly met, although there are a few news reports (e.g., Huang and Han, 2022) but no empirical study systematically introducing the policy-changing process in detail and especially assessing the impact of grassroots actions on it. On the other hand, after the incident, the state was reported to forcibly arrested some of the participants and quietly round up people who protested.

Given but not limited to such an increasingly diverse and even 'polarised' interactions between state and social contention witnessed in the new era, the last point of this thesis emphasises is that the research of 'harmonious' and 'contentious' politics in China should not stop with the seemingly complete building of a harmonious society as a political agenda or the end of the harmonious society-building era as a historical phase in the CCP's ruling of China. Instead, this thesis urges researchers to pay more attention to the complex interactions between state and protest in the new era of China and to assess the potential impact of social contention on the CCP's ruling of China. Although not being able to provide detailed guidelines for policymaking of foreign affair and the practice of grassroots mobilisation involving in China,

this thesis provides deep insights into the understanding of the CCP's ruling and, even more importantly, the great people of China.

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