International Political Science Review

Economic development and mass political participation in contemporary China: determinants of provincial petition (*Xinfang*) activism 1994–2002

Wooyeal Paik

The online version of this article can be found at:

Published by:

$SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:

IPSA ⊕ AISP

International Political Science Association (IPSA)

Additional services and information for *International Political Science Review* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://ips.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://ips.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://ips.sagepub.com/content/33/1/99.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Feb 8, 2012

What is This?

Economic development and mass political participation in contemporary China: determinants of provincial petition (*Xinfang*) activism 1994–2002

Wooyeal Paik
Sungkyunkwan University

Abstract

Rapid economic development has increased mass political participation in market reform China. Many electoral authoritarian regimes with a good record of economic development have experienced the growing participation of elite/middle-class citizens. Under the Chinese Communist Party regime, however, the poor mass is the main group to participate drastically more. This is because despite rapid aggregate growth, the mass have suffered extensively from excessive exploitation with high levels of corruption and inequality, which benefits many local elites. The regime has evaded authoritarian election but channeled such mounting participatory demands into an extensive petition (*Xinfang*) institution nationwide. As a result, the mass petition activism has rapidly increased since the early 1990s. This article finds the specific determinants of such petition activism with newly assembled data on provincial petition frequency and multiple case studies.

Keywords

authoritarian regime, Chinese politics, economic development, petition activism, political participation

1. Introduction

Has rapid economic development increased political participation in market reform China? Many would expect so because a large number of authoritarian regimes with a good record of economic development have experienced some steady increase of their citizens' political participation, ending in democratization (Geddes, 1999, 2007). Economic development improves citizens' education and strengthens political recognition, encouraging them to participate in politics to protect their rights to life and property, in many cases, by voting out the dictator who attempts to take away those rights (Lipset, 1959; Moore, 1966). This is a core idea of 'modernization theory',

Corresponding author:
Wooyeal Paik, Academy of East Asian Studies, Sungkyunkwan University, 53 Myungnyun-dong 3-ga, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea 110-745, Korea.
Email: woopaik@skku.edu

which has been a key theory in the relationship between development and participation (Boix and Stokes, 2003; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck, 1994; Geddes, 2007).

It is unclear, however, whether we can or cannot use modernization theory to understand the patterns of political participation in market reform China. Chinese citizens participate more, but their participation pattern is different from their counterparts' in other developmental authoritarian regimes, such as previous South Korea and Taiwan and other exemplary cases of modernization theory. It is not the elite and middle class, whom modernization theory assumes as the primary force and leader of increasing participation, that actively participate in politics (Chen, 2002; Chen and Dickson, 2010; Tsai, 2007), but rather the poor masses who are generally the subject of elite mobilization that lead the participatory trend (Cai, 2004; O'Brien and Li, 2006). Why do the latter participate more while the former hesitates to join and lead in mass participation? What are the determinants of mass participation? In all eventualities, what are its preliminary implications for China's potential regime transition?

In this context, this paper questions the applicability of the 'middle class-oriented' modernization theory to market reform China, and pays more attention to mass political participation, which is explained more convincingly by the theory of contentious politics (McAdam et al., 2001; O'Brien, 2008; O'Brien and Li, 2006; Piven and Cloward, 1977; Scott, 1985). 'Contentious politics' means 'episodic, public, and collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) a government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants' (McAdam et al., 2001: 5). In this vein, I propose that mass participation is primarily motivated by the exploitative nature of economic development and its negative impacts on the poor. In conclusion, this paper also cautiously adds that we cannot connect soaring mass participation to potential regime transition at this time, because it is neither connected with, nor mobilized by, the opportunistic elites.

Despite having a stunning average growth rate of 9.6 percent GDP since Deng Xiaoping launched the 'economic reform and open to outside (*gaigekaifang*)' policies in 1978 (*Chinese Statistical Yearbooks*, 1980–2005), this did not satisfy the overall demands of many citizens. In fact, while many co-opted and patronized elites enjoyed the fruits of exploitative development, many peasants, workers, and migrant workers at the bottom of the social strata still suffer from its negative externalities and understandably protest (Chen, 2009; Dickson, 2003; O'Brien and Li, 2006; Pei, 2006; Zweig, 2000); as we find many similar cases in the literature such as 'weapons of the weak' (Scott, 1985), 'poor people's movement' (Piven and Cloward, 1977), and others (McAdam et al., 2001). The gravely unfair reality is clearly revealed by serious corruption, which allegedly occupies more than 15 percent of national GDP (Pei and Hu, 2007), as well as ever-growing inequality, with the Gini-coefficient having increased to 0.5 in the 2000s;[1] both are among the highest in the world. In this vein, Sidney Tarrow, a leading scholar of contentious politics, points out, '[C]hina's panoply of contentious politics is expanding in step with its booming economic growth' (2008: 2).

For an empirical test of the above propositions, this paper makes use of petition activism. Without semi-competitive elections, which most authoritarian regimes hold (Brownlee, 2007; Lust-Okar, 2005; Magaloni, 2006) with the exception of the CCP regime, the disgruntled masses participate via petition activism. In contemporary China, 'petition' or '*Xinfang*' refers to citizens' political participatory activities, such as sending letters and paying visits to designated government institutions, in order to address their economic and political needs along with policy suggestions (Cai, 2004; CMLVA, 2000: 214; Minzner, 2006; Shi, 1997).[2] This form of participation has been institutionalized and legally protected by this authoritarian regime. An increasingly large number of officials - estimated at more than one million - have been working for this participatory institution. (CMLVA, 2000).

A new dataset on nationwide petition frequencies from 1994 to 2002 confirms that petition activism has significantly increased since the early 1990s at an annual rate of 8 percent, already reaching an unprecedented 30 million petitioners in 2002. An even more intriguing finding is that there are large variations across provinces. The wealthier eastern provinces, such as Shanghai and Zhejiang, have higher petition frequencies than the poorer central Anhui and western Guangxi. Two middling northeastern Heilongjiang and Jilin Provinces mark much higher frequencies than their equivalents in other regions, and previously low petition frequencies of poor western Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces have begun to soar. These spatial and temporal variations of petition activism seem to have some underlying systematic patterns to demonstrate its determinants, but have rarely been studied in the literature.

This paper proceeds as follows. In section 2, I briefly review the literature on modernization, regime transition, and contentious political theories to locate Chinese mass political participation in the literature before illustrating and operationalizing petition activism. In order to assess the posited relationship, section 3 proposes hypotheses with two sets of explanatory variables – socioe-conomic factors (income, education) and negative externality factors (real estate development, agricultural financial burden, and State Owned Enterprise [SOE] layoffs) – and operationalizes them. Section 4 studies as many provinces (14 in total) as the recent data on petition frequencies (1994–2002) allow, employing quantitative methods that include a multivariate regression analysis with Panel Corrected Standard Errors (PCSE) and AR1 Correlation-Correction. This study is arguably the first statistically based effort to explore *nationwide* mass political participation in contemporary China. Multiple case studies and individual-level research are also included before section 5 concludes.

2. Theories of modernization and authoritarian regime transition

One stylized fact to emerge from studies of regime transition is that democracy is more likely to occur in more developed countries. Labeled as the aforementioned 'modernization theory,' the positive relationship between economic development and democratic government was empirically established (Boix and Stokes, 2003; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck, 1994; Geddes, 2007) beyond early doubt by Jackman (1973) as well as more recent criticism by Przeworski and Limongi (1997), and Przeworski et al. (2000). Another widely accepted generalization in this literature is that the first steps toward what would eventually become democratization could be traced to splits within authoritarian regime rulers under crisis situations (Geddes, 2003; O'Donnell et al., 1986). In keeping with this argument about elite-initiated democratization, however, many observers assign little importance to mobilized mass participation as a cause of democratization. Popular mobilizations took place in many countries, but they usually occurred relatively late in the process, when democratization was well underway and the risks of opposition had diminished. *Mass participation for popular protest* may have pushed democratization further and faster than regime elites initially intended (Bermeo, 1997; McAdam et al., 2001), but in most cases it did not cause the initiation of liberalization.

This relationship between elite-initiated democratization and popular mobilization is well studied in another part of regime transition literature on electoral authoritarianism and its survival strategy (Schedler, 2006). Most authoritarian regimes make use of semi-competitive or controlled elections for their survival. Elections assist authoritarian regime leaders to obtain popular legitimacy, monitor local politicians' performance, form clientele networks from national to grassroots level, deliver clientele goods to achieve the acquiescence of the poor, prevent opposition leaders' coalitions, and show overwhelming power with lopsided electoral victory (Brownlee,

2007; Lust-Okar, 2005; Magaloni, 2006; Schedler, 2006). These advantages notwithstanding, the semi-competitive elections often backfire under certain disadvantageous situations such as economic crisis, and play a significant role in letting the opportunistic elites and the dissatisfied masses interact, mobilize, and form anti-regime coalitions to challenge and even overthrow the incumbent authoritarian regime (Geddes, 2003, 2007).

3. Mass political participation in market reform China: understanding and measuring petition activism

3.1 Petition activism as mass political participation for popular protest

China's political institutions differ from those in other electoral authoritarian regimes. The selection of members of the legislature – National (and local) People's Congresses – depends on party elites, not voters, so deputies have no incentive to build clientele networks downward to ordinary voters and, in fact, no reason to respond to the interests of ordinary citizens, unlike those in most other electoral authoritarian regimes. It does not link political elites to ordinary citizens through party networks or patron–client relationships, and it does not provide a forum within which local interests or grievances are addressed.[3]

Instead, the CCP regime provides citizens with the means for expressing discontent via petitions (*Xinfang*), which are delivered to local, regional, or national agencies (Cai, 2004; CMLVA, 2000; Minzner, 2006; O'Brien and Li, 1995). Because of this, petition activism has a two-sided nature. On the one hand, petitions are usually addressed to higher levels of government for redressing grievances caused by local officials and their patronized entrepreneurs. They thus help higher officials to monitor the behavior of lower officials, one of the key challenges that face all dictatorships. Through the petition system, ordinary citizens can occasionally succeed in ousting an especially corrupt or exploitative local official, or persuading the government to change especially onerous polices (Minzner, 2006; Wang, 2008). On the other hand, many petitioners remain unsatisfied by government responses, and groups that formed to present petitions often become the nuclei of spontaneous protests as students of contentious politics in China demonstrate (Chen, 2009; O'Brien and Li, 2006; Minzner, 2006). Collective petitions have become politically important because illegal and violent protests often begin as collective petitioning.

Whether petitioners are satisfied with the government's responses to their petition or not, however, the petition process does not lead to the creation of on-going elite–mass relationships that might sustain an opposition movement. The institutions play a routine, a day-in-day-out role in hindering the transformation from popular opposition of the regime's policies to politically effective action. The petitioners' lack of local elite patrons translates to the lack of elite leaders in petitioning and other non-elite activist activities, unlike their electoral counterparts. The regime intends to prevent elite citizens, most of whom are already co-opted or patronized and have remained much less active politically,[4] from participating in or leading in petition activism.[5] In other words, the regime makes a great effort to maintain petitioning as a participatory compartment exclusively for the masses and consequently, to separate elite and mass participations. Again, their combined participation could end up becoming a serious challenge against the regime, eventually culminating in a large opposition movement, as frequently found in electoral authoritarianism.

These differences between election and petition are an important clue in understanding the nature and determinants of petitioning and, accordingly, the spatial and temporal variation of petition frequencies in China. In this context, we may not be able to apply conventional modernization theories, which explain electoral political participation and middle class-led

democratization, to petition activism in a dictatorship. Political participation in China is not in the conventional context of democratic transition, but in that of limited and managed political liberalization and contentious/protest politics.

Such petition activism, which is well situated in the theory of contentious politics, is important in understanding the relationship between development and participation in protest in market reform China. Even though the study of contentious politics in China has become both rich and complex, scrutinizing political processes – political opportunities and threats, mobilizing structures, and framing processes (Cai, 2004; Chen, 2009; Keidel, 2006; O'Brien, 2008; O'Brien and Li, 1995, 2006) – we should note a striking disjunction, the gap between most studies of political economy and studies of contentious politics (Tarrow, 2008). To fill this lacuna, this article attempts to show some patterns of causality linking economic development (or economic inequality and exploitation) and mass participation for protest.

3.2 Measurement and recent trend of petition activism

The petition (*Xinfang*) sections in the yearbooks of the 14 provinces from 1995 to 2003 (actual information presented is for the years 1994–2002) report aggregate data on petitions received by the Party-Government petition organizations from county, municipality, and provincial governments.[6] The data break down the numbers of letter petitions and visit petitions – letter, individual visit, and collective visit by 'petition case' and 'petitioner'.[7] The number of cases does not indicate how many people actually petitioned because collective visits, where multiple petitioners participated, are listed as one case. The number of petitioners is therefore a more accurate measurement of petition frequency, and this paper uses *the total number of petitioners* as the measurement of petition activism[8] from the most reliable data of 14 provinces from 1994 to 2002.[9] Even though there are some missing years (22 out of 126 province-years, $N = 104$), the data provide enough coverage to explore the relationship between economic development and petition activism trends. These provinces are geographically well distributed to represent each of the three regions – Eastern, Central, and Western.[10]

Even though we should take into account the reliability of this politically sensitive data, it is surprisingly reliable nonetheless for the following reasons. First of all, the data of the 14 provincial yearbooks is presented in a format that is consistent with the instructions on statistical data collection and reports of the aforementioned National Petition Bureau's *Complete Manual on the Letters and Visits Affair in a New Millennium* (CMLVA, 2000). Second, even though provinces (and their lower-level governments) could scale down the petition frequencies, there are clear spatial and temporal trends of increase and decrease apparent. Third, if there was a need to hide such sensitive data, this could have been done because provinces seem to have a choice in announcing their numbers; some have reported them, others have not. Provinces that 'suffer' skyrocketing petition frequencies, therefore, might have an incentive in not reporting such data (e.g. Heilongjiang, Shanghai, and Zhejiang), but they have announced detailed numbers, nevertheless.[11]

The total number of petitioners to the Party-Government organization at the county and above (municipality and province) levels reached about 11 million in 2002 and 13.3 million in 2004, before it began to decrease to 12.5 million in 2005. Figure 1 illustrates national trends in petition activism, showing the rapidly increasing tendency with some fluctuation since the mid-1990s. Also, the Court organization alone received 11 million in 2002 (*China Law Yearbook*, 2003). The combined 22 million in 2002 does not include other *Xinfang* organizations in the People's Congress, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Inspection Committee System, State-Owned Enterprises, and mass organizations at the same levels, as well as the township (one level
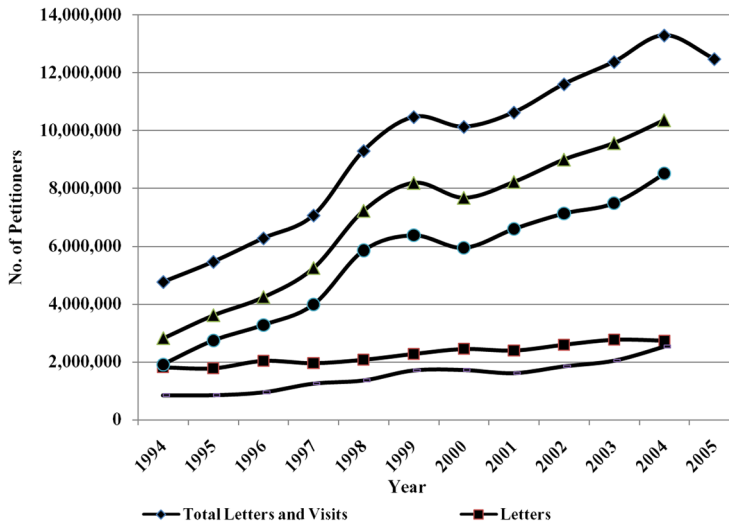
Figure 1. National Trend of Petition Activism in China (1994–2005)a
a. Petition activism has roughly four types – individual letters, collective letters, individual visits, and collective visits.
(*Source:* 17 China Provincial Yearbooks, 1995–2005)

lower than county) and national (the Party Center) petition organizations. In other words, in 2002 the Party-Government organization above county level alone received 86 petitioners per 10,000 persons and the court organization received 86 petitioners, totaling 172, which might have reached 250–300 petitioners if we include all other organizations. These enormous numbers vividly demonstrate how extensive mass participation through petitioning is in market reform China, which will be empirically studied below.

4. Hypotheses and operationalization

In a cross-provincial study investigating the determinants of the marked increase of petition activities,[12] they are treated as the dependent variable, defined and operationalized in the previous section. This section provides theoretical explanations for the variation in petition frequencies. The main question is whether a higher level of economic development increases petition activism or not. If so, through what channels? This section answers this question along two dimensions. The first dimension is the effect of rapid economic modernization on petition activities via income and education. The second dimension is its three negative externalities – real estate development, peasants' financial burden, and SOE layoffs – which harm the economically disadvantaged.

4.1 Rapid economic development and petition activism

4.1.1 Socio-economic status factors
Hypothesis 1: a higher level of provincial economic development increases petition activism.
Hypothesis 2: higher provincial educational levels increase petition activism.

China's economic development has dramatically improved people's socio-economic status, making people more concerned about their rights to life and property. We can accordingly expect that

people would become more interested in participating in politics. The annual per capita disposable income of urban residents rose from 343 yuan in 1978 to 9574 yuan in 2004, a 28-fold increase, and the annual net per capita income of rural households had risen from 133 yuan in 1978 to 3064 yuan in 2004, a factor of 23 (*Chinese Statistical Yearbooks*, 1979–2005). Increases in income raise educational levels. Economic development gives rise to more educational infrastructure, such as schools, more available income for education, and more demand for highly educated labor.

In turn, more education gives people the capacity to learn or recognize their political rights to protect their interests, especially 'property rights' (Moore, 1966). The nationwide junior/senior secondary education attainment per 100,000 increased from 31,383 in 1990 to 45,007 in 2000, a 43.4 percent increase, and literacy rates increased from 84.12 percent in 1990 to 93.28 percent in 2000. The better-educated primary petitioners – peasants, workers, and migrant workers – would be more politically active now than before. Admittedly, this socio-economic progress does not directly cause people's petition activities, but it is a prerequisite to such activities. This logic is consistent with modernization theory.

It is not clear, however, whether this theory can always hold in the case of petition activism. The primary petitioner groups are the poor peasants, workers, and migrant workers, who certainly do not belong to the 'middle class' in a transitional – mostly democratizing – society.[13] Even though the improving basic education would encourage those poor citizens to participate more extensively, the higher – secondary and post-secondary – education is still more often enjoyed by middle-class citizens, less by the poor petitioners. Even though the rate of attaining secondary education has risen quickly, it was only slightly over 50 percent even in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. This means that half the population has failed to receive secondary and further education. From a different angle, the improvement of higher education would also decrease petitioning because one of the primary petition and protest subjects is the deteriorating educational environment.[14]

Beyond the conventional explanation, an alternative explanation of contentious politics explains the causal relation better. Economic development increases this type of political participation because it creates more victims. Economic development may increase economic opportunities and/or trickle-down effects. This is not entirely the case in China's marketizing society. The problem is that only a minority can avail themselves of these opportunities. They are mostly reserved for new economic elites, entrepreneurs, and professionals, whose tight clientele relations with local governments largely exclude and excessively exploit the poor masses. In a more developed region, there are more victims. Any province with these developmental problems is more likely to experience more petitioners.

For the operationalization of economic development, I shall use two conventional indicators, provincial logged GDP per capita (yuan) and provincial GDP per capita annual growth rate (percent), to capture both the level and change of development. For the operationalization of education, I use two indicators to capture both general and higher educational levels during the period. The former is measured with the provincial literacy rate (percent) of population above age six from *China Statistical Yearbooks*. The latter is measured with secondary school student numbers (per 1000 persons) from *China Statistical Yearbooks*.

4.2 Externalities of economic development and petition activism

4.2.1 Negative externality factors.   Bearing the two socio-economic factors in mind, we should analyse more direct causes of petition activism, such as the gradual reversal of economic conditions or there being direct interests at stake, as Gurr (1970) and Lipset (1959) hypothesize. David Zweig (2000: 120) argues, 'in China today "externalities" associated with accelerated economic growth

are generating widespread protests.' As such, many governmental development policies generate negative externalities that create a number of losers who cannot meet their expectations, and even feel victimized by rapid economic marketization. So the weak and poor make use of contentious strategies and tactics to participate in politics.

4.2.2 Real estate development
Hypothesis 3: increase in real estate development results in a higher number of petitions.

Real estate development for industrial construction and urbanization may be related to petitions. Turning fields into factories helps to boost the regional economy in many respects; however, it causes problems for agriculturally reliant peasants and poor urbanites (Cai, 2003; Ho and Lin, 2003, 2004). Sharp economic reversals, such as under-compensated land expropriation and forced resettlement, coming after sustained economic progress through agricultural privatization and social welfare like government-guaranteed housing schemes, can stimulate more political participation. Local governments expropriate peoples' land to build factories, infrastructure (roads, dams, power plants), and residential areas (apartments) to boost the local economy, as well as to accumulate enormous profits for 'red capitalist' entrepreneurs and cadres (Dickson, 2003; Pei, 2006). Moreover, the compensation for those having lost land and buildings is usually not enough to allow them to resettle elsewhere. This negative externality of development may be responsible for much of the proliferation of rural and urban discontent in China during the 1990s and 2000s (Guo, 2003; Zweig, 2000). Thus, we can expect a systematic relationship between real estate development and petition activism. Hasty urbanization and industrialization also frequently lead to another major petition subject – environmental degradation such as deforestation, soil erosion, chemical degradation of rivers and streams, and water shortages (Jahiel, 1997; Lai, 2002).

To operationalize real estate development, I use provincial construction expenditures (100 million yuan) from provincial statistical yearbooks, which measure all the expenditures for construction in the provinces. This paper comprehensively defines real estate including industrial areas, infrastructures, and rural and urban residential areas, making more comprehensive provincial construction expenditure a reasonable measurement.

4.2.3 Peasants' financial burden
Hypothesis 4: the more financial burden there is on peasants, the more petitions.

Many rural peasants fell victim to externalities in this period, such as surging agricultural taxes and extra-budgetary fees to enrich arbitrary and deficient local governments, as well as to mitigate the collapse of the public goods regime. As many provincial yearbooks report, most rural petitions were made by peasants so affected, who were forced to bear a growing financial burden during the mid- and late 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, this financial burden grew to the extent that it exceeded their agricultural income in many places and the arbitrary extra-budgetary fees became a main source of peasant complaints and protests (Bernstein and Lü, 2003; Wedeman, 1997). In the late 1990s, the central government launched a series of tax reforms, fixing the maximum agricultural tax rate at 8.4 percent, and forcing local governments to abolish the agricultural tax by 2008 (Li, 2007; Yep, 2004). This reform significantly lowered the financial burden of the peasants, which reduced the cause for petitions in agricultural regions.

Nevertheless, the problem is the sustainability of reform, mainly due to other negative externalities (Yep, 2004). According to Oi and Zhao (2007), agricultural tax reforms created local fiscal crises because agricultural taxes and fees were the primary revenue source for rural local

governments. As a result, local governments misappropriated social welfare, health care, and education funds to partially compensate for the loss of revenue. This not only caused a severe contraction of public goods provisioning in rural China, but, by the early 2000s, disillusioned peasants. These factors may lead to more petitions.

For its operationalization, I shall use the provincial ratio of extra-budgetary revenue to budgetary revenue (percent) from provincial statistical yearbooks. Basically, this extra-budgetary revenue is levied not only on agriculture but also on industries (license, land usage, etc.), making the amount itself not an accurate measurement. The ratio is better because more revenue-starved governments tend to depend more heavily on extra-budgetary revenues, especially in rural jurisdictions, raising the ratio between extra-budgetary and budgetary revenues.

4.2.4 SOE laid-off workers
Hypothesis 5: the more SOE laid-off workers, the more petitions.

Like rural peasants, urban workers have also enjoyed overall economic gains, particularly in the eastern coastal region, the heart of Chinese economic development. It has raised the expectations of urbanites well above that of rural peasants and workers in Township-Village Enterprises (TVEs), and some urbanites even became entrepreneurs. As economic modernization deepens, however, rapid marketization and incomplete privatization have produced losers. SOE reform is arguably the most challenging facet of China's economic transition to a market economy because it smashes the 'iron rice bowl' that state workers once took for granted.

SOE layoffs are one of the primary externalities of economic development in urban areas, which directly threatens the subsistence of workers and their families. According to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics in 2005, about 30 million workers lost their jobs from 1997 to 1999 alone, a figure that includes tens of millions of SOE workers. This restructuring reform hit Northeast provinces the hardest, where there is a heavy concentration of these industries (Cai, 2002; Dittmer, 2003; Guo, 2003). The SOE workers were unpaid and laid off due to the central government's industrial restructuring policy and the local governments' irresponsible and corrupt policy implementation, which has often benefited their entrepreneurial clients. To make matters worse, SOE bankruptcies jeopardized pensions for countless retired SOE workers. Workers have used petitions followed by mass protests to air grievances against these measures. I therefore expect to see a positive relation between the number of SOE laid-off workers and petition numbers. This is operationalized by the number of provincial laid-off workers in SOEs per 10,000 persons, the most direct measurement from *China Statistical Yearbooks*.

4.3 Control variables

There are two more control factors to consider – general unemployment and inflation. First, general unemployment is also an important subject for petitions. However, the other aspect of unemployment, layoffs from private enterprises, has been low and more accepted than the SOEs' layoffs in the 1990s and early 2000s. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the layoffs by private enterprises and other unjust treatment of workers, which has become a subject of more petitions, especially as we see numerous migrant workers rush to petition offices in industrial areas. This is operationalized by the provincial urban registered unemployment rate (percent) from respective provincial statistical yearbooks.[15] Second, since high inflation would cause a deterioration in the living standards of the poor, the inflation variable should be included in the group of hypotheses. The variation from the early 1990s to early 2000s has been substantial, as it was higher than 20 percent

in 1994 but lower than zero in the early 2000s across the provinces. It is operationalized with the direct measurement of the provincial inflation rate (preceding year = 100).

5. Testing the hypotheses

In testing the five hypotheses, I estimate stepwise regressions – Ordinary Least Square (OLS) Regression with Panel-Corrected Standard Error (PCSE) and Corrected Auto-correlation (AR1) – to test the proposed hypotheses and verify the statistical model's robustness.[16] I also use data analytic techniques such as residual analysis to scrutinize the claims more closely. This is a first step in constructing theories on how economic development and its results influence petition activism in marketizing China.[17] As previously mentioned, I use provincial petition frequency per capita as a measurement for the dependent variable.[18] My model is as follows:

Petition Frequencies$_{ti}$ = α + β$_1$Economic Development$_{ti}$ + ß$_2$Economic Growth$_{ti}$

+ ß$_3$Basic Education Level$_{ti}$ + ß$_4$Secondary Education$_{ti}$ + ß$_5$Real Estate Development$_{ti}$

+ ß$_6$Peasant Financial Burden$_{ti}$ + ß$_7$SOE Layoff$_{ti}$ + ß$_8$Unemployment$_{ti}$ + ß$_9$Inflation$_{ti}$ + e$_{ti}$

5.1 Findings

Table 1 shows the basic regression results. I first estimate a model (Models 1, 5, and 9) that includes only the economic development variables – *Economic Development Level (income)* and *Economic Growth Rates* – designed to test *Hypothesis 1* on the general development's effect on petition activism. In the next column, I add *General Educational Level* and *Secondary Education* to test the education channel between economic development and petition activism (Models 2, 6, and 10). Models 3, 7, and 11 include the three externality variables, *Real Estate Development*, *Peasant Financial Burden*, and *SOE Laidoff Workers* to test *Hypotheses 3*, *4*, and *5*. Models 4, 8, and 12 add two more variables, *Unemployment* and *Inflation* to control for their effect on the petition trends.

5.2 Economic development and petition activism

The regression results statistically and substantively confirm the positive relationship between income – *Economic Development Level* – and petition frequencies, with some reservations. Model 8, which contains reasonable controls, indicates that an increase of 1 unit of logged GDP (yuan) will increase petitioners by 28.55 per 10,000 persons.[19] This is a 33.2 percent increase over the 86 petitioners, which is the aforementioned national average.[20] The third variable, *General Educational Level*, is substantively and statistically significant with an over 95 percent confidence level. Even when the model controls for the three negative externalities and other control variables, its coefficient is 2.20, meaning that a 1 percent higher literacy rate will encourage 2.20 more petitioners. Literacy rates or basic education are arguably more pertinent to poor and uneducated peasants and workers, who are the primary petitioners.

This finding seems to support a basic logic of modernization theory that economic modernization positively affects political participation via education. But the results of the *Secondary Education* variable make this conventional theory difficult to support for petition activism in China. Its coefficient, −1.39 in Model 8, means that one more secondary school student per 1000 people will lower the number of petitioners by 1.39. The more opportunities for higher education in turn

Table 1. Cross-Provincial Tests of Economic Development, Its Externalities and Petition Trends in China 1994–2002

Independent Variable	OLS				OLS PCSE				OLS PCSE AR1			
Regression Model	Provincial Xinfang Frequency (1994–2002)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Economic Development Level (Income)	87.38*** (9.34)	88.47*** (8.49)	29.29*** (11.10)	30.50*** (7.02)	91.45*** (7.02)	91.12*** (4.71)	32.45*** (8.49)	28.55*** (9.71)	82.69*** (11.51)	92.49*** (11.25)	47.43*** (11.59)	43.90*** (12.71)
Economic Growth Rate	-0.81 (0.62)	-1.30** (0.56)	0.06 (0.44)	-0.12 (1.04)	-0.72 (0.57)	-1.19** (0.57)	0.18 (0.49)	1.37 (1.21)	-0.35 (0.40)	-0.80** (0.37)	0.73 (0.50)	0.88 (0.81)
General Educational Level		5.65*** (1.16)	2.15** (1.00)	2.16** (1.00)		5.79*** (1.65)	2.19** (1.13)	2.20** (1.14)		1.23* (0.70)	1.29 (1.13)	1.28 (1.11)
Secondary Education		-2.92*** (0.52)	-1.29*** (0.43)	-1.26*** (0.45)		-2.88*** (0.62)	-1.25*** (0.32)	-1.39*** (0.32)		-1.98*** (0.68)	-1.44*** (0.45)	-1.55*** (0.47)
Real Estate Development			0.79*** (0.11)	0.78*** (0.12)			0.79*** (0.07)	0.82*** (0.11)			0.64*** (0.09)	0.66*** (0.13)
Peasant Burden			0.29** (0.13)	0.29** (0.14)			0.28*** (0.10)	0.27*** (0.12)			0.01 (0.13)	0.02 (0.15)
SOE Layoffs			0.83*** (0.10)	0.83*** (0.10)			0.83*** (0.13)	0.83*** (0.13)			0.60*** (0.13)	0.61*** (0.15)
Unemployment Rate				1.79 (5.05)				-5.27 (7.77)				-3.04 (7.72)
Inflation Rate				0.27 (1.28)				-1.54 (1.25)				-.13 (0.92)
Constant	-592.75*** (116.08)	-886.17*** (132.20)	-412.86*** (111.71)	-438.04*** (132.77)	-641.33*** (86.72)	-938.16*** (161.74)	-460.90*** (146.50)	-379.58*** (136.04)	-605.09*** (131.65)	-639.95*** (120.92)	-450.61*** (135.68)	-379.24*** (139.96)
Adjusted R-Squared	0.47	0.61	0.79	0.79	0.49	0.64	0.82	0.82	0.23	0.38	0.67	0.68
N	108	108	108	108	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
rho									0.78	0.68	0.50	0.48

Note: Main entries are the coefficients of the following 3 regression models; (1) OLS, (2) OLS with Panel Corrected Standard Error (PCSE), and (3) OLS with PCSE and Correlation Correction (AR1). Generated using Stata8.

*P<0.10; **P<0.05; ***P<0.01

All numbers are rounded off to two decimal places.

Standard Errors are reported in parentheses.
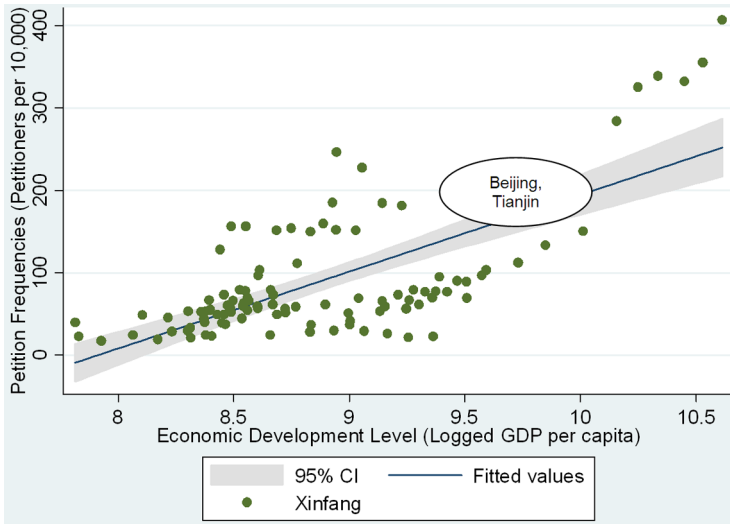
Figure 2. Linear Relationship between Level of Economic Development and Petition Frequencies in China (1994–2002)

decrease petition activism. This can be interpreted in two ways. First, increased opportunities for higher education brought about by development would decrease people's grevances on education. Second, more educated people, like the middle class, do not petition the government. Admittedly, this set of interpretations is unclear, but enough for us to be suspicious of modernization theory's applicability.[21]

Such mixed results indicate that the hypothesis that economic development increases petition activism because it creates primarily victims in market reform China is more responsible for the variable of economic development and its explanatory power. It is also consistent with the aforementioned 'contentious politics' argument. The logged GDP (yuan) coefficient decreases significantly from 91.45 (Model 5) to 28.55 (Model 8), when the three major externalities are introduced. That is, the introduction of externalities decreases the estimated coefficient of economic development, affirming the core assumption: externalities of economic development are behind the bivariate relationship between petitioning and development. This may partly explain why more frustrated people participate more in petition activism than relatively well-off people.

Figure 2 finds a bivariate linear relationship between the level of economic development and petitioning activities in market reform China. The regression line and 95 percent confidence interval fitted into Figure 2 clearly show the positive linear bivariate relationship. Those six outliers at the upper-right quadrant belong to Shanghai. Shanghai's higher petition frequencies are not surprising because its level of economic development is much higher than that of the other 13 provinces, and it therefore suffers much more interest-related based conflicts. The next two highest GDP per capita provinces were Beijing and Tianjin. Unfortunately they are not included in the dataset but very likely fill the missing space between these Shanghai outliers and the main data point group, as oval-marked in Figure 2.[22]

In addition, the *Economic Growth Rate* may not have a consistent effect on petition activism. Most regression results are statistically insignificant and also show that the sign of the economic

growth coefficient changes depending on which variables are included.[23] This change is because economic growth rates may not reflect the peasants' and workers' worse economic conditions. Even though they lack economic advantages, higher level administrative units can still maintain higher growth rates by making their industries more efficient (Keidel, 2006; Pei, 2006; Pei and Hu, 2007). Rapid development is accomplished through the capitalist exploitation of land and human resources, which improves efficiency but causes a large number of problems for the poor. This illustration leads us to consider the three major negative externalities, which most likely stimulate discontent and frustration for the weak, the most likely participants in petition activism.

5.3 Externalities of development and petition activism

5.3.1 Real estate development.   *Real estate development* increases the number of petitioners by increasing the frequency of grievances. On average, a 100-million-yuan increase in provincial construction expenditure gives rise to a 0.82 percent increase in petition frequency. The average provincial expenditure on land development is 10 billion yuan, meaning that if a province doubles its expenditure on construction, it will receive 82 more petitions, equivalent to a 95 percent increase over the national average. In every model, regardless of controls, the coefficient estimating *Real Estate Development* is robust at the 99 percent confidence interval. Such strong results suggest that externalities lead to more political activities, a claim consistent with anecdotal and ethnographic evidence related to the recent Great Western Area Development Plan.

Figure 3 demonstrates that two economically and demographically similar provinces, Henan (Central) and Sichuan (West), show different trends in petition activities.[24] Henan's petitions decreased and stagnated from 1998 to 2001, presumably due to the agricultural tax reform and relief subsidies. Meanwhile, Sichuan's petition activities increased from 1997 onwards, even though it experienced the same agricultural tax reform as Henan. The huge investment in the Western provinces, particularly in key areas with relatively firm economic bases, high population densities, and transportation hubs, such as Sichuan and Chongqing, at least partially contributed to this difference. Increased national investment has not only developed the western region's economy, but has also caused serious negative externalities, unlike the Central region.

One of the most salient examples is the fact that the central government decided to build the controversial Three Gorges Dam in Sichuan Province, thereby ensuring that neighboring Chongqing would have to deal with the project's attendant problems, including millions losing their homes and land with little compensation (Lai, 2002). As a result, in Sichuan in October 2004, 90,000 peasants reportedly fought with police over losing their homes for little compensation to make way for a hydroelectric dam. Only martial law restored order (Keidel, 2006). According to the established literature (Cai, 2004; Chen, 2009; Minzner, 2006; O'Brien and Li, 2006) and numerous journalistic reports, these peasants very likely resorted to petitioning before undertaking violent protests. This fact also confirms the strong 'protesting' or 'contentious' element in petition activism.

5.3.2 Peasants' financial burden.   *Peasants' financial burden* has a positive influence on the petition trend. As Models 7 and 8 confirm, the higher the extra-budgetary revenue (as a percentage of total provincial government revenue), the more petitions are observed. In fact, a 10 percent increase in the ratio leads to an increase of 2.7 petitioners, a 3 percent increase over the annual national average. Models 11 and 12 with the corrected auto-correlation, however, do not confirm results, as the coefficients become statistically insignificant, even though the coefficient signs are still positive. This may be due to poor measurement of this variable; more rigorous model specification and data are needed in future studies.
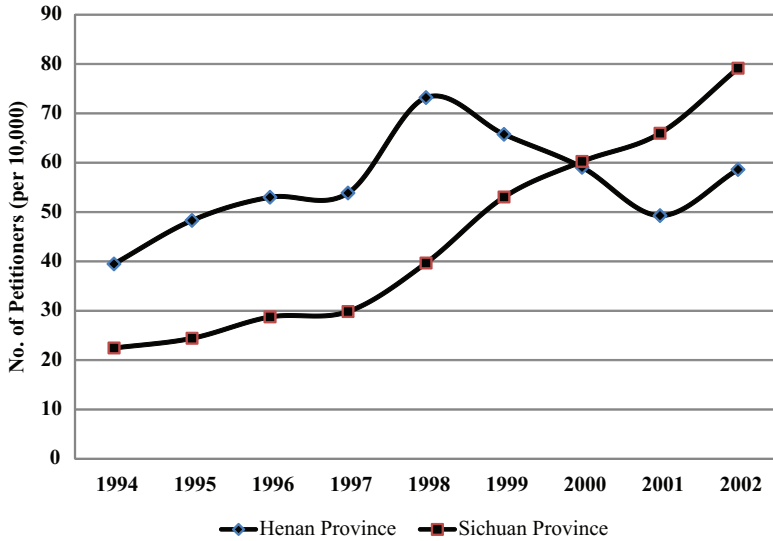
Figure 3. The Great West Development and Petition Trend in China (1994–2003)
(*Source:* Henan and Sichuan Provincial Yearbooks 1995–2004.)

Though there is room for improvement in the model, additional evidence suggests that there is a positive relationship between peasant burden and petition activities. First, Figure 1 (National Petition Trends) finds a marked increase in petitions throughout the 1990s, but a slight decrease around 2000, with an increase since 2002. As explained in section 3.2, this trend is likely a result of the fact that the peasants' frustrations and grievances were soothed by agricultural reform in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, even though there were regional variations in the speed and degree of the reform. A few years later, however, the petitioners returned in greater numbers to collectively remonstrate against the severe contraction of public goods in rural areas, which offset the effects of the reforms.

This argument finds even more support when the data are disaggregated. In Figure 4 above, in the two agricultural provinces, Henan and Guangxi,[25] the number of petitioners began to decrease in 1998 and 1999; however, it started to increase again in 2001. The peasants likely responded to the financial burdens that they face with petitioning activities.

5.3.3 SOE Laid-off workers. The statistically and substantively strongest result comes from the number of *SOE laid-off workers*. The coefficients for this variable are all significant at the 99 percent confidence interval. The result demonstrates that an increase in the number of newly unemployed SOE workers by 10 (per 10,000) in a province is correlated with an increase in petitioners between 7.0 and 9.7. It is roughly a 4.7 percent increase over the national average. In other words, the model suggests that there are nearly 7–10 petitioners for every 10 SOE laid-off worker. In urban areas, the frustration of laid-off workers is likely to be higher than that of most other residents. Now that they no longer have their factory position and accordingly the ensuing 'iron rice bowl' benefits, they feel more insecure and resent the government.
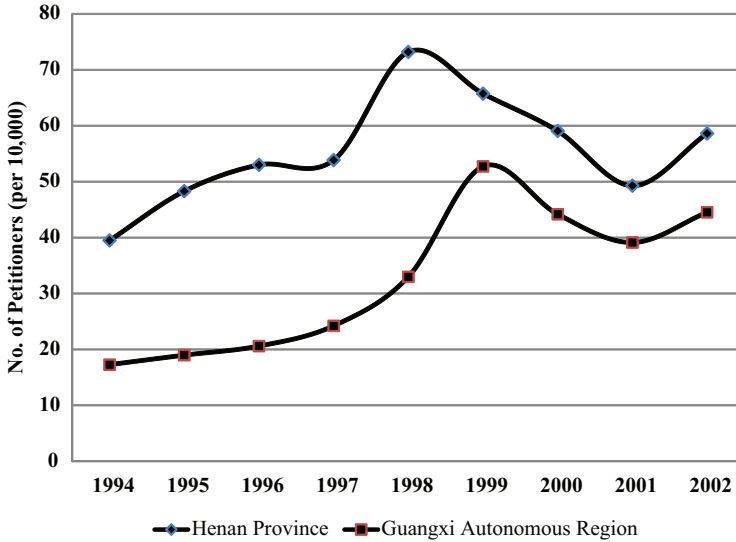
Figure 4. Peasants' Burden and Petition Trends in Henan and Guangxi Provinces (1994–2002)
(*Source:* Henan and Guangxi Provincial Yearbooks 1995–2004)

The number of SOEs fell from 100,000 to 60,000 between 1995 and 1999 nationwide, pushing tens of millions of SOE workers into unemployment. Among China's provinces, Heilongjiang had the most laid-off SOE workers, followed by Liaoning and Jilin provinces, all in China's northeast.[26] It was the most heavily dependent province on SOEs in the entire country. Its ratio of value added through SOEs to total gross industrial output is 51.06 percent (compared with the national average of 29.68 percent) (*China Statistical Yearbook*, 2002). This province's data strongly support a positive relationship between the number of laid-off SOE workers and petition activism, as Figure 5 shows the close correspondence between laid-off workers and petitioners during the period.

Interestingly, the *unemployment rate* does not show a similar effect, with its result statistically insignificant. This may be due to the fact that regular unemployment because of natural market changes is not viewed as a legitimate reason to petition, unlike the restructuring of SOEs, even though petitioning because of it would be more likely in the late 2000s (17 Provincial Yearbooks 2006–2007). The *inflation* variable does not show statistical significance, and causes little change in the other variables' coefficients. Nevertheless, it should be recalled that the unemployment that was mainly caused by SOEs in the 1990s and early 2000s, and by private enterprises in the late 2000s, is more crucial for poor workers rather than inflation rates. Thus they are more sensitive to loss of job than to inflation, as opposed to rich elites who are not as concerned about their job security as the poor (Alesina, 1989).[27]

6. Theoretical and policy implications

In this paper, I explain the marked increase as well as the provincial variations in mass political participation in market reform China. Based upon the strong substantive results of my tests and additional descriptive data analysis, I find that a general positive relationship exists between rapid economic development and petition activism – an important mode of political participation almost
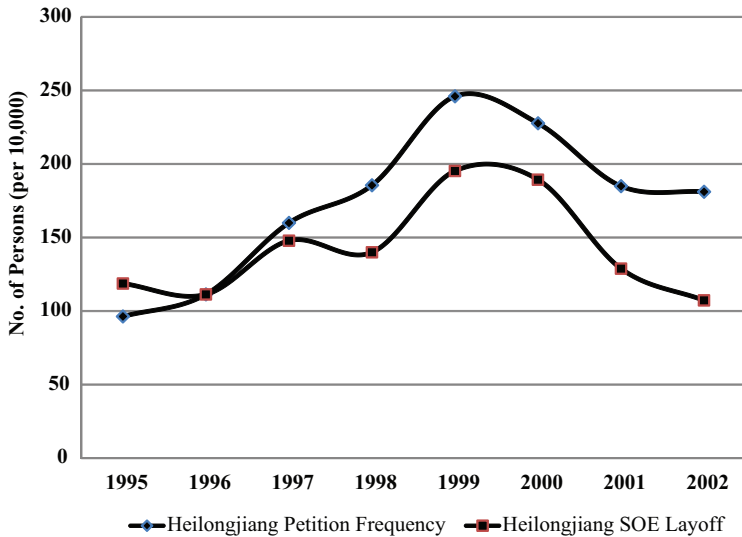
Figure 5. SOE Laid-off Workers and Petition Trends in Heilongjiang (1995–2002)
(*Source:* Provincial Yearbooks 1995–2003, China Statistical Yearbooks 1994–2003)

exclusively for the poor masses in contemporary China. Several hypotheses on two sets of possible channels – socio-economic factors and negative externalities – are tested and empirically confirmed using rigorous statistical tools.

First of all, the results on petition activism are mixed and unclear with regard to development's positive results – the effects of improvement in the education level. Improved basic education indirectly encourages more peasants and workers to participate in petitioning when they have issues to address. However, more opportunities for higher education simultaneously decrease petition frequencies because they reduce grievances regarding education, and/or affluent people in the market economy with higher education are less likely to petition. Second, alternatively, rapid development and incomplete marketization have produced more victims among the weak and poor, who are more interested in lodging petitions. Local officials and their entrepreneurial clients have been excessively exploiting weak peasants, workers, and migrant workers because there are few overarching or relevant institutions to restrain their exploitative practices. In this context, I find that negative externalities of economic development – land expropriation and house demolition in connection with real estate development, peasants' financial burdens, and SOE layoffs – largely account for the provincial variations. Furthermore, three regional analyses and much other micro-level research demonstrate that petition frequencies positively respond to some macro state policies such as the Great Western Area Development, agricultural tax and fee reform, and SOE restructuring.

These findings have significant theoretical implications. The relationship between economic development and petition activism, even under authoritarian regimes without semi-competitive elections, is positive. However, the relationship is better understood by referring to theories of contentious politics than modernization. Unlike electoral participation which is dominated by the middle-classes, petition activism is mostly done by the disadvantaged masses, not led by elite and middle-class citizens. The frequency in petitioning, consequently, highly dependent on the

government's capacity to settle the masses' various problems. Discontent and frustration caused by political and economic hardship, which forces the weak and poor to fiercely protest, substantially explains the variations in this form of participation in China. This article clearly shows some patterns of causality linking economic development (or economic inequality and exploitation) and mass participation to protests.

Such patterns of mass political participation have significant implications for China's potential regime transition. We see neither the clear logic of modernization theory in this participatory behavior nor the elite–mass interaction or opportunistic elite-led mobilization of the dissatisfied masses, which we observe in many regime transitions involving electoral authoritarianism. Non-electoral political institutions, which separate the elites and the masses, hinder the formation of elite–mass cooperation. Even if the accumulated economic problems create tens of millions more petitioners, we do not expect these grievances to result in effective pressure to change the Chinese political system. Local petition activism will not spread into national movements because they lack elite political leadership and sophisticated organization, unlike electoral authoritarianism. The government will be able to respond with repression and economic compensation rather than being forced to offer political liberalization (and eventually democratization). Growing petition activism therefore should not be interpreted as a prelude to potential democratization.

The policy implications of this paper are uncertain. The regime can strengthen the petition organizations, making them a more powerful participatory institution. Such reform will incentivize peasants and workers to resort to petition institutions that may yield higher rates of success and quicker responses to nationally recognized problems. Consistent with this policy direction, the government has already begun to reinforce the petition organization's power of redress. The National Public Security Chief Zhou Yongkang publicly called on local officials to attach high importance to resolving petition conflicts at an early stage. Occasionally, local authorities were given deadlines to settle petition appeals filed by aggrieved citizens in an attempt to shed the image of petition offices as a 'powerless mailbox'.[28] Nevertheless, such a system is much less effective than competitive electoral contestation, and is still an expedient remedy at best.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. UNDP Human Development Indices 2008 estimates 0.469. It is more likely over 0.5 as many experts argue.
2. This paper uses the terms 'petition' and '*Xinfang*' interchangeably, hereafter. This paper uses a 2,000-page-long official petition manual '*Xinshiji Xinfang Gongzuo Shiwu Quanshu* [*The Complete Manual on the Letters and Visits Affair in a New Millennium*, CMLVA hereafter]' published by the National Petition Bureau *(guojiaxinfangju)*, which is an untapped authoritative source in the literature that contains every detail on petition institutions, activism, and instructions with many real cases.
3. Even though China began to hold village committee elections, most scholars agree that despite some positive consequences, these lowest-level elections do little to affect local power relations or resource allocations at the township level – which is the lowest level of formal government in China. Neither

national nor regional elections have been discussed and even though township election has been discussed and experimented, but it has never been seriously introduced. For details, see Kennedy (2002), Li and O'Brien (1999) and Li (2002).

4. One exception is the moderate resistance of homeowners of the urban middle class (Cai, 2005), but the extent of this middle-class protest is much smaller than that of the poor masses.

5. See 'Communist Party Members Cannot Participate in Collective Visit Petition to Higher-Level' in the Central Organization Department's internal document, [Zuzhibumen Xinfang Gongzuo Wendang] (2004) 24.

6. It is extremely difficult to obtain reliable statistical data on political participation in the non-electoral CCP regime for two reasons. First, there are few election data, which are the primary data source for democratic as well as many electoral authoritarian regimes. Second, most information on political institutions is not available to the public. With the exception of an increasing number of surveys (Dickson, 2003; Shi, 1997), ethnographic studies dominate the field of Chinese political participation. Because of this, the partial statistical data from *Provincial Yearbooks* (*sheng nianjian*) serves as a useful new source of information.

7. Unfortunately, some provincial yearbooks provide incomplete data on this detailed petition type, which limits alternative tests by petition type.

8. Note that it might be questionable to to combine individual letter petitioners and individual/collective visit petitioners in the same unit of measurement. Even though the magnitude of letters and visits is different, their combined number is still more representative than other measurements.

9. The complete list of the 14 provinces is as follows; Anhui Province (1998–2002), Fujian (1995–2002), Guangxi (1994–2002), Heilongjiang (1995–2002), Henan (1994–2002), Jiangsu (1995–2002), Jiangxi (2000–2002), Jilin (1994–2002), Shandong (1994–2002), Shanxi (1997–2002), Shanghai (1995–2002), Sichuan (1994–2002), Yunnan (1999–2002), and Zhejiang (1994–2002). There are three more provinces that were observed for one or two years; Guizhou (1997), Shaanxi (1995, 1996), and Xinjiang (2002), which are included only in the OLS model 1, 2, 3, and 4 to obtain the maximum number of observations ($N = 108$). The other 13 provinces (Beijing, Chongqing, Gansu, Guangdong, Hainan, Hubei, Hunan, Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Qinghai, Tianjin, and Tibet) have unclear or no data.

10. However, this dataset under-represents the most developed provinces such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Guangdong, causing a problem as pointed out in section 5.2.

11. According to the aforementioned official manual (CMLVA), the whole set of petition data from grassroots to the national level are compiled by the National Petition Bureau.

12. There is little extant research that systematically tests this relationship, except for tests that focus more on descriptive and ethnographic tests, such as Cai (2004), Diao (1996), Minzner (2006), and O'Brien and Li (2006).

13. Chen (2002) approaches this issue of modernization theory's effectiveness to understand the CCP regime's political change from the view of an 'elite/middle class,' and finds that the theory does not work for the case of China.

14. For the effect of the public goods regime on petition activism, see Section 4.2.

15. Many economists have used these official unemployment rates for their statistical analysis with some reservations about their accuracy (Solinger, 2001).

16. The simple OLS method allows the cross-section regression to include most data points ($N = 108$); the OLS with PCSE method allows the time-series cross-section regression to control the time factor; and the OLS with PCSE and Corrected Auto-correlation (AR1) method to check the model's robustness. I also run a regression with Provincial Fixed Effects, whose results are largely consistent with the other test results.

17. This model needs more control variables, such as political repression, social mobility, information flow (media), and participatory institutional expansion. At this stage, I am cautious about using this statistical test for the purpose of prediction, one of the main goals of time-series analysis. A clearer test of the theory must await better data. Unfortunately, the data for some independent variables (SOE layoff,

agricultural financial burden) are not available after 2002, and many provincial yearbooks stopped publishing accurate petition frequencies or have changed the numeric formats after 2004, limiting the testable period up to 2002.

18. I also tested the logged petition frequencies as a dependent variable, which produces similar but less clear results than these raw petition frequencies.

19. To avoid redundancy, hereafter, the number of petitioners is per 10,000 persons, unless it is noted otherwise.

20. If we apply this proportion to the petition to Courts and other *Xinfang* organizations, the number of petitioners per 10,000 for this factor increases to 57.10, and possibly more than 80, respectively. Note that such reasoning is also applicable to the analysis of the other variables in this test.

21. The validity of this result is supported as follows. First, I used the 'control' function of multivariate regression analysis to sort out the effects of these two education variables, which is a conventional statistical method. Second, the bivariate relationship between secondary education and petition shows a negative relationship, which is consistent with my hypothesis. Third, as multiple provincial yearbooks and ethnographic research show, one of the major petition subjects is the deteriorating educational environment. Last, few middle-class and capitalists with higher education levels resort to petition activism to achieve their goals.

22. This argument is also strongly supported by the fact that the regression results without the Shanghai observations are less clear but largely consistent with those of the observations made of Shanghai, as well as a series of residual analysis (the leverage vs. the squared residuals, Cook's D, and robust regression) showing few serious concerns.

23. This fluctuation is not the result of problematic levels of collinearity in the regression. Only one control variable (inflation), which does not influence the key results, is highly correlated (0.9), while the other seven variables' correlations run between −0.34 and 0.18.

24. The data point in Figures 3, 4 and 5 is the frequency (Y-axis) of the particular year (X-axis) from 1994 to 2002.

25. Henan Province in the central region has 7865.6 rural inhabitants per 10,000 people and its primary industry provides 21.9 percent of the provincial GDP; both were among the highest in China in 2001. Also, Guangxi Province in the west has 4034.8 rural inhabitants per 10,000 people and its primary industry provides 25.2 percent of its GDP (*China Statistical Yearbook, 2002*).

26. Jilin Province and Anshan City (in Liaoning Province) show a very similar pattern to that of Heilongjiang Province.

27. I found many cases to confirm my hypotheses for complementary evidence in minimizing the ecological fallacy. In support, I checked various descriptive data from the provincial, city, and county yearbooks as well as academic and journalistic reports; for example, a variable for the SOE layoff worker (Jilin and Liaoning [via Anshan City] Provinces), a variable for real estate (Yunnan and Xinjiang [via Urumqi City] Provinces), and peasant burden variable (Guangxi Province) to name a few, which cannot be added due to the limited space of this paper.

28. The use of this phrase appeared in *Xinhua News* in July 2005 (*South China Morning Post*, 1 August 2005). In fact, the Sixth Plenum of the 16th Communist Party Central Committee in 2006 focused on this critical political reform (*Xinhua News*, 10 May 2006; *South China Morning Post*, 6 October 2006). The most recent reform of petition institutions aims at further enforcement and legalization (*Xinhua News*, 18 August 2009).

References

Alesina A (1989) Politics and business cycles in industrial democracies. *Economic Policy* 4(8): 55–98.

Bermeo N (1997) Myths of moderation: confrontation and conflict during democratic transitions. *Comparative Politics* 29(3): 305–322.

Bernstein TP and Lü X (2003) *Taxation Without Representation in Contemporary Rural China.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boix C and Stokes SC (2003) Endogenous democratization. *World Politics* 55(4): 517–549.

Brownlee J (2007) *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burkhart RE and Lewis-Beck MS (1994) The economic development thesis. *American Political Science Review* 88: 903–910.

Cai Y (2002) The resistance of laid-off workers in the reform period. *The China Quarterly* 170: 327–344.

Cai Y (2003) Collective ownership or cadres' ownership? The non-agricultural use of farmland in China. *The China Quarterly* 175: 662–680.

Cai Y (2004) Managed political participation in China. *Political Science Quarterly* 119(3): 425–451.

Cai Y (2005) China's moderate middle class: the case of homeowners' resistance. *Asian Survey* 45(5): 777–799.

Chen A (2002) Capitalist development, entrepreneurial class, and democratization in China. *Political Science Quarterly* 117(3): 401–422.

Chen J and Dickson BJ (2010) *Allies of the State: China's Private Entrepreneurs and Democratic Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chen X (2009) The power of troublemaking: protest tactics and their efficacy in China. *Comparative Politics* 41(4): 451–471.

Complete Manual on the Letters and Visits Affair in a New Millennium (CMLVA) (2000). Beijing: National Petitions Bureau.

Diao J (1996) *Renmin Xinfang Shilue* [A Brief History of People's Appeals]. Beijing: Beijing Jingji Xueyan Chubanshe.

Dickson BJ (2003) *Red Capitalist in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dittmer L (2003) Leadership change and Chinese political development. *The China Quarterly* 176: 903–925.

Geddes B (1999) What do we know about democratization after twenty years? *Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 115–144.

Geddes B (2003) *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Geddes B (2007) What Causes Democratization? In: Boix C and Stokes SC (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, 317–339. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Guo S (2003) The ownership reform in China: what direction and how far? *Journal of Contemporary China* 12: 565–566.

Gurr TR (1970) *Why Men Rebel.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ho SP and Lin GS (2003) Emerging land markets in rural and urban China: policies and practices. *The China Quarterly* 175: 682–707.

Ho SP and Lin GS (2004) Non-agricultural land use in post-reform China. *The China Quarterly* 176: 758–881.

Jackman RW (1973) On the relation of economic development to democratic performance. *American Journal of Political Science* 17(3): 611–621.

Jahiel AR (1997) The contradictory impact of reform on environmental protection in China. *The China Quarterly* 161: 81–103.

Keidel A (2006) *China's Social Unrest: The Story Behind the Stories*. Policy Brief No. 48, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Kennedy JJ (2002) The face of 'grassroots democracy' in rural China: real versus cosmetic elections. *Asian Survey* 42(3): 456–482.

Lai HH (2002) China's western development program: its rationale, implementation, and prospects. *Modern China* 28(4): 432–466.

Li JT and Wang JS (eds) (2000) *Xinshiji Xinfang Gongzuo Shiwu Quanshu* [The Complete Manual on the Letters and Visits Affair in a New Millennium]. Beijing: Zhonguo Senji Chubanshe.

Li LJ (2002) The politics of introducing direct township elections in China. *The China Quarterly* 171: 704–723.

Li L (2007) Working for the peasants? Strategic interactions and unintended consequences in the Chinese rural tax reform. *China Journal* 57: 89–106.

Li LJ and O'Brien KJ (1999) The struggle over village elections. In: Goldman M and MacFarquhar R (eds) *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*, 129–144. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lipset SM (1959) Some social requisites of democracy: economic development and political legitimacy. *American Political Science Review* 53(1): 69–105.

Lust-Okar E (2005) *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McAdam D, Tarrow S and Tilly C (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Magaloni B (2006) *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Minzner C (2006) Xinfang: an alternative to formal Chinese legal institutions. *Stanford Journal of International Law* 103: 42–103.

Moore B (1966) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

O'Brien KJ (ed.) (2008) *Popular Protest in China.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

O'Brien KJ and Li L (1995) The Politics of Lodging Complaints in Rural China. *The China Quarterly* 143: 756–783.

O'Brien KJ and Li L (2000) Accommodating 'democracy' in a one party state: introducing village elections in China. *The China Quarterly* 162: 465–489.

O'Brien KJ and Li L (2006) *Rightful Resistance in Rural China.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'Donnell G, Schmitter PC and Whitehead L (eds) (1986) *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Oi JC and Zhao S (2007) Fiscal crisis in China's townships: causes and consequences. In: Perry EJ and Goldman M (eds) *Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China* 75–96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pei M (2006) *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Pei M and Hu A (2007) Corruption threatens China's future. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief* 55: 1–5.

Piven F and Cloward R (1977) *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Pantheon.

Przeworski A and Limongi F (1997) Modernization: theories and facts. *World Politics* 49(2): 155–183.

Przeworski A, Alvarez ME, Cheibub JA and Limongi F. (2000) *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–90.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schedler A (ed.) (2006) *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition.* London: Lynne Rienner.

Scott JC (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Shi T (1997) *Political Participation in Beijing.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Solinger DJ (2001) Why we cannot count the 'unemployed'. *The China Quarterly* 167: 671–688.

Tarrow S (2008) Prologue: the new contentious politics in China: poor and blank or rich and complex? In: O'Brien KJ (ed.) *Popular Protest in China*, 1–10. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tsai KS (2007) *Capitalism without Democracy: The Private Sector in Contemporary China*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Wang S (2008) Changing models of China's policy agenda setting. *Modern China* 34: 56–87.

Wedeman A (1997) Stealing from the farmers: institutional corruption and the 1992 IOU crisis. *The China Quarterly* 152: 805–831.

Yep R (2004) 'Tax-for-fee' reform reduce rural tension in China? The process, progress, and limitations. *The China Quarterly* 177: 43–70.

Zweig D (2000) The 'externalities of development': can new political institutions manage rural conflict? In: Perry EJ and Selden M (eds) *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict, and Resistance* 120–142. London: Routledge.

Yearbooks

Zhongguo falü nianjian bianji bu [China Law Yearbook Editorial Committee] (1994–2005) *Zhongguo Falü Nianjian* [China Law Yearbooks] (Beijing: Zhongguo falü nianjian she, 1994–2005).

Guotu ziyuan bu [Ministry of National Land and Resources] (1999–2006) *Zhongguo Guotu Ziyuan Tongji Nianjian* [China National Land and Resources Statistical Yearbook] (Beijing: Dizhi chubanshe, 1999–2006).

Zhongguo Sheng Nianjian [Anhui, Fujian,Guangxi, Guizhou, Heilongjiang, Henan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Jilin, Shandong, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Shanghai, Sichuan, Xinjiang Yunnan and Zhejiang Provincial Yearbooks], 17 Provinces, 1995–2005.

Guojia tongji ju [National Statistics Bureau] (1979–2006) *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian* [China Statistical Yearbooks] (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1979–2006).

Author biography

Wooyeal Paik is an assistant professor in Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, Korea and visiting researcher in the Institute of International Studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. Dr. Paik received a B.A. in political science from Yonsei University, a M.Phil. in public and social administration from City University of Hong Kong, and a M.A. and a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California at Los Angeles. His research interests comprise comparative politics and international relations, focusing on the comparative authoritarianism, political economy and state–society relations of contemporary China and other East Asian countries, and international security in Northeast Asia. His recent publication includes 'I Want to Be Expropriated! The Politics of *Xiaochanquanfang* Land Development in Suburban China' (*Journal of Contemporary China*, March 2012), 'Authoritarianism and Humanitarian Aid: Regime Stability and External Relief in China and Myanmar' (*The Pacific Review*, 2011), and 'From Autonomous Areas to Non-autonomous Areas: The Politics of Korean Minority's Migration in Contemporary China' (*Modern China*, January 2012).