

Why do large-scale land protests in China succeed or fail?

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Abstract

Land protests account for a large portion of all protests in China, but existing scholarship on this topic does not explain under which conditions large-scale land protests succeed or fail. This thesis will attempt to answer this question by focusing on five large-scale land protests that happened in China from 2012 to 2017. I argue that large-scale land protests are more likely to succeed under three conditions: when 1) domestic media reports on this protest are supportive or on the protesters' side; 2) the protests are violent, and 3) the protests occur in the early stages of a developmental project. Those conditions do not work in isolation, but they coincide with protest success in those five cases that I investigated in this research. Using media analysis and doing a one-and-a-half-month-long period of fieldwork in China, I found that domestic media in China played two roles in determining the outcome of a protest: a "catalyst" role or a "watchdog" role. I also distinguished between short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes and found that the success of a short-term outcome will not necessarily guarantee the long-term outcome of a protest. Thirdly, I found that not only does the level of violence of the protest matter, but also which side used violence first affects the outcome of a large-scale land protest. This research contributed to the literature on contentious politics in China by highlighting under what conditions do large-scale land protests in China tend to succeed in the Xi Jinping era.

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List of Abbreviations

CCDI	Central Commission for Discipline Inspection
CCTV	China Central Television
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CRB	Cultural Relic Bureau
DLRYP	Department of Land and Resources of Yunnan Province
DW	Deutsche Welle
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LVCAMLG	Liantang village collective assets management leading group
MSSD	Most Similar System Design
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPC	National People's Congress
PRC	People's Republic of China
PX	Paraxylene
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RFI	Radio France Internationale
SCMP	South China Morning Post
SCYPPC	Standing Committee of Yunnan Provincial Party Committee
USA	United States of America
VOA	Voice of America
YNUFE	Yunnan University of Finance and Economics

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

As China's economy has expanded dramatically in the last four decades, protests have also exploded throughout the country. According to China's official statistics, there were 8,700 mass incidents (*qunti xing shijian* or 群体性事件) in 1993. This number increased to over 10,000 in the following year, and it has continued to surge ever since, reaching 87,000 cases in 2005 (Song, 2010:5-11; Tang, 2013: 2; Shambaugh, 2016:62). China's government has not made any such figures available since 2005, but some prominent scholars have provided estimates, including Sun Liping, a well-known sociologist from Tsinghua University, who estimated that there were over 180,000 protests in China in 2010 (Demick, 2011).

Among these protests, land-related protests, such as land expropriation and anti-demolition protests, accounted for a large portion (Yu, 2016). From January 1, 2004 to June 30, 2004, land-related issues accounted for 67 percent of all call-ins on rural issues on a famous China Central Television (CCTV) program (Yu, 2004; Cai, 2010:56). Perhaps the most famous land protest in China in the last two decades was the so-called "Wukan Incident,"¹ which happened in 2011 in Guangdong province. Land protests have continued since then. From June 2013 to June 2016, Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu recorded 74,452 protests by collecting data from the internet, particularly social media.² Göbel analyzed their dataset and found that land-related protests accounted for 15 percent of all the protests, a substantial percentage, though lower than previously expected (Göbel, 2017:20).

¹ I will describe this case in more detail in the next chapter.

² They were arrested by the Chinese government in 2016, and they were sentenced to a 4-year prison term in 2017 by a Chinese court. See: Austin Ramzy, "Chinese Court Sentences Activist Who Documented Protests to 4 Years in Prison", The New York Times, August 4, 2017; https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/world/asia/china-blogger-lu-yuyu-prison-sentence-protests-picking-quarrels.html?_ga=2.8686581.1560533960.1539134121-344023349.1477373723, (accessed October 18, 2018).

In 2012, China's new leader, Xi Jinping, came to power. He became general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), chairman of the Central Military Commission and president of the People's Republic of China (PRC). By then, China had entered a new "era" of "hard authoritarianism."³ China's nascent civic society was eroded by the new government. Censorship on China's social media became increasingly strict, while many public intellectuals were purged by the central government.⁴ China also enacted new laws to regulate non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially those with connections with foreign organizations. It became increasingly difficult for overseas NGOs to operate in China.⁵ In the meantime, under most circumstances, China's domestic media were not allowed to report on protests.⁶ However, some protests were still reported on by international media, and domestic media also sometimes reported on them as well, particularly when severe violence occurred, such as the Jinning Incident (2014).

Since the Wukan Protest (2011), five large-scale⁷ land-related protests have been reported by international media: the Haosi Protest (2011), Shangpu Incident (2013), Liantang Incident (2014), Jinning Incident (2014) and Tianmu Protest (2015). They have been the most influential land protests since the Wukan Incident, and although they only represent a small number of all recent land protests that have occurred in China, they reflect the overall characteristics of

³ According to David Shambaugh (2016, p99), China has entered "new era" since 2009. From 1998–2008, in his term, China was under "soft authoritarianism." From 2009 to date (2016), China stepped back to "hard authoritarianism."

⁴ Starting with Xue Manzi in 2013, Chinese authorities came after more and more public intellectuals who were active on social media and were banned from using China's social media, such as Li pengcheng, Murong Xuecun, He Weifang, Qin Hui, Yu Jianrong, Li Kaifu, and so on. China's social media is now dominated by people who support this regime.

⁵ For a more detailed description after entering the "new era," see Shambaugh (2016, P117-124).

⁶ Reporting on protests is usually forbidden for China's journalists. Because all of China's news outlets are controlled by the propaganda department, if they dare to violate these regulations, they will face punishment. See Stern & Hassid (2012). But under very rare circumstances, some kinds of protests are allowed to be reported on, especially when severe violence, including casualties, occurs. Environmental protests have sometimes been reported on, especially from 2011 to 2013.

⁷ A large-scale protest by Cai's (2010) standard means that a protest has at least 500 participants. Also see Yang (2016).

contemporary large-scale land protests in China. The outcome varies: some were successful, some were not successful, and some of the outcomes were not clear from the reports. So why did some of these protests succeed? Why did others fail? These questions are part of the puzzle this research project wants to solve.

1.2 Research question, argument and hypotheses

There have been thousands of land-related protests in rural China: Why are some successful, while others fail? What are the factors that make a large-scale protest more likely to succeed? I argue that large-scale land protests are most likely to succeed under three conditions: (1) when the land protests are reported on by domestic media and the reports are pro-villager; (2) when land protests become violent and (3) when the protest happens at the early stage of a project that was going to occupy villagers' lands. The following hypotheses are derived from the existing literature on land protests in China:

Hypothesis one: if the domestic media's reports on this protest are supportive or on the protesters' side, then the likelihood of success is higher; if the domestic media's reports are negative or on the local government's side or if there is no domestic media reporting on this case, then the likelihood of success is lower; if there is a lack of domestic media reporting, it will more likely lead to a failing result for the villagers.

Hypothesis two: the more violent a protest is, the higher its likelihood of success. In turn, the less violent a protest, the less likely it is to succeed.

Hypothesis three: if a land protest occurs in the early stages of a project that occupies villagers' lands, the likelihood of success is higher. If a land protest happens at the end stage of the project, the likelihood of success is lower.

Large-scale protests in China refer to protests that have at least 500 participants.⁸ Not all protests met this threshold, of course. Mass incidents (*Quntixing shijian*) is the official Chinese term used to refer to protests. Unlike democratic countries like the US or Canada, protests are illegal in China; if you want to protest, you have to get permission from the local government. In reality, unless there are very rare circumstances like the 2008 Olympic Games,⁹ the Chinese government never allows citizens to protest. But protests are not rare phenomenon; they happen all the time. Sometimes, protests are peaceful like in Xiamen (2007), where citizens “walked” to protest a chemical plant that was being planned in the city. Other times, however, protests can turn very violent, such as the Weng’an (2008) Incident. Even though protesting is illegal in China, citizens can petition (*Xinfang*). Petitioning is a legal channel citizen can use to complain about something, such as an injustice or grievance, as every level of government has a petition branch.¹⁰ A group of five people or fewer can petition, but petitions with more than five participants are illegal.¹¹ If a petition has more than one participant, it is considered a collective petition. Collective petitioning is also a form of protest in China.

Following Cai’s (2010) study, I define a protest as successful, “if the participants achieve their goal entirely or partly” (Cai, 2010:8). If the protesters did not get anything but repression, then it was unsuccessful or a failed protest.

⁸ Cai (2010 p44). According to the police department, a collective action involving more than 500 participants is seen as a large-scale action, and an action involving more than 1000 participants is seen as especially large-scale action. (Chen Jinsheng, *Quntixing shijian yanjiu baogao*) [Research report on instances of collective action] [Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 2004], 32)

⁹ To show its openness and make a good impression on international media, before the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games began, China’s government allowed citizens to protest in certain areas in Beijing. See: Jim Yardley, “China Sets Zones for Olympics Protests,” *The New York Times*, July 24, 2008; <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/sports/olympics/24china.html>, (accessed October 10, 2018).

¹⁰ China’s government encourages citizens to write letters to complain, and writing letters to a petition branch has the same effect as visiting a petition branch in person. Personally, I have used this channel (writing letters) to complain about the unjust treatment of my disabled relative by the local authorities, and the problem was solved.

¹¹ Article 18, State council, 2005, *Regulations Concerning Letters and Calls*.

By domestic media, I mean all media outlets that operate within China's territory, either government-sponsored media, such as CCTV, *People's Daily*, *China Youth Daily* and so on, or commercial media outlets, such as *Southern Weekly*, *Caixin Magazine*, *Caijing Magazine* and so on. "Domestic media" does not include media outlets blocked by the Great Fire Wall, even though they are written in Chinese language, such as Boxun News, *Duowei News*, Dajiyuan News, Mingjing News and so on. By "early stage," I mean that a project is in an early stage of its whole process; for example, if it is at the planning stage and only part the project has been started. By "late stage," I mean that the majority of the project has been finished or is close to being finished or if land expropriation has been ongoing for many years when the protest happened.

1.3 Why land-related protests?

Most of China's population is registered as rural households (*Hukou*),¹² although, in reality, most Chinese people live in urban areas. For these rural residents, land is the most precious resource they have. If they lose their lands, they will lose their means of survival, so for them, land is everything. But because China is experiencing a rapid urbanization process, a lot of land is being expropriated for urban development, but many of them are through "illegal" forms, and land acquisition often triggers villagers to go to the streets or get involved in violent confrontations.

By focusing on land protests, could we better understand how China is handling its fast-growing urbanization process? How does China's government treat its own rural residents

¹² By the end of 2017, 57.65 percent of Chinese people were registered as living in a rural household. See, National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017, *Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2017 National Economic and Social Development*. China's "*Hukou*" (household) system is divided into urban households and rural households; people who live in urban households can enjoy the urban welfare system, such as receiving education, pensions, healthcare and so on. In terms of the welfare system, rural households are much worse off than urban households.

during this process? What is a better choice for the future? Thus, focusing on land protests has very important implications for those living in rural areas. However, it also has academic benefits. For example, can land protest logics from democratic regimes also apply to the China context? What are the differences between China's peasants and their counterparts in other places of the world? This thesis will contribute to the literature on China's contentious politics by describing a prism of land protests.

1.4 Who owned China's lands?

According to current China's constitution, which went into effect in 1982, all lands in China's urban areas are owned by the State. In rural areas, collectives owned the lands. Peasants lease the lands from the collectives, and on average, each peasant can only be allocated 0.7 *mu* of lands for cultivation. But the household or peasants can not decide which kind of crop to grow on his or her lands; they have to use their lands to grow the main staples as the government required, which can only bring them a very modest income. As technology improved, there is some surplus of labor in the rural areas, and millions of peasants went to the cities to find low-end jobs to make up for the income that they received from growing crops (Ho, 2005; Zhan, 2019).

The collective owns the lands, and peasants cultivated those lands. But neither the collective nor the peasants can sell the lands for other uses, such as building factories or housing units. The Chinese law stipulates that only the State can expropriate peasants' lands and then sell it to private developers at a much much high price than what they compensated those farmers who lost their lands. As China's lands have become more and more valuable during the last three decades or so, the incentive for local government to sell lands is very high. As one scholar captured,

“The main motivation of local governments for land expropriation has been the revenue generated from the conversion of rural land to urban land. Due to the implementation of urban bias policies, urban land has become much more valuable than rural land. This was so particularly after the urban housing reform in 1998, which created a market for urban real estate. By expropriating rural land and selling the use rights [*sic*] of the land to real estate developers, local governments have reaped an enormous amount of revenue. In 2017, the land revenue reached a record high, 5.2 trillion *yuan*, accounting for 56.9 percent of all local revenue. Between 2004 and 2015, the land revenue had been hovering around 50 percent of all local revenue, attesting to its crucial importance in local finance.” (Zhan, 2019:76)

At the same time, peasants can only receive about five percent to ten percent of compensation from this transaction by the government, and the local government received the majority of the profit from selling their lands (Zhan, 2005). The imbalance between those grieved villagers and the local government became the main reason why, each year, there are so many lands-related protests happened in China (Zhan, 2019).

1.5 Why do some protests in China succeed while others fail?

Previous studies on protests in China have tended to analyze factors affecting the outcomes of all protests or what makes some types of protests more successful than others. Many of them have examined the role of government intervention (Cai, 2010), social media (Yang, 2016; Lei, 2014), framing (Deng, 2010), or violence (Cai, 2008; Cai, 2010; Yang, 2016; Chen, 2012). But do these logics apply to land protests?

Cai’s (2010) work focused on the role of upper level governments’ intervention, especially central or provincial governments. Cai based his theory on rational theory and assumes that China’s authorities are calculating costs and benefits when they are making decisions on how

to respond to protesters' actions. He argued that protesters' success hinges on central or provincial governments' intervention. Therefore, protesters' strategies should focus on how to prompt the central government and provincial governments to "step in." He contended that "forceful" protests are more likely to be intervened in by central or provincial governments.

Others have examined the role of social media. Yang (2016) argued that when protesters use social media as an organizational tool rather than as just a "pick-up" tool, then the possibilities for a particular protest to succeed were higher. More specifically, if protesters use social media to organize and mobilize others to join in their causes, such as what Wukan's young generation did in the Wukan Incident, then social media played a role as an organizational tool. But when protesters only use social media to disseminate the outbreak of a protest, then social media only played the role of a "pick-up" tool. He contended that when the first "function" is used, the possibilities for a protest to succeed are higher. When social media is only used as a "pick-up" tool, then the possibilities for success are lower. Lei's (2014) research also emphasised the role of social media in determining the outcome of the Wukan Incident.

In contrast, Deng's (2010) research focused on the role of framing in determining the outcome of a protest. More specifically, her research focused on an influential environmental protest, the Huazhen Incident¹³, which occurred in 2005 in Zhejiang province. She argued that how villagers framed their grievance played a key role in the outcome of this protest. Instead of only framing their arguments in environment language, the villagers also used land policy and anti-corruption language in their discourse. This strategy expanded the opportunities these villagers had. Their framing strategy contributed to the final outcome—a successful environmental protest. Similarly, Hurst (2008) and Chen (2008) also explored the role framing played in the course of workers' protests in China.

¹³ Huazhen is a pseudonym used to protect the participants of this protest.

Last, several studies explored the role of violence in the outcome of protests (e.g., Cai 2008, 2010; Yang 2016; and Chen 2009, 2012). As aforementioned, in Cai's theory, in order to prompt the central or provincial government to intervene, when protesters have exhausted other channels, they will use disruptive tactics such as violence to induce upper-level government to "step in" (Cai, 2010). But this tactic is not without limitations, as when small-scale protests adopted violence in their protests, the odds of these protests succeeding did not increase, "on the contrary, the use of violence tends to be counterproductive" (Cai, 2010:135). This is because violence is tolerated less by local governments. Yang's (2016) study also discussed the role of violence in the outcome of protests. He argued that violence is more likely to occur in "half-open" issues, such as land protests, than in open issues, such as environmental protests and "closed issues," such as separatist protests. He argued that "violence in protests is an effective strategy for expanding existing political opportunities by gaining leverage over local officials" (Yang, 2016:2190). At the same time, he also contended that "violence is a necessary but insufficient condition for large-scale nonenvironmental protests' success" (Yang, 2016:2190). Chen's (2009, 2012) work also explored the role violence in protests. He argued that the cadre evaluation system in China encouraged troublemaking and, in some circumstances, extreme tactics. He contended that "the statistical study confirms that disruption, publicity, and event size all positively affect the likelihood of a substantial government response" (Chen, 2012). Therefore, we can conclude that violence (in Chen's words: disruptive tactics or troublemaking strategies) is an effective way to achieve the goals of protests.

But what about land protests? Can these findings be applied to China's land protests? What is the role of violence in land protests? What is the role of media in land protests? These questions have not been systemically examined so far by scholars in relation to land protests in China since the Wukan Protest, and this topic deserves to be explored. Although some research studies focused on land protests in China, such as Lie (2014), there have been no comparable

case studies on land protests in China since the Wukan Protest. This is the academic void that this research attempts to fill.

1.6 Research method

This research will provide a comparison of five large-scale land protests that took place in China between 2012 and 2017. As such, it covers land protests in the “new era” since the 2011 Wukan Incident.

This research focuses on China because it is the most powerful authoritarian regime on the planet. The country’s land ownership policy is also unique¹⁴ and is expected to affect China’s land protests. As such, protests are a sensitive topic in China, especially in today’s atmosphere.¹⁵ But we need to understand this regime and unpack its political system, as many scholars have asserted that China’s political system is non-monolithic. Therefore, in terms of land protests, different levels of government may respond to protests differently. China’s case will contribute to our understanding of contentious politics, and we will have a better understanding of the nature of China’s non-monolithic political system.

While investigating five cases cannot reflect the whole “view” of China’s land protests, these five cases do represent the most influential land protests since the Wukan Incident, and they represent all instances of the large-scale protests that happened in China during this period. Comparing these cases will allow me to find the differences between these cases and to narrow down the key factors that determined the final outcome.

More specifically, I will use Most Similar System Design (MSSD)¹⁶ to achieve that goal. MSSD consists of very similar cases that only differ in the dependent variable, as it is assumed that this would make it easier to find independent variables that could explain the

¹⁴ For a more detailed introduction on China’s land ownership system, see Ho (2005).

¹⁵ See Shambaugh (2016, p115-124).

¹⁶ For good examples of applying the MSSD approach in comparative research, see Côté and Mitchell (2016) and Hurst (2009).

presence/absence of the dependent variable. In a basic sense, MSSD starts out with similar variables between subjects and tries to determine why the outcome is different between the subjects. My five cases fit the requirements of the MSSD method: they are all large-scale land protests in China, and all happened between 2012 and 2017,¹⁷ a very short time period. But the outcomes varied; for example, the Jinning Incident (2014) and Shangpu Incident (2013) were successful land protests, while the Liantang Incident (2014) was a failed land protest. So, using MSSD will help identify which factor or factors contributed to the different outcomes of land protests that happened over a short time period. Focusing on several cases of comparable size will allow me to develop a more nuanced theory about why some land protests in China succeeded while others failed.

I conducted a media analysis. Following Yang (2016) study, I used LexisNexis to search for how many large-scale protests had been reported in recent years. Using the search term “protest” and the five villages’ names in the LexisNexis database, I collected 53 international news articles on the five land protests that occurred between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2017.¹⁸ The LexisNexis database includes various types of renowned mainstream media

¹⁷ When I was doing my field work in January and February 2019, the Tianmu protest was still ongoing but on a small-scale level, as everyday, about twenty to thirty villagers, mostly elders, went to protest at an intersection. So, technically speaking, the Tianmu case is not finished yet, but because this research set a line at December 31, 2017, events that happened after that time were not the focus of this research; sometimes, however, short descriptions of events that happened after December 31, 2017 are given to make the story more complete.

¹⁸ First, I followed Yang’s (2016) method. I searched “China” and “protest” in the LexisNexis database between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2017. I collected 40 cases that belong to large-scale protests, including the five large-scale land protests in this research. Then, I searched “protest” and each village’s name in the LexisNexis database, and in total I collected 53 international media reports on these five cases. It is highly possible that these five cases were not all the large-scale lands protests that happened in China during this period and were reported on by international media. There are more cases that were reported on by international media during this period, but possibly because the title or body of that report did not include the word “protest”, or “China” or the report did not mention how many people were involved in the protest, so the case was not included in my dataset. Such cases include but are not limited to the Wanggang protest, Xishuangbanna protest, and Panhe protest. See (Hess, 2015, 200-201). Because of the limitation of my research method, it is almost impossible to include all cases that meet the threshold to be included in my dataset. But it is fair to say that those five cases were reported on by at least two English-language international media outlets, and therefore they are the most influential, by international standards, large-scale land protests that

from different countries, such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *South China Morning Post*, *The Telegraph*, *Sydney Herald*, *The National Post*, BBC, CNN and so on. I cross-checked the facts of each case to make sure they were supported by at least two reliable news sources, reducing the problem of bias produced by a single news report. A second database I used in this study is WiseNews, which includes overseas Chinese newspapers like RFA (Radio Free Asia), *The Epoch Times*, Boxun News, BBC Chinese, RFI (Radio France Internationale), VOA (Voice of America), DW (Deutsche Welle), and so on. WiseNews also includes Chinese newspapers and websites. I used WiseNews to search for Chinese language news reports from either domestic media or international news outlets. In total, I collected 126 domestic media reports on these five cases.

In addition to conducting a media analysis, I performed ethnographic fieldwork. Performing fieldwork allowed me to get more detailed information about these protests, as information on many of them could not be obtained only from media reports. Given the resources available, I did fieldwork on four cases: the Guangji Incident (2013), Liantang Incident (2014), Jinning Incident (2014), and Tianmu Protest (2015).¹⁹ These four protests had different outcomes: the Guangji Incident and Jinning Incident were successful land protests, while the Liantang Incident and Tianmu Incident were not successful. Focusing on these four cases will allow me to reveal the dynamics of these protests in more detail. I interviewed protest participants, protest organizers or leaders and general rural residents. When necessary, I also interviewed local government officials, because the perspective from the local government sometimes is also necessary for us to depict the whole picture of these protests.

happened in China between 2012 and 2017. As the Tianmu case shows, it is impossible to include all large-scale land protests in China in this research because many protests were not reported on by either domestic media (i.e. the Tianmu case), or international media (i.e. the Qingliang case). For more on the Qingliang case, see (Xin, 2017).

¹⁹ I did not do fieldwork on the Shangpu case (2013) because it resembles the Fuyou case in a number of ways: i.e. both cases were violent and succeeded in the end. This allowed me to focus on cases that varied in their independent or dependent variables.

1.7 The organization of this thesis

The first chapter introduces the research question: Why do some land protests in China succeed while others fail? I argue that large-scale land protests are more likely to succeed under three conditions: (1) when domestic media reports are supportive or on the villagers' side (2) when land protests become violent and (3) when the protests occur at the early stage of the project that is occupying villagers' lands.

Chapter Two provides a detailed literature review. It begins with a brief introduction of the Wukan Protest. Then, it moves on to discuss existing scholarship on factors that may influence the outcome of protests in China (either protests in general or a particular type of protest). Then, I will explain why I chose certain variables but not others in my research. The last part will reintroduce my own hypotheses.

Chapter Three will review my research methods and the types of data collected. The two research methods this research will use are media analysis and qualitative comparative analysis based on fieldwork. Media analysis will allow the collection of data from both domestic media and international media reports on China's land protests since 2010. Then, doing fieldwork will allow me to gather more detailed and nuanced information about these land protests that I could not get only from media reports.

Chapter Four will briefly introduce these five cases; it will describe the background of these cases, how they have evolved, the main events of each case, and the outcome of each case. Chapters five to seven will present the empirical analysis. Each individual chapter will focus on a single hypothesis. I will use data collected from my media reports and fieldwork to test these hypotheses. Chapter Five will focus on the role of domestic media, Chapter Six will focus on the role of violence, and Chapter Seven will focus on the role of the timing of the protest.

The last chapter is the conclusion. This part will briefly summarize the main findings of this research. What has this research contributed to the field of contentious politics? Can these findings be applied to other contexts, such as democratic regimes or other authoritarian regimes? What are the limitations of this research? How can they be remedied? What should future research focus on to better understand China's land protests?

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

After Deng Xiaoping's 1992 "Southern Tour," China entered a new booming cycle. As China's gross domestic product (GDP) experienced a continually rapid increase, China replaced Japan as the second largest economy in the world in 2010. But, internally, China also entered a "contentious period." As mentioned in the first chapter, China witnessed an exponential increase in the number of protests and mass incidents occurring throughout the nation since the 1990s. Different groups stood up and waged protests, including peasants, workers, urban citizens, environmental pollution victims, migrant workers, homeowners, veterans, teachers, students, ethnic minorities, financial fraud victims and so on. But why did some protests succeed while others did not? Among them, land protests stand out as a particular protest type that has drawn both international and domestic attention. As China is still experiencing rapid urbanization, it is possible that land protests will persist in China for a long period. So, studying the mechanisms that affect the outcome of land protests in China has both theoretical and practical implications.

This chapter will first introduce what is perhaps the most famous land protest that occurred in China after the Tiananmen Massacre—the Wukan Protest. There are several reasons why covering this case is important for any investigation of land protests in China. First, it is one of the biggest and most famous land protests that happened in China in the last two decades. What is more, it achieved its goals, at least initially. For this reason, several studies on land protest dynamics in China used the Wukan protests as their case study. Finally, the Wukan protest is the reason why I became interested, as a graduate student, in the study of protests in China.

After introducing the Wukan Protest, I will review the literature examining the outcomes of protests in China, covering both general protests and particular types of protests (e.g.,

environmental protests, worker protests and so on). Finally, based on existing scholarship, I will provide my own hypotheses on why some land protests in China succeeded while others failed.

2.2 Wukan Protest

The most famous land protest that happened in China in the recent decade was the “Wukan Incident,” which occurred in 2011. Wukan is located in Guangdong province, which was the forerunner of China’s reform and opening-up that started in 1978. Because of its proximity to Hong Kong, many foreign journalists were stationed there. When four thousand villagers in Wukan started to protest in front of the Lufeng City²⁰ compound on September 21, 2011 because their lands had been sold to developers without their consent and with no compensation, their protest drew international attention.²¹

This protest escalated after November 13, 2011, when a protest representative, Xue Jinbo, was killed while in custody. After this event, a series of protests were organized by Wukan villagers. On November 18, 2011, Wukan was cut off from the outside world. Villagers erected barricades on the roads to Wukan, and outsiders were not allowed to enter this village: only foreign journalists were permitted entry. The standoff between the villagers and authorities last one month. How things would play out became uncertain, and there was a lot of speculation from different media outlets.

The timing of this protest was notable: it took place just one year before the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which takes place every five years, and the party secretary of Guangdong, Wang Yang, was expected to enter the Politburo Standing

²⁰ Lufeng City is a county-level city. In China, there are municipality-level cities, sub-provincial cities, vice-provincial cities, prefecture-level cities, county-level cities and township-level cities, though the last type is only a recent phenomenon in China.

²¹ This case was mainly based on Lie’s (2014) account and Zhang and Lu (2011), Zhang (2011a), Zhang (2011b), and Zhang (2011c).

Committee of the CPC²² after this meeting. Consequently, how he handled this protest would affect his political fate. He dispatched Zhu Mingguo, the then-deputy party secretary of Guangdong province, to have a dialogue with representatives of the protesters. Zhu promised to let these villagers elect their village committee members for the first time in four decades, and he also promised to handle the land issue properly. The protest lost its momentum after this meeting.

In the first year after this protest, things went smoothly for the Wukan villagers, and they elected their village committee members. Unsurprisingly, all seven new village committee members were former protest leaders. Lin Zuluan, a critical person in this protest, was elected as both village head and party secretary of Wukan.²³

At that time, both international and domestic media praised this as a success for the Wukan villagers and as a model for other villages to follow (Lau, 2012a; Lau, 2012b; Wines, 2011; Wen, 2012; Zhu, 2012). Scholars have also treated Wukan as a successful land protest in China (Lu, Zhang & Wang, 2017; Hua, Hou, & Deng, 2016; Ren, 2017; He & Xue, 2014; Hess, 2014).

Things in Wukan, however, have turned sour since 2014.²⁴ Since 2014, several protest leaders have been arrested by local authorities. Some of them fled from Wukan fearing they will be caught by the local authorities, including one couple who fled to the United States of America (USA).²⁵ Since 2016, the situation has become worse: Lin Zuluan was arrested and then sentenced to 37 months in prison. Another nine protest leaders were also arrested and

²² Actually, Wang Yang did not enter the Politburo of Standing Committee of CPC in 2012. He became a member of Politburo of Standing Committee of CPC five years later, in 2017, on the 19th National Party Congress.

²³ For a detailed description of this protest, see Lie (2014: 17-23).

²⁴ After CPC's 18th National Party Congress, Wang Yang was promoted as vice prime minister of State Council. Hu Chunhua, a member of Tuanpai or Youth League Faction took over Wang Yang's position as party secretary of Guangdong province. Wang Yang is also a member of Tuanpai. On China's elite politics and factions among top CPC leaders see Li (2016), especially chapter 7.

²⁵ They are Zhuang Liehong and his wife.

sentenced to up to 10 years in prison (Blanchard, 2016). Since then, Wukan has been under the surveillance of local authorities.²⁶ It may have been fair to say in 2012 that Wukan represented a successful land protest, but it is hard to do the same now.

Why then, was Wukan a successful land protest, at least between 2012 and 2014? What factors contributed to this outcome? Can this case be supported by existing scholarship? Examining this particular case will help us understand existing scholarship on different variables that may increase the likelihood of a protest succeeding.

2.3 Why do some protests succeed but others fail?

In the last decade, scholars have examined different factors that may have influenced the outcome of protests that happened in China. Some of them focused on general protests, such as Cai (2010), Yang (2016), and Chen (2009, 2012). Some of them focused on a particular type of protest, such as environmental protests (Li, 2016; Deng, 2010, 2016; Deng and Yang 2013; Li et al., 2016), home-demolition protests (Huang et al., 2016) or land protests (Lie, 2014). What are their findings? Can their findings also be applied to land protests in China? In this section, I will explore the role of issue opportunity structure, state capacity, the role of social media, issue linkages, the size of protests and the role of the central and provincial governments, before indicating why these factors are not expected to play an important role in affecting recent land protest outcomes in China. Then, I will investigate in greater detail the role of domestic media, the role of violence, and the role of timing (of the protest), which will form the basis for my hypotheses.

²⁶ Online communication with Zhuang Leihong, September 2018.

2.4 Issue opportunity structure

Yunkang Yang (2016) focuses on large-scale protests. By analyzing 26 large-scale protests that happened from 2011 to 2013 that were reported on by mainstream English newspapers, he found that “issue opportunity structure” is the most important factor that shapes the outcome of large-scale protests in China. He argues that environmental protests are more likely to be tolerated by China’s governments. Therefore, they have a better chance to succeed when a group of people are protesting against environmental issues. But if protestors are taking up other issues such as political rights or workers’ rights,²⁷ the likelihood of success is much lower. This is because the opportunity structure that exists for environmental issues does not exist for these more “sensitive” issues. This is also due to the nature of an authoritarian regime; the ruling party or leaders do not want other forces to challenge their power in controlling society. Therefore, he distinguished “open opportunity structure,” such as environmental protests, “half-open opportunity structure,” such as land protests, and “closed issues,” such as secessionism and freedom of speech. However, relying on issue opportunity structure is not appropriate for answering my research question because, as Yang (2016) points out, land protests belong to a “half-open” structure, so this theory cannot explain why some land protests in China succeed while others fail.

2.5 The role of “state capacity”

Based on six case studies, which consist of three environmental protests and three social riots,²⁸ Xiaojun Yan and Kai Zhou (2017) found that “disparities in state capacity²⁹ noticeably affect

²⁷ In his article, Yang (2016) included “freedom of speech” and “Tibetan independence” as closed structure and labor rights issues as “increasingly closed structure.” See Yang (2016:2908).

²⁸ Three environmental protests were: the Dongyang protest (2005), also called the Huaxi protest, the Xiamen protest (2007), and the Shanghai Anti-MagLev Railway Project protest (2008). Three social riots were the Weng’an protest (2008), Shenzhen protest (2008), and Shishou protest (2009).

²⁹ State capacity includes fiscal capacity, coercive capacity, and institutional capacity.

the trajectories of contentious collective actions and shape government responses in China” (Yan and Zhou, 2017:67). Specifically, they found that when local governments have more state capacity in their control, for example, if there are more monetary resources controlled by local governments, such as that of Shenzhen, the government will be more likely to compromise and employ nonviolent or peaceful resolutions in response to collective actions such as protests. But in cases when local governments have no such resources, the local government will be more likely to use repression to contain protests. In other words, under the former condition, protests are more likely to succeed, while under the latter situation, protests are more likely to fail.

However, many land protests took place in the most economically developed provinces in China. Among the six large-scale land protests that happened in China during 2010 to 2017, four of them were located in Guangdong province, which is one of the most prosperous provinces in China, so the “state capacity” of these places was much higher than in places like Jinning in Yunnan province. Yet, only two of the four protests in Guangdong succeeded (the Wukan Protest before 2014 and Shangpu Protest) while the Jinning Protest, which happened in a low “state capacity” region, succeeded. So, this framework cannot be applied to land protests that happened in China.

2.6 The role of social media

Since entering the new century, the Internet has become an indispensable part of life in China.³⁰ At the same time, social media has also entered people’s lives. For example, as of March 2018, Sina Weibo, one of China’s most popular social media platforms, had 411 million monthly-active members, and it became the seventh platform in the world that passed 400 million active

³⁰ China has the largest online population in the world. As of June 30, 2019, 854 million Chinese have access to the Internet (CNNIC, 2019).

members (Sina, 2018). As was the case in other societies, such as the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, social media played an important role in affecting the outcome of protests.

Yang (2016) argues that when protesters used social media as an organizational tool rather than as just a “pick-up” tool, the possibilities for a particular protest to succeed were higher. More specifically, if protesters used social media to organize and mobilize others to join in their cause, such as what Wukan’s young generation did in the Wukan Incident, then social media played a role as an organizational tool. But when protesters only used social media to disseminate the outbreak of a protest, then social media only played the role of a “pick-up” tool. He contends that when the first “function” is used, the likelihood for a protest to succeed is higher. However, when social media is only used as “pick-up” tool, then the odds of success are lower. Lei’s (2014) research also emphasizes the role of social media in determining the outcome of the Wukan Incident. In the same vein, Li (2016:206) also emphasized the role of social media in affecting the result of environmental protests.

As Lie (2014) has shown, social media played an important role in affecting the outcome of the Wukan Incident. Without the young generation so adeptly using social media platforms, such as QQ group, Twitter, and Weibo, and using documentary to disseminate information on the internet, the Wukan protest would not have drawn so much attention, either from domestic or international media.

However, not all protests rely on social media. Among the six land protest cases that took place from 2010 to 2017,³¹ only in Wukan did the villagers use social media as an “organizational” tool, as the other five cases only used social media as a “pick-up” tool. Yet, the Jinning protest still succeeded, so it cannot be applied to this context.

³¹ The sixth case is the Haosi protest. This occurred in 2011, so it is not included in this research, as this research mainly focused on large-scale land protests that happened between 2012 and 2017.

2.7 The role of “issue linkage”

Cai (2010), Deng (2010, 2016), Deng and Yang (2013) emphasized the role of “issue linkage” in affecting the outcome of protests in China.

In his book, Cai (2010) argued that “Chinese citizens may improve their chance of success by exploiting the political space embedded in the political system with means that are acceptable to the state” (Cai, 2010:69). He found that some citizens increase their chance of success by applying multiple constraints on local officials. Issue linkage increases the risk to local officials who use or intend to use suppression against protesters.

His finding was in agreement with Deng (2010, 2016), Deng and Yang’s (2013) research. As the last chapter mentioned, Deng (2016) analyzes an environmental protest that happened at a village in Zhejiang province—the Huazhen protest. They argue that “protests based solely on environmental claims are often powerless, but the interlocking of different issues makes it possible for victims to address environmental grievances by piggybacking on other issues that present greater political opportunities” (Deng and Yang, 2013:334; Deng, 2010, 2016). As aforementioned, only using environmental language at that time (2005) would not have opened the political opportunity structure, so they piggybacked on the anti-corruption strategy together with environmental discourse to frame their grievance and therefore expand their “political opportunities structure.” They conclude that “the chances of environmental protest are contingent upon these other conditions and values” (Deng and Yang, 2013:334). My preliminary investigation showed that these six cases did not apply the “issue linkage” strategy in their protests; therefore, I will not focus on this variable.

2.8 The size of protests

Several scholars such as Cai (2010) and Li (2016), have focused on how the size of protests affects their outcome.

In his book, Cai (2010) emphasizes the scale of protests in affecting the outcome of protests in China. He argues that compared to small-scale³² protests, large-scale protests are more likely to succeed, as large-scale protests are more likely to be noticed by the central government and pose more of a challenge for societal stability, and hence the central government is more likely to intervene.

In his dissertation, Li (2016) proposes that “local government tends to adopt a tension reduction or a giving in strategy to when the scale of protests is large.³³ However, local governments tend to apply a go-alone or suppression strategy when protests are small scale” (Li, 2016: 207). After investigating ten environmental protests and using comparative case studies, he then reformulates his proposition to “The scale of protests is not crucial in explaining the patterns of government strategies” (Li, 2016:207). After using the crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA) method to investigate the same ten environmental protests, he then further redeveloped his proposition to “Large-scale or small-scale protests, combined with other conditions, can result in government compromises” (Li, 2016:207). Thus, he concludes that “this conclusion is not in line with the conclusion drawn by Cai (2010), who argues the scale of protest played a crucially important role in shaping government decisions in social conflicts” (Li, 2016:205).

The size of protests is not an appropriate factor that may affect the outcome of land protests in China because in Cai’s (2010) standard, all these cases are large-scale protests, but, as has been previously established, the outcomes varied. Moreover, Li (2016) already found that the scale of protests is not as important as Cai (2010) indicated in his research. Consequently, this variable will not be included in my hypotheses.

³² A small-scale protest means that a protest has less than five hundred participants.

³³ The threshold for large-scale protests in Li’s (2016) dissertation is a little vague, as he did not define what is a large-scale protest in Chapter 3 when he introduced his original propositions, but in Chapter 8 he defined a large-scale protest as having at least 5,000 participants. See Li (2016:179). Thus, his standard is different from Cai’s (2010) definition.

2.9 The role of the central government or provincial government

Cai (2010) focuses on the role of upper-level government intervention, especially that of central or provincial governments. Cai bases his theory on rational theory and assumed China's authorities are calculating costs and benefits when they are making decisions on how to respond to protesters' actions. He argues that protesters' success hinges on central or provincial governments' intervention. Therefore, protesters' strategies should focus on how to prompt the central government and provincial government to "step in." He contends that "forceful" protests are more likely to be intervened in by the central or provincial government.

Using the csQCA method, Yanwei Li, Joop Koppenjan and Stefan Verweij (2016) and Li (2016) focus on environmental protests, especially high-profile protests against incinerators and paraxylene (PX) plants. Through investigating ten high-profile environmental protests that occurred from 2006 to 2013, they identify one necessary condition and three sufficient paths that can explain why local governments choose to compromise or, in their words, "occurrence of decision changes." They find that the central government's attitude is critical when local governments make decisions on whether or not to compromise when facing challenges from society, especially, in this case, during environmental protests. In his dissertation, Li (2016) concludes that "the position of the higher-level government is the most important condition in explaining the application of government strategies during environment conflicts" (Li, 2016:202).

Using a similar method (fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis or fsQCA), Ronggui Huang, Wen Zheng and Yong Gui (2016) investigate 40 anti-demolition protests based on information they collected from China's newspapers from 2003 to 2012. Their findings are similar to Yanwei Li et al.'s conclusions. They argue that the "co-presence of central government intervention and supportive reports from central state-sponsored media" is a sufficient condition for protest success. They refer to these two factors as "multi-channelled

forceful intervention.” They also point out that this phenomenon depended on a favorable institutional environment and the challengers’ strategic use of different frames such as the socialist frame or collective frame. Their findings are also substantiated by the Wukan case, because when the provincial government “stepped in” on December 22, 2011, the Wukan protest finally diminished.

However, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether or not the central government or provincial government has intervened in a particular protest because the domestic media may not disclose this information in their reports. Thus, it is difficult for an outsider to determine whether or not a high level of government has intervened in a protest. Secondly, from the information I have gathered, neither the central government,³⁴ nor the provincial government intervened in the Shangpu case; nevertheless, it succeeded in the end. Therefore, the role of the central government and provincial government can not be used to explain the outcomes of these five cases.

2.10 The role of traditional media

Unlike in democratic countries where media is the “fourth pillar” of society and freedom of the press exists, media in China is under strict control by party departments, such as the propaganda department or publicity department. But during the last two decades, China’s media experienced a process of marketization. As Mertha (2008) puts it:

This in turn, has been reinforced by a Chinese media increasingly required to generate its own budgetary revenue. As a result, it must rely on advertisers who will not pay for ad space if people do not consume said media. To ensure that people do so, there has been a

³⁴ After the second clash happened on March 10, 2013, the Publicity Department issued a report ban for domestic media on this event, so it is still hard to decide whether or not the central government and provincial government directly intervened in this protest.

dramatic increase in the proportion of tabloid journalism stories that, in addition to racy sex stories, covering government injustice, civil protest, and the like. (Mertha, 2008:10)

During this period, some media have been more likely to report on controversial issues, such as protests. There are a lot of consumer-driven media in China now such as *Southern Weekend* (Nanfang Zhoumo), *Finance* (Caijing), *Caixin Weekly* (Caixin Zhoukan), *Phoenix Weekly* (Fenghuang Zhoukan), *The Beijing News* (Xinjingbao), *Nanfang Metropolis Daily* (Nanfang Dushibao), *21st Century Business Herald* (Eshiyi Shiji Jingji Baodao), *The Economic Observer* (Jingji Guanchabao) and so on. Among directly state owned or controlled media, *China Youth Daily*³⁵ (Zhongguo Qingnianbao) stood out for its brave and often critical attitude toward governments.³⁶ In general, there are two distinct types of domestic media in China. One is under the direct control by the government or CCP propaganda department or government-supported media, i.e., the *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *Farmers' Daily*, *Workers' Daily*, etc., and the other is consumer-oriented media outlets, i.e., *Caixin Magazine*, *Southern Weekly*, the *Beijing News*, *Phoenix Weekly*³⁷, *Nanfang Metropolis Daily*, etc. But even the consumer-oriented domestic media also need to abide by the CCP propaganda department's orders. Still, compared to the former ones, consumer-oriented domestic media outlets are more likely to report controversial issues/topics, especially in the early years of the Xi Jinping era. But sometimes, there is no clear-cut line between government-sponsored domestic media outlets and consumer-oriented domestic media outlets. For instance, the *Global Times* is a domestic media outlet that is

³⁵ *China Youth Daily* is directly controlled by the China Youth League Central Committee, one of the national-level newspapers controlled by the communist party.

³⁶ For a more detailed description on China's media transformation in the last two decades, see Lynch (1999), Shirk (2011) and Donald et al. (2013).

³⁷ Because the *Phoenix Weekly* likes to report controversial and important issues, so even though it is granted to publish within mainland China, many/some provincial governments prohibit it be circulated within its jurisdiction. For example, when I was studying at Nankai University in Tianjin Municipality between 2011 to 2013, I noticed that it is illegal to sell that magazine in the bookstores, and this was the Tianjin Municipality's dictate.

controlled by the *People's Daily*, but at the same time, it is also a consumer-oriented domestic media outlet, famous for igniting nationalistic sentiment in mainland China.

There are three strands of thought on how media influence the attitude of the central government on protests that happen in China. The first is represented by Mertha (2008). As he puts it,

China's leadership's primary constituency is its domestic one. That is to say, the leadership in Zhongnanhai pays attention to reports of 'public opinion,' as measured indirectly by what the media produces—a premise that assumes the media to be increasingly consumer-driven, which is the case. Thus, an important proxy measure of public opinion in China is the amount of media coverage on a given issue. (Mertha, 2008:108)

Thus, in Mertha's opinion, Chinese media reports on protests serve as a proxy of "public opinion", and the central government will treat those reports seriously if there are enough reports on a particular issue or protest. Therefore, if media reports side with one side, for example the protesters' side, then the central government will choose to intervene in this protest.

The second strand of thought is represented by Li (2016). As mentioned earlier, he treats the national mass media (such as *People's Daily*, *Xinhua News Agency*, or CCTV³⁸) as an extension of the central government. Consequently, the attitude they display reflects the attitude of the central government. In this case, if the national mass media's attitude on a particular protest is negative, then the local government will compromise with protesters. If the attitude of the national mass media is supportive, then the local government will not compromise with protesters and will continue their projects.

The third strand of thought is represented by Cai (2010). Cai divided China's governments into the central government and local governments. Compared to local governments, the central

³⁸ These three national mass media outlets are on a bureaucratic level, as both *People's Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency* are minister-level entities, while CCTV is a vice-minister-level entity.

government pays more attention to legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. So, if negative reports about a protest appear on China's media, the central government will face the risk of losing its legitimacy in the eyes of Chinese citizens if they do not intervene in this protest. Therefore, media reports, especially negative reports, will induce the central government to choose to intervene in a protest.

Some scholars have looked into the role of media in affecting the outcome of protests in China, such as Cai (2010), O'Brien and Li (2006), Bernstein and Lü (2003), Mertha (2008), and Li (2016).

Media played an important role in environmental protests. In his book on China's anti-dam protests, Mertha (2008) finds that media and journalists are important forces that advocate for environmental protection, in this case, through anti-dam protests, such as the dams supposed to be built on the Nu River (also, Sun and Zhao, 2008) and Dujiangyan Project. In the Dujiangyan case, the media is an important ally of the Dujiangyan Cultural Relic Bureau (CRB), the Dujiangyan World Heritage Office, the Dujiangyan Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Dujiangyan Seismological Bureau, and the generalists in the Dujiangyan municipal government against the Sichuan provincial government. "Around 180 media outlets, newspapers, magazine, and TV and radio stations reported on the controversy, and almost all of them sided with the opposition" (Mertha, 2008:106). Strictly speaking, this is not an environmental protest waged by ordinary citizens, but rather an "environmental policy" struggle between different government agents or different levels of government. However, citizens around this dam who need to resettle (*yimin*) are also important stakeholders in this case, and they usually did not get enough compensation for losing their lands and homes. Thus, successfully altering the "trajectory" of the Dujiangyan (*Yangliuhu*) project will also benefit those who may need to resettle due to this project. In the Nu River case, because of continual

and critical domestic media reports, this dam was suspended by the Wen Jiabao administration in 2004 (Mertha, 2008).³⁹

In his dissertation, Li (2016) proposes that “When the national media criticizes existing government strategies, local governments tend to apply a tension reduction, a giving in, a collaboration, or a facilitation strategy. However, when they support government strategies, local governments tend to adopt a go-alone or a suppression strategy” (Li, 2016: 208). After investigating ten environmental protests and using comparative case studies, he then redevelops his proposition to “the absence of support from national mass media is important in explaining project cancellation and project relocation” (Li, 2016:208). After using the csQCA method to investigate the same ten environmental protests, he further reformulates his proposition to “The absence of support from the central government (including the national mass media) contributes to government compromises. Its presences (including from the national mass media) contributes to the absence of government compromises” (Li, 2016:208) as he treats the national mass media (such as *People’s Daily*, *Xinhua News*, or CCTV) as an extension of the central government. So, their attitude can also reflect the attitude of the central government. He concludes that “the position of the national mass media is important in explaining the application of government strategies” (Li, 2016:204).

Media also played an important role in affecting peasants’ protests. Media is an important ally for peasants when they are seeking support from the system, and media programs such as the CCTV’s famous “Focus Report” have often aired peasants’ grievances, especially during the Zhu Rongji era. Their supportive report helped peasants achieve their protest goals (O’Brien and Li, 2006; Bernstein and Lü, 2003; Yu, 2007; Cai, 2010).

It is true that international media can sometimes have an impact on the outcome of a protest as illustrated in the Wukan case (Hess, 2015). In his article, Hess built a four-level model

³⁹ These dams were revived by Yunnan provincial governments eight years later. See, Li (2013).

to show how protesters tried to use international media outlets as an ally to induce the provincial or central government to intervene on their behalf and get a favorable result. But the situation of those five cases is different from the famous Wukan case, though all six cases have been reported on by English-language international media outlets. The key difference lies in the intensity of the international media attention: the five cases covered by this research did not receive the same level of international media attention as the Wukan case. For example, we can find 1,341 media reports on the Wukan protest in LexisNexis between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2012. But we can find only 19 international media reports on the Shangpu protest/incident between January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2014, which is the most international media exposure among the five cases investigated in this paper. Therefore, compared to the Wukan case, where the international media clearly played a role in influencing the outcome of that protest, the five cases this research focused on were more likely to be affected by traditional media or domestic media.

Indeed, China's domestic media does not enjoy "the freedom to report," which Western media do. But to some extent, that they still have some space/freedom to report some controversial topics, such as some consumer-oriented domestic media outlets did in the early 2010s in China, at the beginning of Xi Jinping's reign, when the central government's control over domestic media was not as tight as now. At that time, media framing is presumed to be at least somewhat (though perhaps not completely) independent from the government's preferences. So, it is fair to say that during this period (2012-2017), domestic media coverage on some topics was independent of the government's preferences. I will further talk about this point in the Fuyou case later in Chapter five.

Based on this literature, I propose my first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: If the domestic media reports on this protest are supportive or on the protesters' side, then the likelihood of success is higher; if the domestic media reports are negative or on

the governments' side or if there is no domestic media reports on this case, then the likelihood of success is lower.

2.11 The role of violence

Several studies have explored the role of violence in the outcome of protests (e.g., Cai 2008, 2010; Yang 2016; and Chen 2009, 2012). As mentioned in Cai's theory, to prompt the central or provincial government to intervene, when protesters exhausted other channels, they would use disruptive tactics such as violence to induce the upper-level government to "step in" (Cai, 2010). Consequently, the role of violence in large-scale protests in assuring their success is evident. But this tactic is not without limitations: when a small-scale protest adopted violence, the odds of this protest succeeding did not increase, "on the contrary, the use of violence tends to be counterproductive" (Cai, 2010:135). This is because violence is not tolerated by the local governments.

A study by Yang (2016) also discusses the role of violence in the outcome of protests. He argued that violence is more likely to occur in "half-open" issues, such as land protests than in open issues, such as environmental protests and "closed issues," such as separatist protests. He argues that "violence in protests is an effective strategy for expanding existing political opportunities by gaining leverage over local officials" (Yang, 2016:2190). But, at the same time, he also contends that "violence is a necessary but insufficient condition for large-scale nonenvironmental protests' success" (Yang, 2016:2190).

Work conducted by Chen (2009, 2012) also explores the role of violence in protests. He argued that the cadre evaluation system in China encouraged troublemakers and, in some circumstances, extreme tactics. He claims that "the statistical study confirms that disruption, publicity, and event size all positively affect the likelihood of substantial government response"

(Chen, 2012:185). Therefore, we can conclude that violence (or in Chen's words: disruptive tactics or troublemaking strategies) is an effective way to achieve protests goals.

In his doctoral dissertation, Li (2016) proposed that "local governments tend to apply a go-alone or suppression strategy to deal with peaceful protests, whereas they tend to apply a tension reduction or giving in strategy to cope with violent protests" (Li, 2016: 207). After investigating ten environmental protests, he then redevelops his proposition to "the occurrence of violent protest is important in explaining project cancellation. Its absence is important in explaining project continuation and project relocation" (Li, 2016:207). After using the csQCA method to investigate the same ten environmental protests, he then further reformulates his proposition to "the occurrence or the absence of violent protests, combined with other conditions, can lead to the occurrence of government compromises. The absence of violent protests contributes to the absence of government compromises" (Li, 2016:207). Thus, we can conclude that violence is an important factor that influences the decisions of government to make compromises when they are challenged by protesters. In his language, "the form of protest is the second most important condition in explaining the application of government strategies during environment conflicts" (Li, 2016:203). In the Wukan case, we can see the influence of violence because the protests in Wukan were very violent in September to December 2011 (Lie, 2014:17), after which the provincial government intervened. Based on this theoretical literature, I propose my second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The more violent a land protest, the higher the likelihood of success. In turn, the less violent a land protest, the less likely it is to succeed.

2.12 The role of timing of the protest

In his dissertation on China's environmental protests, Li (2016) found that if a protest happened at the early stage of a development project, the local government was more likely to

adopt a “give in” or “tension reduction” strategy because investments in the project were still low, which means that the protesters were more likely to win that protest. But, if a protest happened at the late stage of the developmental project, the local government was more likely to adopt a “suppression strategy” because the cost for the local government to give in was high at that point, which means the protesters were going to have a failing outcome. This analysis is based on a cost-benefit analysis from the viewpoint of the local government when an environmental protest occurred in China. Based on these insights, I propose my third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: If a land protest happens at the early stage of a project, it is more likely to end with a successful result; if a land protest happens at the late stage of a project, it is more likely to end with a failed outcome.

2.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on factors that have been identified by different scholars, such as the issue opportunity structure, state capacity, social media, issue linkage, and the size of protests and involvement of central and provincial governments, before rejecting them. Even though those factors may not be the *necessary* conditions for those five cases to succeed, because I am not 100 percent certain that those cases represent all the large-scale land protests that happened in China during this period, so if more cases were added to the analysis, then some of those factors may become *sufficient* conditions for large-scale land protests in China to succeed. For the purpose of my research project, I focused on domestic media, the role of violence, and the role of the timing in affecting recent land protest outcomes. This chapter also introduced the famous Wukan Protest and explained why this protest was successful before 2014.

The next chapter will focus on the research method that will be applied to my research, mostly, the media analysis and qualitative case study.

Chapter Three: Research Method

In this chapter, I will describe the qualitative research methods applied in this research. More specifically, this research uses media analysis and comparative case studies drawn from two months of field work in China from January 2019 to March 2019. I will demonstrate why these two methods combined will be appropriate to answer my research question. What are the advantages and challenges of these two research methods?

3.1 Sub-national comparison

It is true that China is a unitary government system, but many political scientists have pointed out that China's political system is "fragmented"⁴⁰ –i.e. that policies promulgated by the central government were applied by different local governments unevenly.⁴¹ Thus, to understand China as a whole, it is better to understand it from the perspective of sub-national-level governments. As Hurst (2009) puts it incisively,

Rather, Chinese politics bears a greater resemblance to a primitive particle accelerator, in which subnational units behave like particles moving in the national context of the accelerator. The shape of the accelerator and the general direction of the particles are controlled by the central state, but the behavior of each subnational unit is at least somewhat independent of the others. (Hurst, 2009:5)

Therefore, to understand how Chinese governments reacted to land protests, it is necessary to compare local governments from different provinces. As I mentioned in the first chapter, the five cases are located in three different provinces: Shangpu and Liantang are all

⁴⁰ "Fragmented authoritarianism" was first introduced by Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg in their book, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes*, 1988. This framework has been applied by many scholars including Bernstein & Lü, O'Brien & Li (2006), Cai (2010), Chen (2012), Hurst (2009), Fu (2018) and Mertha (2008).

⁴¹ China's fragmented political system or "federalism, Chinese style" as Gabriella Montinola et al. call it, had been used to explain China's economic success since 1978, see Gabriella Montinola et al. (1996).

situated in Guangdong province, Fuyou and Guangji are located in Yunnan province, and Tianmu is located in Tianjin municipality.⁴² Among these five cases, some accomplished their stated goals, while others did not. **Table 3.1** shows some basic information on these five cases that I collected from performing the media analysis.

Table 3.1 Summary table of protest cases

Incident name ⁴³	Province	Outcome	Period	Size
Guangji	Yunnan	Success	12/26/2012–10/22/2013	1,000
Fuyou	Yunnan	Success	3/28/2012–10/14/2014	2,000
Shangpu	Guangdong	Success	2/22/2013–3/10/2013	3,500
Liantang	Guangdong	Fail	10/25/2012–9/26/2014	3,000
Tianmu	Tianjin	Fail	1/12/2015–1/30/2016	2,000

Investigating these five cases will allow me to use the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) to answer my research question because MSSD consists of very similar cases that only differ on the dependent variable based on the assumption that this would make it easier to find those independent variables that explain the presence/absence of the dependent variable. The reasons why these five cases are similar are fourfold. First, all five cases are large-scale protests (i.e. involved at least 500 people).⁴⁴ Second, all these protests were triggered by land acquisition. Third, all these protests during at the same period, from 2012 to 2017, meaning that their background environment such as land-related laws or regulations are the same. Fourth, the related laws regarding the ownership or exploitation of land are the same.

⁴² China has four province-level municipalities: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing. In total, China has twenty-three provinces (including Taiwan), five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two special administrative regions. See China's central government website: http://www.gov.cn/test/2005-06/15/content_18253.htm (accessed December 22, 2018).

⁴³ Liantang, Tianmu, Shangpu, Guangji and Fuyou are the names of the villages where the land protests happened. Jinning case and Fuyou case are used interchangeably.

⁴⁴ The number of protesters for Liantang, Jinning, Tianmu, Shangpu and Guangji are 3,000, 2,000, 2,000, 3,500 and 1,000 respectively.

MSSD starts with similar variables between subjects and is used to determine why the outcome is different between the cases. This method has both advantages and disadvantages. The method of difference (MSSD) can be used to distinguish *sufficient* conditions (See Dion 1998; Mahoney 1999). Moreover, the method of difference can help structure comparisons and can be used to confirm arguments (See Collier and Collier 1991; Skocpol 1979). The disadvantages of this method include its challenges in coping with the probabilistic perspective, data errors, multivariate analysis, and interaction effects (Lieberson 1991, 1994). This method also suffers from one serious practical shortcoming—there are a limited number of countries, and therefore it will never be possible to keep constant all potential explanatory factors (e.g. Meckstroth, 1975:134; Peters, 1998:38-39). But, overall, its advantages outweigh its disadvantages. As Hurst (2009) puts it,

Causal stories that produce divergent outcomes across regions can be more easily pinned down. Subnational comparison of this sort can be useful for creating bounded theories, specifying the antecedent conditions (background variables) required for these theories to operate, and providing some test of the necessity of these background conditions and thus estimating the scope of generalizability of the theories inferred. (Hurst, 2009:7)

Also, as Lijphart (1971) put it over forty years ago, “If such comparable cases can be found, they offer particularly good opportunities for the application of the comparative method because they allow the establishment of relationships among a few variables while many other variables are controlled” (Lijphart, 1971:687). Thus, the MSSD approach is an appropriate research method for this project.

3.2 Media analysis

The first method applied in this project is media analysis. Following Yang’s (2016) study, I used LexisNexis to search for large-scale protests that had been reported on in recent years.

Using the search terms “protest” and “China” in the LexisNexis database, I collected 40⁴⁵ relevant protest events from international media⁴⁶ reports between 2012 and 2017,⁴⁷ including five land protests: Shangpu (2013) and Liantang (2014) in Guangdong province, Guangji (2013) and Fuyou (2014) in Yunnan province, and Tianmu (2015) in Tianjin municipality.

The LexisNexis database includes various types of renowned mainstream media from different countries, such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *South China Morning Post*, *The Telegraph*, *Sydney Herald*, *The National Post*, BBC, CNN and so on. I cross-checked the facts of each case to make sure they were supported by at least two reliable news sources, reducing the problem of bias produced by a single news report.

A second database I used in this study is WiseNews, which includes overseas Chinese newspapers or media like RFA (Radio Free Asia), *The Epoch Times*, *Boxun News*, BBC

⁴⁵ We should be aware that one media report does not equal one case/incident, as there are sometimes several media reports on one case. Thus, this number did not contradict the number shown in Table 3.2.

⁴⁶ I used international media reports to narrow down my research focus, and those land protests that had been reported on by international media outlets can also reflect that those protests constitute the most influential land protests happening in China in recent years. Another reason for using international media instead of domestic media is because there is no comprehensive dataset that includes all of China’s domestic media outlets like that of LexisNexis, though Wisenews is close to LexisNexis. Constructing my own dataset would require a lot of resources, and as a master’s student I could not afford this.

⁴⁷ I encountered some challenges when deciding whether or not to include a particular case into my project. For example, in some media reports, journalists used vague words such as “hundreds of people participated in this protest”, which, in this case, will not be included in my dataset. To meet the standard of “large-scale,” it has to meet the five hundred participant threshold; however, words such as “hundreds” are too vague to determine the specific number of participants in this protest. Therefore, cases like these were excluded from my dataset.

Chinese, RFI (Radio France Internationale), VOA (Voice of America), DW (Deutsche Welle),⁴⁸ and so on. WiseNews also includes Chinese newspapers and websites.⁴⁹

In total, I collected 244 original media reports on these five cases, as shown in **Table 3.2** below.

⁴⁸ A problem with domestic media like the *People's Daily* or *Xinhua News Agency* and others—all of which are controlled by the communist party—is that they often either do not report protests that happened in China or under-report the number of those who participated in these protests or how many people were injured in them. In contrast, overseas Chinese-language media like *The Epoch Times*, *Boxun News* and others often exaggerate the number of participants and people injured in these protests. This is because they usually base their reports on villagers' accounts through phone interviews or from social media platforms and lack the capacity to verify villagers' accounts. So, comparatively speaking, English mainstream media like *The New York Times*, BBC and others have the most reliable information about these protests because they spent a lot of resources on verifying journalists' reports. But a limitation is that most international media do not have the financial resources to have regular journalists stationed in China. This is also the reason why most English-international media reports on China's protests were reported by *The New York Times* and *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*. The former is the most famous English language media in the world, and it has the financial resources to have journalists stationed in China, mostly in Beijing. The latter one is the most reliable English language media outlet based in China, as it is based in Hong Kong, and it is not directly controlled by the communist party like the *Global Times* and the *China Daily*. The current owner of SCMP is Ma Yun, the founder of Alibaba and one of the richest people in China. However, it was recently revealed that Ma Yun is a communist party member.

⁴⁹ WiseNews (*Huikē*) is a Chinese-language news dataset like its English counterpart, LexisNexis; it provides full-text articles from over 1,200 plus key newspapers and magazines, 10,000 plus websites, and 1,500 plus social media platforms from China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and the United States. It is one of the most comprehensive Chinese-language news datasets in China. It is updated daily.

Table 3.2 Summary table of media analysis of five land protests

Incident name	Domestic media reports	English-language international media reports	Chinese-language international media reports	Total media reports
Shangpu	7	19 ⁵⁰	23	49
Liantang	13 ⁵¹	7 ⁵²	16	36
Guangji	6	5	4	15
Fuyou	100 ⁵³	14	8	122
Tianmu	0	8	14	22
Total	126	53	65	244

From these media reports, I collected the following information: e.g., when these protests happened, how many people participated in these protests, whether they were violent or not, how many people were injured, how local governments reacted to these protests, the outcomes of these protests and so on.

3.3 Fieldwork interview

The second method of data collection applied in this research is fieldwork interviews. In the last two decades, as China has become more open to Western scholars, doing field work in China has become more and more accessible, and scholars have in turn used this method to collect original data to perform their research, such as Bernstein and Lü (2003), O'Brien and Li (2006), Lee (2007), Lu (2008), Mertha (2008), Hurst (2009), Cai (2010), Deng (2010, 2016), Chen (2012), Côté (2014), Li (2016), and Fu (2018).

⁵⁰ Two English-language international media reports are from *China Daily*. *China Daily* is an English-language daily newspaper owned by the Publicity Department of the CPC and published in the PRC.

⁵¹ There are at least 92 domestic media outlets or websites that reproduced these thirteen original media reports. Many of these media reports or websites have been censored by the state and cannot be opened now, even though they just reproduced the official account of this protest/case.

⁵² One English-language international media report is from the *Global Times*, the English version of *Huanqiu Shibao*, one of China's nationalist media outlets administered by *People's Daily*, but it is "consumer oriented."

⁵³ There are hundreds of domestic media outlets or websites that reproduced these fifty-seven original media reports or commentaries about this protest. It was the deadliest land protest that happened in China since the Dingzhou Protest, which happened in 2005.

I conducted field work for approximately one week in four of these five sites of study (i.e., Liantang, Fuyou/Jinning, Guangji and Tianmu) to allow for a series of in-depth, personal, open-ended interviews. The four cases were decided based on the MSSD, as they show substantial similarities, yet they reached different outcomes.

I spoke to two types of members from the local community: 1) public personalities (e.g. local scholars, group leaders, and representatives of NGOs, etc.), and 2) members of the broader population (e.g. teachers, farmers and salespersons), especially protest leaders. The rationale for interviewing participants from these two categories can easily be explained. Interviewing public personalities helped clarify the nature of some events/conflicts. It also provided me with some material for understanding the socio-economic context of land protests while furthering my understanding of the state's perception of land protests. On the flip side, though, this group is, as a whole, expected to tow the party or the state's line the most (though there would clearly be exceptions to this general remark, e.g. religious leaders and NGOs). Interviewing members of the broader population, in contrast, teased out more unexpected findings, such as individual motivations for participating in the protests as well as individual recollections of events. Speaking with protest leaders gave me more detail on what the protest involved and how it progressed, and I learned much inside information about these protests that I could not get from either media analysis or online information.

Whenever possible, I randomly recruited participants in order to account for possible bias in gender, age and place of residency. I first started by initiating contact with potential participants via social media and blogs prior to my arrival in China, a common research strategy. Indeed, all of my case studies have been covered and discussed in social media in China, and other scholars, e.g. Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu, have also collected protests data from social media platforms (such as Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo). I contacted some journalists who had reported on those cases (either domestically or internationally) and

therefore had some connections with that place and some protest leaders. Some of them replied to my message/emails and introduced me with some protest leaders' contact information. I reached out to them before I went to China: some of them replied to me and agreed to accept my interview, others were still in prison, I also received help from my own network, including from a former supervisor at a Chinese university, who introduced me to one of his students, who happens to have connections with one of my fieldwork sites. Then, we set up a meeting in a restaurant, and they accepted my interview after we had dinner together, providing me with some valuable information from the perspective of local government, which help me to build a more comprehensive picture of that case.

In one case, I recruited participants as they were participating in a protest. I went to the place where they were gathering together and protesting peacefully on the main street. I introduced myself to those protesters and asked them some questions about this case; some of them answered my questions by telling their personal stories and how they were treated throughout those events. I also interviewed a librarian, who told me more macro background information about that protest/case, who also gave me a recent published local chronicle (*difangzhi*) of that place, which included beneficial information about that place and helped me to learn about that place.

Being introduced by someone they knew helped me gain the participants' trust, which is a significant advantage of this method, especially people who may be suspicious of talking to people they have never met. At the second and third sites of my fieldwork, I was lucky to build a connection with one of the main protest leaders in that village. They helped me to set up a group interview with some of the key protest leaders in that village, including one current village committee director, a former village committee director, a township representative, other village cadres, and the general public. I had two long conversations with them, which gave me in-depth information about this protest and that village. They also

introduced me to other protest leaders in my site three of my fieldwork. But protest leaders were not the only group of people that I spoke with, whenever possible I tried to talk with the general public in that village to listen to their views on that protest/case, and their stories added more detailed and personalized perspectives to those cases and helped to depict a complete picture of those cases.

In my fourth fieldwork site, I was not able to build a connection before I arrive there, so it took me a while to know someone in that village who can tell me some inside information of that village, and the protest happened there. I talked to both protest leaders and the general public and elders in that village.

During my interviews, all participants were asked to reflect upon the events leading to and resulting in the land protests. Since these events took place fairly recently, most members of that community were aware of the main dynamics of the protests (e.g. what initiated it, whether violence was involved, whether the government played a role, etc.), regardless of whether or not they themselves participated in the protests.

Each interview lasted from ten minutes to about three hours (group interview). The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the main language in China, which is also my mother tongue.

The following table provides a detailed breakdown of my interview sample and size.

Table 3.3 Interview sample and size

	Public personalities	Broader population	Total
Liantang	0	3	3
Fuyou/Jinning	0	5	5
Guangji	3	3	6
Tianmu	3	13	16
Total	6	24	30

Doing field work had a lot of benefits for my research. For example, I was able to obtain information about what kind of strategies protest leaders adopted in this protest, whether or not they achieved their goals, how they mobilized others to participate, and so on.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the research method that will be applied in this project, namely, media analysis and qualitative methods such as ethnographic interviews. To select my sub-national case studies, I will employ the MSSD approach. Combined, these methods will allow me to get more nuanced information about the most five influential large-scale land protests in rural China in the last six years and disclose the factors that contributed to the success of land protests in China. I will now move on to the second part of this thesis project and present the empirical analysis.

Chapter Four: Empirical Case Studies

In this chapter, I will briefly introduce each of these five cases studies in order. In each case, I will describe where, when, and how each case happened, what are the main events, how it ended, and what are the main actors/players in those cases. I will also talk about how those cases are similar or dissimilar to each other. The primary purpose of this chapter is to introduce each case rather than analyzing them. So, it is descriptive in nature. I will focus on the analysis of those cases in the following three chapters.

4.1 Liantang Case, Guangdong Province

Liantang village⁵⁴ is located in Tuolian sub-district (*jiedao*), Jinping district, Shantou city, Guangdong province.

The Liantang village protest began on October 25, 2012. Villagers protested at the Tuolian sub-district office, Jinping district government, and Shantou municipal government, but the government did not take any steps to solve their problems, leading the tensions between the Liantang villagers⁵⁵ and government to escalate.

On July 7, 2014, this tension erupted into violence. The police first arrested some protest leaders and accused them of gambling on that day. Then, thousands of villagers gathered at a local stage,⁵⁶ and the protest leaders urged their fellow villagers to take action to save the

⁵⁴ Liantang village is divided into five village or neighborhood committees (*Juweihui*). In 1997, they were Lianrong, Lianhua, Lianfeng, Lianguang, and Lianmei. But because media outlets still use Liantang as the village name, in this paper, I will also use Liantang as the village name, though it no longer exists politically.

⁵⁵ When I say “Liantang villagers”, I mean those villagers/residents who lived in Lianrong, Lianhua, Lianfeng, Lianguang, and Lianmei neighborhood committees because, politically speaking, Liantang village did not exist after 1997, and its villagers were divided into five neighborhood committees. Still, there is no clear boundary between these five neighborhood committees. I use Liantang village and Liantang villager as a convenience and as a convention. At the entrance of Liantang village, there is a stone erected by the local government and Liantang village (*Liantang cun*) is “written” on this stone, so local people still use Liantang village to describe this place. So, although, politically speaking, Liantang village no longer exists, people still use Liantang village as a geographic name and a cultural identity.

⁵⁶ The stage is an outdoor theatre center where villagers can perform operas, such as the Yue Opera, during festivals.

arrested protest leaders. Outraged villagers went to the Liantang police station and took three police officers as hostages; then, those villagers blocked the nearby national road (*guodao*) 206. The government sent hundreds of police officers to crack down on this unrest. As a result of this protest, forty-seven police officers and dozens of villagers were injured, and eleven police vehicles were damaged (Shantou City Jinping District People's Court, Criminal Verdict. 2015, No. 93).

The tensions did not end here but further escalated when thousands of villagers walked about fifteen kilometers to the Shantou municipal complex on September 26, 2014 and demanded that the municipal government investigate the issue of their land. No municipal government officials came out and talked with them, so they started to push down the gate of the government complex and clashed with hundreds of police officers who were on duty to protect the government building and the officials working there.

Liantang villagers' grievances were the consequence of their lands being sold off by corrupt village cadres without their knowledge and consent, and they did not get any compensation for losing their collectively owned lands. During the past ten years, village cadres have sold thousands of *mu*⁵⁷ of their lands to developers or other entities.

The outcome of the Liantang protest was a failure of the Liantang villagers, as the Shantou municipal government framed Liantang villagers as being "coerced by some criminals and (they) did not know the truth (of this incident/matter)" (*bei bufa fenzi guoxie, buming zhenxiang de qunzhong*) (Shantou Daily, September 28, 2014). The municipal government claimed that those villagers had been incited by some gamblers who were not happy with their capture by police on July 7, 2014. In the end, this protest lost its momentum,

⁵⁷ One *mu* is 0.165 acre.

as the local government arrested about one hundred protest leaders and participants of these two clashes⁵⁸ without solving the villagers' land issues.

4.2 Guangji Case, Yunnan Province

Guangji village is located at Jincheng township, Jinning county (now Jinning district), Kunming city, Yunnan province.

The Guangji protest started on December 26, 2012 when the Jincheng township government posted a bulletin announcing that the “ancient Dian Kingdom” (*gudian wangguo*) project would expropriate 14,933 *mu* of land from twelve villages in Jincheng township, including Guangji village and Fuyou village, among others. As was the case in other villages, Guangji villagers questioned the legitimacy of expropriating so much land from villagers, and they wondered whether the local government had approval from the state council.⁵⁹ So, they asked the local government to show them the approval from the state council. However, the local government did not have approval. Thus, the villagers went to the Yunnan provincial government to petition, but they did not get a satisfactory answer from the provincial government either.

To keep their lands out of the hands of the local government, Guangji villagers formed a patrol force at Guangji village. They also set up five tents at different entrances to Guangji village. There were villagers in each tent; their job was to watch out for any outsiders who wanted to enter Guangji village and inform the whole village when someone wanted to “invade” it. Meanwhile, Guangji villages elected eleven villagers as their representatives to protect their lands. These protest leaders were at the front line of this movement.

⁵⁸ Interviewee C, March 6, 2019.

⁵⁹ According to China's <Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China>, if the local government wants to expropriate basic farmland for any project, it needs the state council's approval. See (Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China, 2004).

On May 7, 2013, Guangji villagers held a village assembly, and seventy-eight percent of all eligible⁶⁰ villagers signed a letter to expel the current village committee members. Yet, the Jincheng township government and Jinning county government did not recognize this recall. Then, on May 13, 2013, Guangji villagers held a ten-thousand-person meeting (*wanren dahui*) at Guangji village, a retired provincial leader, Yang Weijun,⁶¹ attended this meeting. On June 25, 2013, Guangji villagers caught some suspicious people who were stealing the basic-farmlands-protective-stele (*jiben nongtian baohu jiezhuang*)⁶² at Guangji village, and they were held as hostages. On the second day, Jincheng township government officials came to Guangji village to apologize for the incident. There were also some smaller clashes between the villagers and the local government before the “10·22” Incident.⁶³

After the “10·22” Incident, the Jinning county government promised not to expropriate Guangji village’s lands for the *gudian wangguo* project. The Kunming city government and Jinning county government did not abandon the *gudian wangguo* project after the “10·22” Incident, but they downscaled this project and did not use Guangji villagers’ lands.

4.3 Fuyou Case, Yunnan Province

Fuyou village is a neighboring village of Guangji village and is also located in Jincheng township, Jinning county, Kunming city, Yunnan province. In the Chinese context, the Fuyou

⁶⁰ “Eligible villagers” refer to villagers who have the voting right, which means they were over eighteen years old, and their household registration was at Guangji village.

⁶¹ Yang Weijun, 98 years old, is a retired leader who served as a vice-chairman of the Yunnan People’s Political Consultative Committee. He is famous for speaking up for farmers’ grievance in Yunnan province. He was acclaimed as “the most amiable official” (*zui keai de guanyuan*) in China by the media.

⁶² Basic-farmlands-protective-stele is a sign erected by the local government to indicate the lands belong to the basic-farmland category. According to <Regulation on the Protection of Basic Farmlands> (1998), 80 percent of farmable lands should be designated as basic farmlands, and it is difficult to expropriate basic farmlands for other purposes.

⁶³ In this part, I referred to a media report. See Wang, Qiaopeng. April 24, 2014. “A story from Guangji village, Yunnan province. You can take away my life, but you cannot take away my lands” (*Yunnan Guangji cun de baodi gushi: yaoming keyi, yaodi buxing*). Honesty Outlook (*Lianzheng liaowang*).

case, also called the Jinning Incident, took place at Jining county (now Jinning district). The Jinning Incident happened on October 14, 2014. The clash occurred between hundreds of Fuyou villagers and about one thousand “workers”⁶⁴ who were hired by developers to restore the construction of the “Fanya” project, which involved the expropriation of about 3,000 *mu*⁶⁵ of land from Fuyou village. In this conflict, at least eight people died⁶⁶ (seven were “workers,” one was a villager), and eighteen people were injured (The Beijing News, October 17, 2014), which made it is the deadliest land protest in China since the 2005 Dingzhou Incident.

This protest was triggered by land expropriation at Fuyou village. Since 2008, the local government had started to expropriate Fuyou villagers’ lands for different projects. First, they started with the “Nanche” Project in 2010, the “Fanya” project in 2011, the *gudian wangguo* project in 2012 and so on. As of 2014, Fuyou villagers had lost the majority of their lands, but each villager had only received less than 60,000 *yuan* as compensation.⁶⁷

Fuyou villagers were not happy with the fact that they could not refuse the local government’s request for expropriating their valuable land, especially for the “Fanya”

⁶⁴ Those “workers” were not real workers, as most of them were thugs and idle personnel from society (*shehui xiansan rennyuan*). They were hired by Yang Ruming, who made a deal with developers. According to the verdict, on October 12, 2014, four companies signed a contract with Yang Ruming stating that these companies would pay Yang twenty-two million yuan for the road construction in the “Fanya” project. They paid Yang eight million as a down payment; then, Yang used this money to recruit hundreds of thugs. They bought military uniforms and used police equipment for those “workers,” such as shields, helmets, tear gas, stab-resistant clothing, fire extinguishers, steel pipes, stones, and so on. The government played the role of a middleman between the two sides. On why the government uses thugs instead of police to expropriate farmers’ lands and do other dirty work, see, Ong (2018a, 2018 b), Chen (2017).

⁶⁵ On paper, the “Fanya” project only used 2,200 *mu* Fuyou village land. But, according to villagers, in reality, they used over 3000 *mu* of their land. Those developers only paid compensation for the 1,700 *mu* of land. This kind of collusion has been common at Fuyou village during the past ten years.

⁶⁶ This number is from the verdict the court issued to the defendants. According to my interviewees, the actual number should be eleven people that died from this clash: two villagers and nine “workers” (Interviewee J, February 20, 2019). The number of people injured from this clash was much higher than eighteen. According to one of my interviewees, the actual number should be about fifty people (Interviewee L, February 22, 2019).

⁶⁷ According to a paper that one of my interviewees gave me, as of 2014, 5,485 *mu* of Fuyou villagers’ land had been expropriated, but each villager only received 59,180 *yuan* as compensation.

project, which only occupied 2,200 *mu* of Fuyou villagers' land according to local government documents, but, in reality, took away more than 3,000 *mu* of their land. The local government forged their signature to agree to the "Fanya" project to expropriate their land. As a result, beginning on March 28, 2012, when the local government decided to clear villagers' lands for the "Fanya" project, there were several clashes between local government officials, government-hired thugs, developers and Fuyou villagers. There was a clash between villagers and the developer side in June 2014. After that, the project stopped because of villagers' resistance. Finally, on October 14, 2014, another violent incident occurred between villagers and the developers. During that clash, at least eight people were dead; six were from the developer-side-hired thugs, two were villagers. Among those six "workers" who died in this conflict, four were burned to death, and they suffered other injuries as well. It is one of the most violent protests in the last two decades that happened in China.

After this incident, the Kunming city government swiftly intervened, as both the Communist Party secretary and the mayor of Kunming city visited Fuyou village on the same day of this incident. They dispatched working groups to every group⁶⁸ and each family in this village to understand their grievances and spread their propaganda, which is referred to as "thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*). On October 21, the Communist Party secretary of Kunming city discussed the concerns of the villagers with representatives from Fuyou village. After this incident, twenty-one people were arrested (six were "workers," and fifteen were villagers) (Xinhua News, October 28, 2014). Sixteen related local officials received administrative penalties or party discipline (For example, the county mayor of Jinning was discharged) (Nanjing Daily, October 24, 2014).

⁶⁸ A group (*xiaozu*) is a sub-unit of the village; there are eleven groups at Fuyou village. Fuyou village is an administrative village (*xingzhengcun*) that consists of the Fuyou natural village (*zirancun*), which has seven *xiaozu* and four other natural villages (each natural village is a group).

This year (2019), five years since this incident, the judgment of the retrial of the first instance (*yishen chongshen*) was carried out, and one villager received a death sentence,⁶⁹ one villager received a death sentence with a reprieve, and another villager was sentenced to life in prison. Yet, the businessman who recruited hundreds of *workers* to invade this village only received a ten-year sentence, which was reduced from the life sentence given in the initial judgment.

In the short term, the villagers won the protest, as they, for example, received one year's *fanzufei*⁷⁰ (Interviewee G, February 19, 2019; Interviewee L, February 22, 2019) after this clash. The local government promised to give Fuyou villagers *fanzufei* by March of each year. The “Fanya” project was suspended after this protest.

But in the long term, the results for the Fuyou villagers were not so positive. For example, villagers only received one year's *fanzufei* after the “10·14” Incident, and the local government failed to deliver the following years' *fanzufei*.⁷¹ Villagers could never get their

⁶⁹ According to a recent media report, some defendants appealed to the higher court for the second instance. The judgment on the second instance has not come out yet. See (Tan and Shi, 2019).

⁷⁰ The *fanzufei* is 3,000 *yuan* per *mu* each year. Because the “Fanya” project occupied over 2,200 *mu* of land (this is according to the paper; this project actually occupied over 3,000 *mu* of land from Fuyou village) of Fuyou villagers. Although not every household occupied the same amount of land, the compensation is the same; each Fuyou villager received 43,000 *yuan* as compensation. So, each year the local government will give villagers rent or *fanzufei* for occupying their lands. For this so-called *fanzufei*, the standard is 3,000 *yuan* per *mu* each year. So, if one household occupied one *mu* of land in total, this household could receive 3,000 *fanzufei* every year. For a household, the more land that was expropriated by the government, the more *fanzufei* this household would get from the village committee. One reason why this protest happened was that villagers did not get their *fanzufei* from the local government, and their compensation from the “Fanya” project had been used up (Interviewee K, February 22, 2019). The reason for giving every villager the same compensation is to buy the vote of those villagers whose lands were not expropriated for the “Nanche” and “Fanya” project because to expropriate villagers' lands, the local government needed the majority of villagers' approval. So, the local government gave the same compensation for every Fuyou villager, though not everyone's lands were expropriated by the government. But it is not fair for those whose lands were expropriated by the local government, so the local government promised to give them *fanzufei* every year as compensation for this unfairness.

⁷¹ This year (2019), the Fuyou village committee used five years of *fanzufei* (2015–2019) to entice Fuyou villagers to give up control of their lands to the village committee. The village committee uses all kinds of means, including threatening villagers to achieve their goals, and most of the villagers have given up the fighting and accepted this money. But there are about twenty households at Fuyou village that have not accepted this money; nevertheless, their lands were taken by the village committee (Interviewee L, September 5, 2019).

lands back after this incident, and, even worse, control of their remaining lands was given to the village committee. The collusion between developers and local government officials was still rampant. Some Fuyou villagers received hefty sentences for the Jinning Incident, including one villager who received the death penalty.⁷²

Another positive news story came from the anti-corruption campaign that the Communist Party started at the 18th National Congress of the CPC. So far, some of those high-ranking officials who were responsible or related to this incident have been investigated by the CPC discipline department, such as Qiu He,⁷³ Qin Guangrong,⁷⁴ Cai Desheng,⁷⁵ Zhang Tianxin,⁷⁶ Gao Jinsong,⁷⁷ Zhao Ligong⁷⁸ and so on.

4.4 Shangpu Case, Guangdong Province

Shangpu village is located at Mianhu township, Jiexi county, Jieyang city, Guangdong province. Protests started there on February 22, 2013. Two days later, thousands of Shangpu villagers clashed with about one hundred thugs who were hired by a company⁷⁹ that leased

⁷² It is not the final result. She (the villager who was received a death sentence in the first instance judgment) is still waiting for the result of the judgment of the second instance.

⁷³ Qiu He was the deputy Communist Party secretary of Yunnan province when the Jinning Incident happened. He was the Communist Party secretary of Kunming city between 2007 and 2011. When Qiu He was the party secretary of Kunming city, Kunming started a pattern of “land expropriation and home demolition” (*zhengdi chaiqian*) in Kunming city. Many peasants, farmers, and homeowners began to petition to different levels of government. He was investigated by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI thereafter) in 2015.

⁷⁴ Qin Guangrong was the Communist Party Secretary of Yunnan province from 2011 to 2014. He was removed from the Communist Party secretary of Yunnan province on October 14, 2014, the same day the Jinning Incident happened. He surrendered himself to the CCDI this year.

⁷⁵ Cai Desheng was the Communist Party Secretary of Jinning county when the “10·22” Incident happened. He was investigated by the Kunming Commission for Discipline Inspection this year.

⁷⁶ Zhang Tianxin was the Communist Party Secretary of Kunming city between 2011 and July 2014. He was investigated by the CCDI in 2014. He was expelled from the Communist Party and demoted from assisting roles of provinces or equivalents (*fushengji*) (level 4-5) to assisting roles of divisions or equivalents (*fuchuji*) (level 8-11).

⁷⁷ Gao Jinsong was the Communist Party Secretary of Kunming city between August 2014 and April 2015. He was investigated by the CCDI in April 2015.

⁷⁸ Zhao Ligong was the public security bureau chief of Kunming city when the Jinning Incident happened. He was investigated by the Yunnan Commission for Discipline Inspection this year.

⁷⁹ The owner of that company was another village’s committee director.

Shangpu villagers' lands in January 2013. Shangpu villagers were dissatisfied with their compensation for their lands being leased to an entrepreneur who was the village committee director of a neighboring village. This clash caused nineteen villagers to be injured, and twenty-nine vehicles were damaged, eight of which were burnt by villagers (Zheng, 2013).⁸⁰

This protest escalated on March 10, 2013 when 3,000 security force members cracked down on this protest using tear gas, truncheons, and stun grenades, causing sixty people to be injured (The Daily Telegraph, March 12, 2013; Canberra Times, March 12, 2013; The Guardian, March 12, 2013; China Daily, March 13, 2013). After this incident, the Jiexi county government intervened by dispatching county government officials, township government officials, and village cadres. All together, three hundred people went to Shangpu village to do villagers' thought work (BBC Chinese, March 1, 2013).

This protest was successful for the Shangpu villagers, as the court nullified the land contract, and the village committee director was arrested (The Guardian, March 12, 2013; Democracy & Legal System Times, April 14, 2014). The local government deposed both the Communist Party secretary and the mayor of the Mianhu township government after the second clash. In addition, the local government arrested fifteen people by March 14, 2013. Another twenty-three suspects were wanted by the police (Zheng, 2013).

4.5 Tianmu Case, Tianjin Municipality

Geographically distant from the above-mentioned villages in the south of China, Tianmu village is located in the north. It belongs to Tianmu township, Beichen district, Tianjin municipality. It is one of the largest Hui-Muslim communities in North China, with over 20,000 inhabitants, and over eighty percent of its population was Hui-Muslim (The Straits Times, April 18, 2015).

⁸⁰ The local government's figure for the injuries was only four villagers. See (Jiexi County Government Information Office, 2013).

Another attribute that distinguishes the Tianmu village case from the rest of the cases is that this protest lasted over four years and was still ongoing as of the time of writing this paper, whereas the rest of the cases only lasted a few days or at most twenty days (the Shangpu protest lasted eighteen days) (Zhang, March 14, 2013). It started on January 12, 2015 (The Daily Telegraph; Tianjin Municipality Beichen District People's Court, Criminal Verdict, 2016, No. 422).

This protest was not triggered by land expropriation *per se*, but by the forced eviction of people from their houses by the village committee and township government. In 2008, Tianmu village started the “reconstruction of village in city” (*chengzhongcun gaizao*) process, and the local government wanted villagers to give up their homesteads and their houses that were built on their homesteads and move to high-rise apartments constructed nearby. But the process was not so smooth, as every villager wanted to get the lion's share from the village committee for the compensation. There was a standard of compensation for villagers set by the district government, but Mu Xiangyou and the village committee did not follow the same standard for each household, instead providing financial compensation based on personal connections.

Later, when villagers found out about this unfairness, they started to resist the demolition. In 2011, the village committee started forced evictions of people from their houses, and about fifty household houses were evacuated by force by the village committee, including one of the two key protest leaders' houses. Since then, villagers' resentment and grievances have been accumulating, with the situation finally coming to a head on January 12, 2015. In addition to the forced eviction issue, villagers were also unhappy about their collectively owned lands that had been sold by the village committee gradually, which they did not get any benefit from this. Therefore, land issues were also part of their grievance.

One of their targets was a powerful man—the Communist Party secretary of Tianmu village, Mu Xiangyou, who has been the party secretary for thirty-seven years and had been elected as a deputy of the National People’s Congress (NPC) since 1988. He was depicted by the party as a national model who promoted harmony between different ethnic groups within China (Hui-Muslim and Han Chinese). But villagers accused him of corruption (some people said he embezzled about 10 billion *yuan* of public money) by selling their lands to real estate developers (The Daily Telegraph, April 2, 2015).

On January 12, 2015, about one thousand villagers gathered in front of the village committee every day requesting Mu Xiangyou to step down and the Communist Party to investigate Mu’s corruption (Boxun News, March 3, 2015). Most of the time, the protest was peaceful.

On January 30, 2016, this protest had lasted for 384 days. Nearly one thousand police officers cracked down on this protest and arrested several dozen activists (Radio Free Asia, 2016). Two protest leaders received two-year sentences with two years’ reprieve in 2017. But they had already stayed behind bars for over five hundred days when this verdict came out.

After this, this protest lost momentum, but the villagers did not give up so easily, as when I was doing my field work, I was surprised to see that they were still protesting at an intersection of Jingjin Road and the main road to Tianmu village every day.

In the short term, this protest failed, as the municipal government cracked down on it by arresting dozens of protest leaders on January 30, 2016. The villagers achieved something in 2015, as the village committee raised the pension standard for Tianmu villagers’ seniors who reached the age of 60. The villagers’ main aim was to get fair compensation for their houses, request for Mu to step down and be investigated, obtain fair compensation for losing their lands in the past few decades, etc. But these demands have not been met by the local government until now.

In the middle and long term, this protest partially succeeded, as Mu stepped down as the Communist Party secretary of Tianmu village, and he was removed from the NPC in 2018 (Tianjin Daily, October 2, 2018), though he has not been charged with any corruption so far.

4.6 Conclusion

After providing a brief overview of the five case studies, I will now explore each of the three variables affecting large-scale land protests success in China.

Chapter Five: The Impact of Domestic Media on Protest Outcomes

5.1 Introduction

Media can play an important role in determining whether or not a protest succeeds (Hess, 2015; Greenberg, 1985). Although China is an authoritarian regime, the central government attempts to present itself as legitimate in the eyes of its citizens. If domestic media reports can affect how the central government handles a specific protest that happens in China (Cai, 2010; Li, 2016; Mertha, 2008; Huang, Zheng and Gui, 2016), the central government's attitude will have an impact on how the local government deals with protests that happen in its jurisdiction.

In this chapter, I will examine how domestic media affect the outcome of large-scale land protests in China. In particular, I will examine whether my first hypothesis can or cannot stand and explain why: if the domestic media reports on this protest are supportive or on the protesters' side, the likelihood of the success of the protests will be higher; whereas, if the domestic media reports are negative or on the local governments' side or if there are no domestic media reports on this case, the likelihood of success will be lower.

Table 5.1 summarizes the media coverage of the protests and their outcomes. The outcome of a protest was measured on the basis of whether or not villagers were able to achieve all or part of their main goals within one year after they started the protest. This, as in the case of Fuyou, does not mean that villagers were necessarily satisfied with this outcome in the long run.

Table 5.1 Domestic media and protest outcomes

Protest Name	Domestic Media Attitude	Outcome
Liantang	pro-government	failed
Guangji	pro-villager	successful
Fuyou	pro-villager	successful
Shangpu	Neutral	successful
Tianmu	None	failed

Table 5.2 summarizes the media position: i.e. whether they were pro-government or pro-villager. If a media outlet framed villagers as criminals, culprits, thugs and so on; if their attitude favored the local government; and if they did not interview villagers, I will code them as pro-government. If the media outlet interviewed villagers and investigated why and how these protests happened, I will code them as pro-villager. If the media outlet used a specific frame to depict villagers' behaviors, such as rights protection, righteousness, victims, and so on, I will also code them as pro-villager. If a media outlet reported only facts and did not demonstrate a specific attitude towards this incident, then I coded it as neutral. If a media outlet only reported how the local government officials handled this incident, either by talking to villagers or interviewing local officials, and they did not talk much about why this protest happened, I will also code it as neutral. If there are no domestic media reports on this protest, then I will code it as none.

Table 5.2 Domestic media's attitude on each case

	Pro-government	Neutral	Pro-villager	None	Overall attitude
Liantang	13				pro-government
Guangji	1	3	2		pro-villager
Fuyou	22	36	42		pro-villager
Shangpu		6	1		neutral
Tianmu				none	none

5.2 Pro-government Media Coverage (Liantang)

The Liantang case is a pro-government case because the domestic media's attitude toward/coverage of this case is on the local government's side. I collected thirteen domestic media reports on the Liantang case⁸¹ spanning from September 28 to September 30, 2014. All those reports adopted the local government's frame on this incident, which is a "premeditated and organized crime" (*you yumou you zuzhi fanzui anjian*).

After what happened on September 26, 2014, Shantou and Liantang drew much attention from domestic and international media because it was highly unusual to smash and loot a municipal government building in the daylight, particularly in China. Also, a lot of pressure was put on the local government from social media. Under that pressure, the Shantou municipal government held a public press conference. The municipal government framed this incident as caused by some thugs who were accused of gambling and were consequently arrested by the police. Those gamblers, according to the local government, ignited the villagers to protest in front of the municipal government complex without the villagers realizing the truth of this matter. The municipal government depicted those protesters as "coerced by some criminals and (they) did not know the truth (of this matter/incident)" (*bei bufa fenzi guoxie, buming zhenxiang de qunzhong*) (Shantou Daily, September 28, 2014).

In a press conference held on September 28, 2014, the Shantou municipal government said the reason for the clash that happened on September 26 was because:

Some criminals were afraid of punishment by the law [because of the incident that happened on July 7, 2014], so they used the expansion of the landfill at Liantang village as an excuse; they manipulated public opinion and coerced people who were unaware of

⁸¹ Including one from CCTV's "News 1+1." It is a transcript of the television program, which was hosted by Bai Yansong, a household name in China.

the truth to protest at the municipal government complex on September 26, 2014. (*bufa fenzi yin haipa falv zhicai, jiekou fandui laji tianmaichang kuojian, bangjia minyi, guoxie buming zhenxiang qunzhong dao shiwei naoshi.*) (News 1+1, September 29, 2014).

There were thirteen domestic media reports on this incident; they all adopted the local government's frame and did not reveal the villagers' perspective on this incident. This is demonstrated by the title of a national newspaper report. The title was "Shantou [government] informed [the public] [villagers'] smashing and looting the municipal government complex incident, a premeditated and organized crime" (*Shantou tongbao daza shiwei shijian: youyumou youzuzhi fanzui anjian*).

Many villagers were angry that domestic media relied heavily on the local government frame. As one of my interviewees said,

"The [local] government is lying! We went to the municipal building of Shantou on September 26, 2014 to petition for our lands, not because someone was caught for gambling. This was a tactic used by the [local] government. He [Lin Jianzhong, a protest leader] was arrested not because of gambling but because he led our villagers in protesting; gambling is just an excuse used by the [local] government. We were fooled by the media and [local] government!" (Interviewee A, March 3, 2019).

The local authorities framed this incident as caused by thugs who were caught gambling by police and were afraid of punishment from the law. It was explained that these criminals (*bufa fenzi*) ignited other villagers to protest the local authorities (CCTV, September 29, 2014; China News Service, September 28, 2014). Communist Party-controlled media outlets such as CCTV were in favor of the local authority's framing instead of villagers' viewpoints (CCTV, September 29, 2014).

All thirteen domestic media outlets that reported on this protest used the Shantou municipal government's frame to depict this protest as "a premeditated and organized crime." No domestic media reported from the perspective of the villagers, partly because the local government was trying to block all domestic media efforts to reach those villagers. As one of my interviewees said,

"The [local] government tried to block all domestic media who wanted to talk to villagers.The [local] government even arrested some university students who came to investigate this issue; these students came from Shantou University [only a few kilometers away from Liantang village]." (Interviewee A, March 3, 2019)

After this clash, the local government arrested twenty-six villagers on the same day the protest happened (Shantou Daily, September 28, 2014). In total, the local government has arrested about one hundred villagers so far,⁸² and some protest leaders are still in prison today. Not surprisingly, this protest ended with failure, as the villagers' lands have not been returned to them,⁸³ and they still have not received any compensation for losing their valuable lands.

Because the media portrayed those protest leaders as thugs and criminals, some were even forced to give false confessions on a CCTV news program. As a result, those protest leaders lost their legitimacy and credibility to mobilize/lead again. Furthermore, because no domestic media reported from the villagers' perspective, they lost an important ally, and therefore the likelihood of success was lower.

⁸² This information was given by one of my interviewees at Liantang village.

⁸³ Although so far, no actual changes have happened at Liantang village, the local government began to change their working style and pay more attention to villagers' grievances. The government made some small changes during these years, such as dissolving the Liantang village collective assets management group in December 2014. The government divided the former Liantang villagers' collective assets into those five neighborhood committees, making village affairs more transparent.

Thus, this case fits my hypothesis. Although there were thirteen domestic media reports on this case, they were all on the local government's side, so eventually this protest ended in failure.

5.3 Pro-villager media coverage (Guangji, Fuyou)

There are two cases that fit this category—the Guangji case and the Fuyou case. I collected six domestic media reports on the Guangji case: two were pro-villager, and the other four were neutral. Those reports spanned from October 24, 2013 to February 5, 2016.

The first report was covered by *The Beijing News* on October 24, 2013, two days after the “10·22” Incident. Because the Beijing News is a consumer-oriented media outlet, it reported from the viewpoint of the Guangji villagers, as they interviewed some protest leaders in this report. Although this report was short, it covered what happened on October 22, 2013, and why this clash occurred. This report quoted villagers and said the trigger of this clash was due to forced land expropriation (*qiangxing zhengdi*). Two protest leaders were interviewed, and it mentioned that four villagers were injured by the police. I coded this media report as pro-villager.

The second report was published on April 24, 2014 by *Honesty Outlook (Lianzheng liaowang)*, a magazine managed by the Sichuan Daily Press Group that focuses on anti-corruption. This investigative report covered the details of the story of Guangji villagers protecting their lands from the local government. It included many details on how the tensions between the local government and Guangji villagers had escalated since the announcement of the land expropriation plan of the *gudian wangguo* project at Guangji village. Thus, it promoted the villagers' version of the story and therefore was a positive report for Guangji's villagers. This report depicted villagers' behaviors as a form of rights protection (*weiquan*). The report states that eighty-three percent of Guangji villagers who

were over eighteen years old signed a letter saying they were against the land expropriation. One villager said, they “can take away my life but [they] cannot take away my land” (*yao wode ming dao keyi, yaodi bukeyi*). Another villager, who was also a protest leader, said in this report, “I can give up my wife, but I will use my head to protect my lands” (*laopo keyi buyao, tudi wo yao yong tou laibao*) (Wang, 2014). This report also mentioned that two villagers were severely injured, and over thirty villagers were injured from the clash that happened on September 22, 2013, but they were denied treatment from nearby hospitals. Because this report used the frame of rights protection to describe villagers’ behaviors, I coded this media report as pro-villager.

One domestic media coverage on this case is coded as “pro-government,” as it reported from the perspective of the local government and did not focus on the “whole picture.”

The other three reports were neutral reports on how some protest leaders were arrested after the “10·14” Incident, and the trial related to it. The local government did not retaliate against the Guangji villagers until the Fuyou Incident happened. After the Fuyou Incident, the municipal government thought some Guangji villagers played a part in this event, so they arrested six Guangji villagers on October 22, 2014, the first anniversary of the Guangji Incident. Four of them received sentences and served their sentences, and the other two protest leaders received sentences with a reprieve.

Those domestic media reports might not have influenced the outcome of the Guangji villagers’ protests, as the decision to abandon the land expropriation at Guangji village for the Kunming municipal government-backed *gudian wangguo* project was made *before* the first media report. However, those positive reports contributed to ensuring that the local government kept its word after the protest was finished. Although some may disagree with this, the reality is the local government did not break their word after the “10·22” Incident. Instead, the local government changed the design drawing for the *gudian wangguo* project

after this conflict. Therefore, those reports had an indirect impact⁸⁴ on the outcome, as the Guangji villagers succeeded in their protest. So, in this case, the domestic media outlets played the role of “watch-dog,”—even though, they could not affect the outcome of the protest directly, their positive media report on those villagers made sure that the local government did not break their words after they conceded in the first place.

For the Fuyou incident, I collected one hundred media reports, including commentary articles on this incident spanning from October 14, 2014 to April 13, 2017. Among those reports, ninety-one were written in October 2014, and twenty-nine articles were editorials from different media outlets; the majority of those editorials were on the villagers’ side. There were nineteen reports that were investigations and were mainly conducted by consumer-oriented media outlets, such as the *Beijing News*, *Beijing Times*, *Beijing Youth Daily*, and so on. These media outlets interviewed many Fuyou villagers and brought their stories and grievances to China’s readers, so they were all on the villagers’ side.

Many of those domestic media channels were on the villagers’ side, and they had many questions that needed the local government to address. For example, one national newspaper’s commentary asked:

“Which one was the trigger of this conflict? Did the developers’ side try to ‘return to work,’ or did they hire some thugs to intimidate villagers? These are two different kinds of behavior. The local government’s investigation said the developers’ side recruited nearly one thousand workers to resume work [on that day]. But from journalists’ reports,

⁸⁴ There are other explanations for why the local government kept its word after the “10·22” Incident; for example, the cost for the local government to keep its word was not high because the project had not started when this protest happened. Another explanation is the possibility that another bigger protest could happen if the local government did not keep their word. Then, the situation could become worse than the “10·22” Incident. But, undeniably, the two pro-villager reports made the cost for the local government to break its word higher than if there were no such reports. Because the public will have evidence of the local government failing to keep their word if they choose to change their minds after this conflict. Then, the local government would be at the center of public opinion if another protest happened at Guangji village after the local government changed their minds.

we knew those who were wearing uniforms were musclemen hired by developers, and their job was to use violence against the villagers, beat them and threaten them [to give up their lands]. And they started the preparation one week ago.....” (Fu, China Youth Daily, October 21, 2014)

Another market-oriented newspaper published an editorial on October 17, 2014. It stated: “The [local] government’s most basic responsibility is to be the ‘Night’s Watch,’ to maintain public security, to prevent the law of retaliation and to demand that ‘blood must atone for blood.’ Both the mastermind of this fighting and people who committed intentional homicide in this tragedy should be punished by the law. But the public also has to ask: Where were the police when hundreds of people were fighting? Did the local government and the police commit misconduct during the process?” (The Beijing News, October 17, 2014)

According to the criteria of coding for the purpose of this research, thirty-six domestic media reports were neutral, forty-two were pro-villager, and twenty-two were pro-government. So, in general, the domestic media’s attitude towards this protest was pro-villager.

Fuyou villagers got one-year’s *fanzufei* after this protest, and it was substantial for them. The Kunming municipal government dispatched many government officials who came to Fuyou village and helped them with their problems. So, in the short term, it was a successful land protest for Fuyou villagers.

This is because, if the local government did not meet one of Fuyou villagers’ main requests for waging this protest after the “10·14” Incident, the local government would lose its legitimacy both in the eyes of Fuyou villagers and all Chinese citizens because almost all domestic media reports showed sympathy for Fuyou villagers’ resistance. So, the only available choice for the local government is to make concessions to Fuyou villagers’

demands and take care of those villagers. Compared to giving up the “Fanya” project completely, giving villagers one-year’s *fanzufei*⁸⁵ is an affordable choice for the local government. Otherwise, the local government would lose its legitimacy if they did not make an appropriate concession to villagers after so many domestic media outlets had reported on this incident.

The Fuyou case speaks to the role of customer-oriented media as a proxy of public opinion in an authoritarian country like China, a role that was pointed out earlier by Mertha (2008:10). The central government in China cares about how domestic media report on specific incidents, as it wants to maintain its legitimacy. If the domestic media questioned whether or not the local government at Kunming or Jinning committed misconduct before or during the “10·14” Incident, the pressure on the central government would be high, and this pressure would pass to the local government. This could explain why giving in to one of the villagers’ main demands was a wise choice for the local government after the “10·14” Incident.

The Fuyou case also tells us that domestic media outlets’ coverage, in this case, were not always in line with the local government’s preference. For example, another research, which also focused on the Fuyou case and collected 81 domestic media reports on this case, found that among those media coverage, 41 were “negative” reports (from the standpoint of the government), 21 were neutral, 19 were “positive” reports⁸⁶ (most of which were produced by government-sponsored media outlets, such as *Kunming Daily* and *Yunnan Daily*.) (Wang and Song, 2016). This case indicates that even in an authoritarian regime, such as China, domestic

⁸⁵ One of Fuyou villagers’ main requests for this project was to get their *fanzufei* for the “Fanya” project from the local government (Interviewee K, February 22, 2019).

⁸⁶ Their media reports number is different from mine because my research collected from a more extended period than theirs. Also, the outcome of the coding of domestic media’s coverage of this incident resulted from the different coding rules.

media outlets can enjoy some degree of freedom of press on some issues that were tolerated by the central government.

This case also tells us that we should distinguish between short-term outcomes from the long-term outcomes. By short-term, I mean the outcome of the protest that happened or achieved within one year of the main event/protest of that case. By long-term, I mean the outcome of the protest that achieved after one year of the main event/protest of that case. In the short-term, the Fuyou villagers realized some of their targets, i.e., they received one year's *fanzufei* after the "10·14" Incident, the Fanya Project was suspended, etc. But in the long term, the result for Fuyou villagers was not so positive. For example, villagers only received one year's *fanzufei* after the "10·14" Incident; the local government failed to deliver the rest of the years' *fanzufei*.⁸⁷ Villagers never got their lands back after this incident, and, even worse, control of their last lands was put in the hands of the village committee this year. Collusion between developers and local government officials is still rampant. Some Fuyou villagers received hefty sentences for the Jinning Incident, including one villager who received the death penalty.⁸⁸

Although Fuyou villagers won in the short term after the "10·14" Incident, that did not necessarily mean they would also win in the long term,⁸⁹ as most Fuyou villagers were not happy with the fact that they had lost control of their last lands and were worried that the village committee would sell all their lands and they would become landless farmers.

⁸⁷ This year (2019), the Fuyou village committee used five years of *fanzufei* (2015–2019) to entice Fuyou villagers to give up control of their lands to the hands of the village committee. The village committee used all kinds of means, including threatening, to achieve their goals, and most of the villagers gave up the fighting and accepted this compensation. But there are about twenty households in Fuyou village that did not accept this compensation; nevertheless, their lands were taken by the village committee (Interviewee L, September 5, 2019).

⁸⁸ It is not the final result yet. She (the villager who received a death sentence in the first instance judgment) is still waiting for the result of the judgment of the second instance.

⁸⁹ This is also true for the Wukan case. See Chapter Two.

5.4 Neutral Media Coverage Case (Shangpu)

The Shangpu case belongs to the “neutral” media category. I collected seven domestic media reports on the Shangpu case spanning from February 25, 2013 to July 21, 2014. Only one media report (from *China News Service*) was on the clash that happened on February 24, 2013. It was a short report from the perspective of the local government. There were two media reports after the incident that happened on March 10, 2013, one of which is from the Jiexi county government information office,⁹⁰ which was published on March 11, one day after the second clash. It revealed information about how this protest happened, how it escalated for eighteen days and what actions the local government took after these two major clashes. The second one also comes from the Guangdong channel of *China News Service*; its content was similar to the first report by the Jiexi county information office. I coded those three media reports as neutral, as they did not lean to either the local government side or the villagers’ side.⁹¹

The fourth media article was by *Democracy & Legal System Times* and was published on April 14, 2014. It covered the whole story of how and why this protest started; it mentioned the first clash that happened on February 24, 2013, but it did not mention the second clash that occurred on March 10, 2013, when the local government dispatched three thousand police officers to oppress the Shangpu villagers. Because this media report interviewed

⁹⁰ This report that was released by the Jiexi county information office (*Jiexixian xinwenban*) *per se* may not count as a domestic media report, but because the Guancha Syndicate reproduced this report on its website, and because the Guancha Syndicate is a domestic media outlet, I deemed it a domestic media report.

⁹¹ Although those media reports reported from the perspective of the local government, they framed those two clashes as triggered by the collusion between the village committee and vicious powers (*eshili*), so they did not blame the villagers but rather the two sides who colluded with each other. So, I coded those reports as neutral.

several villagers and presented the reason for this protest, I coded this media report as pro-villager.

The other three media reports were covered by *The Beijing Times*, *Nanfang Metropolis Daily*, and *Information Times*. All three media reports covered the result of the trial of the Shangpu Incident, and the prime culprits—the entrepreneur and the village committee director of another village—received a twenty-five-year sentence. I coded all of them as neutral. Overall, the domestic media’s attitude towards this case was neutral.

The outcome of this protest, according to official information, was a successful one for Shangpu villagers, as the local government had met their two main targets of this protest—nullifying the land-releasing contract and punishing those criminals who were responsible for the two clashes.

The domestic media’s attitude towards this case was generally neutral, but the outcome of this protest was a successful one for the Shangpu villagers. This case suggests that neutral media coverage may still help (or at least not hinder) the villagers achieve their main targets. This distinguishes this study from the works done by Mertha (2008), Cai (2010), and Li (2016), who did not include neutral media coverage in their studies.

Why was this protest successful for Shangpu villagers? I contend that there are three explanations for this unexpected outcome. Firstly, the domestic media reports on this incident put pressure on the local government to solve this crisis properly. Although the first domestic media report on this case was neutral, it still put pressure on the local government, because if they did not handle this protest properly, their political careers would be in danger, as they would be seen as failing at their jobs. Maintaining social stability has, after all, become the first priority for all Chinese local government during the past two decades⁹² (O’Brien & Li,

⁹² During the past decade, many local officials received punishment from upper-level government for failing to maintain social stability, e.g., a large-scale protest or mass incident happened in their

2006; Chen, 2012; Lee, 2007; Fu, 2018; Hurst, 2009; Edin, 2003; Yang, 2017; Wang, 2012; Wang, 2015). Moreover, this media report was covered by central-level media—*China News Service*.⁹³ If the local government officials did not handle this matter carefully, they would put their political careers at risk.

Secondly, the local government was not the target of this protest. This protest happened between Shangpu villagers and a private company owned by another village committee director. Although the village committee was accused of corruption in this protest, it was easier for the local government to give in and meet villagers' demands because the village committee is not a level of government.

Thirdly, this protest happened at a sensitive time of the year—i.e. during China's two sessions⁹⁴ (*lianghui*) period.⁹⁵ Every year's *lianghui* time is a sensitive period for China's political elite, as the world's media are often focused on China's political arena. Any turmoil that occurs in this period in China will draw the world's media attention, which put a lot pressure on the provincial leaders of Guangdong province. This factor is expected to induce the provincial government to intervene and ameliorate the villagers' grievances.

5.5 What happens in the absence of domestic media coverage? (Tianmu)

As I mentioned earlier, there were no domestic media reports on the Tianmu case.

jurisdiction. For example, both the party secretary and county government mayor of Weng'an county were deposed after the Weng'an Incident that happened in 2008. The county mayor of Jinning county government was also dismissed for the Jinning Incident.

⁹³ Some studies showed that national-level media's attitude had an important effect on the outcome of protests that happened in China, see (Li, 2016:204), (Huang, Zheng, and Gui, 2016).

⁹⁴ Two sessions refer to the annual plenary sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). They are usually held from March 3 to mid-March each year in Beijing, China's capital. The *lianghui* period, along with the National Party Congress of the CPC, which are usually held every five years, with a plenary session of the central committee of the CPC, which is usually held each year, are the most important meetings in China.

⁹⁵ Chen's (2009) research also found that the timing of a protest has an indirect effect on its success in China, see (Chen, 2009:467).

Although this protest may be the longest protest that has happened in the history of China, no domestic media have reported on this protest so far. Possible reasons explaining why it has been difficult for Tianmu villagers to reach out to domestic media to air their grievances are their ethnic identity as Hui Muslim (about 80 percent of Tianmu villagers are Hui Muslims), and minority issues are a sensitive topic for the Chinese central government.⁹⁶

Another explanation for the lack of domestic media reporting on the Tianmu protest is that the village is close to Beijing, the capital of China. The distance between Tianmu village and Beijing is only about one hundred kilometers, so if domestic media reported this protest, it would not reflect well on both the central government and local government. Thus, it is likely that there is a reporting ban on the Tianmu villagers' protest from the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee.

The Tianmu case fits with my hypothesis very well. According to my hypothesis, if there were no domestic media reports, the likelihood for a protest to succeed in China would be low, and, in reality, because there were no domestic media reports on the Tianmu villagers' protest, they had not succeeded one year after they started their protest.

This also suggests that current research on the role of media in determining the outcome of a protest in China cannot explain why some large-scale land protests were not reported on by domestic media in China. Unlike democratic countries like the U.S. and Canada, where the media enjoys freedom of the press, China is still an authoritarian regime, and its domestic media do not have the freedom to report, and the domestic media are still under tight control by the propaganda department of the CPC. Thus, not all large-scale land protests in China are reported on by the domestic media. As the Tianmu case showed, the outcome of this protest was likely to fail in the end.

⁹⁶ On why minority issues are a sensitive topic in China, see Côté (2014).

But that does not mean that Tianmu villagers will end with nothing because, in the long term, the local government had to solve this problem to achieve peace and stability in this village. The local government took actions three or four years after this protest started, such as replacing Mu's position in this village, "electing" new village committee members and village cadres in 2018 and so on.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined five cases that belong to four categories to see whether or not domestic media coverage affected land protest outcomes.

When the domestic media reports were pro-government, the protest was more likely to fail, because after the domestic media's negative reports and the local government's repression, it was difficult for the villagers to mobilize again, especially when most protest leaders had to pay a high price to mobilize again. This was proved by the Liantang case. It also showed that the local government can influence how the domestic media reports on or frames a protest in China.⁹⁷

When the domestic media reports were pro-villager, the outcome of the protest tended to be successful. There are two mechanisms for how domestic media reports influence the outcome of a protest: either directly or indirectly. As many research studies such as Mertha (2008), Cai (2010), Li (2016), Li, Koppenjan and Verweij (2016) and Huang, Zheng and Gui (2016) have shown, domestic media coverage increases the likelihood for a particular protest in China to achieve its goals. As Mertha (2008) already pointed out ten years ago, domestic

⁹⁷ A recent illustration of this is the notorious "eight warriors incident". A group of 8 medical professionals from Wuhan – including Dr. Li Wenliang - had started warning the public about a novel coronavirus affecting the community. On January 1, 2020, a CCTV news program reported that the eight individuals were punished by the local police for spreading rumors about the outbreak of the virus. The death of Dr. Li in early February following complications related to the virus drew the ire of Chinese netizens who started criticizing the local government and domestic media for covering up the issue.

media reporting in China can serve as reflection public opinion for the central government. Because the central government cares about its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens (Cai, 2010; Zhao, 2001:23), when domestic media reports favor the villagers' side, the central government will be under the pressure to intervene, and the local government, to ensure its survival, has to make concessions to its villagers, as the Fuyou case showed. This also suggests that the domestic media not only can affect the outcome of an environmental protest (Li, 2016; Li, Koppenjan and Verweij, 2016), it can also affect the outcome of a large-scale land protest in China.

But that does not mean the villagers will also win in the long term, as shown by the Fuyou case, thus showing that the power of domestic media is limited. The extant research on protests (Mertha, 2008; Cai, 2010; Li, 2016a, Li, Koppenjan and Verweij, 2016) has not quite captured that point.

The second mechanism affecting protest outcomes in China is through an indirect process, as shown by the Guangji case. Although it is hard to prove, it is reasonable to believe that the domestic media's favorable reports on the Guangji case have served a "watchdog" function after the protest finished. The existence of positive domestic media reports on the Guangji case can partly explain the long-term success of this protest.

When the attitude of domestic media's attitude is neutral, the outcome of the protest tends to be successful, as shown by the Shangpu case. This is something that was not well captured by previous studies.

Last but not least, when there were no domestic media reports on a particular large-scale land protest, the outcome was more likely to be negative, as shown by the Tianmu case. There are some explanations for the absence of domestic media reports for a large-scale land protest, such as when it involved minorities or when it was very close to Beijing. The extant research did not recognize that China is still an authoritarian regime and the domestic media

does not have freedom of the press, so not all large-scale land protests in China are reported on by the domestic media.

Overall, this chapter shows how the domestic media plays the role of “catalyst” for a protest to succeed (e.g., Fuyou) or the role of “watchdog” (e.g., Guangji). The absence of domestic media reports would lead to failure for the protesters (e.g., Tianmu), whereas negative domestic media reports are likely to lead to the failure of a protest (e.g., Liantang).

Chapter Six: The Impact of Violence on Protest Outcomes

6.1 Introduction

Scholars have found that violence plays an important role in determining the outcome of a protest. Cai (2010) found that the more violent a protest was, the more likely the central government would be to choose to intervene on their behalf, making it more likely for protesters to achieve their goals. Chen (2009, 2012) agreed that protests that use disruptive tactics are an effective way to accomplish their objectives. This has also been confirmed by Li's (2016) research on environmental protests that happened in China from 2006 to 2013. This chapter will examine the following hypothesis: The more violent a land protest, the greater the likelihood of success. In return, the less violent a land protest, the less likely it is to succeed.

Table 6.1 summarizes the relationship between the level of violence and protest outcomes. The level of violence was measured by whether or not people died or were injured, and, if so, how many.⁹⁸ If there were casualties in the conflict, I coded it as a high level of violence; if there were more than 25⁹⁹ people injured on both sides during the protest, then I coded it as a medium level of violence; and if there were fewer than 25 people injured on both sides during the conflict, then I coded its level of violence as low. The outcome of a protest was measured using the same rules as in the last chapter: If the protesters achieved part of or all of their targets, then I coded it as a successful land protest; otherwise, I coded it as a failed land protest. For a better understanding of the mechanism for a successful land

⁹⁸ In this research, acts of violence include death, injuries, kidnapping, and the victims can be either villagers, government officials or third party. To make it easy to analyze, when measuring the level of violence, I only included casualties and injuries as the indicator/benchmark of violence, regardless of who was attacked.

⁹⁹ The threshold of 25 people injured is borrowed from the definition of "armed conflict." Researchers used a death toll of 25 people as the threshold for "armed conflict," see (Wallenstein and Sollenberg, 2001).

protest, a new variable was included in this table: which side used violence, and, if necessary, which side used violence first during the conflict.

Table 6.1 Violence level of protests and protest outcomes

	Level of violence	Who used violence	Outcome
Fuyou	high	both sides, villagers used first	successful
Guangji	medium	both sides	successful
Shangpu	medium	both sides	successful
Liantang	medium	both sides, villagers used first	failed
Tianmu	low	police	failed

6.2 High level of violence (Fuyou)

The Fuyou case represents the highest level of violence, as at least eight people died during the conflict. This is not the first time the two sides¹⁰⁰ clashed with each other. In preparation for the Fanya Project¹⁰¹, Fuyou villagers' lands began to be expropriated in 2012. On March 17, 2012, the Fuyou village committee posted a notice informing villagers to clear their lands by March 21, otherwise the village committee would clear their lands by force. On March 28, 2013, the Jincheng township government and the Fuyou village committee worked together to destroy villagers' vegetable greenhouses using bulldozers, which caused an eruption of violence between villagers and the local government. Several villagers were beaten by the police, local government officials, and thugs. One of the people interviewed for this research was among the injured. He said:

“I was beaten on March 28, 2012. I was seriously injured by those thugs, but the hospital only gave me a certificate to ‘prove’ I received minor injuries. In addition, I was beaten by them twice, and no one helped me to find justice. I have been petitioning to different levels of government in recent years.” (Interviewee U, February 22, 2019)

¹⁰⁰ Villagers and “workers,” and workers' true identity was thugs that were hired by the developers to intimidate Fuyou villagers.

¹⁰¹ The full name of the Fanya project is the Yunnan Fanya Business Logistics Center for Industrial Products; henceforth, I will use Fanya Project for simplicity.

On November 12, 2013, another conflict occurred between villagers and the contractor.¹⁰² One of the interviewees, now ninety years old, was beaten by thugs. Because the Fanya Project occupied one of Fuyou villagers' main roads, this was the reason why the conflict on June 3 happened. On June 3, 2014, there was another major conflict between Fuyou villagers and the constructor side in which both sides were hurt. To better prepare themselves to protect their lands, Fuyou villagers had set up checkpoints at three different entrances to the village before June 3, 2014.

Finally, the tensions between villagers and developers erupted into a deadly conflict. On October 14, 2014, about seven hundred "police"¹⁰³ came to Fuyou village. The villagers, however, heard the news before the police actually arrived there. Four developers made a deal with Yang Ruming, an infamous gang leader in Jinning; they agreed to pay Yang twenty-two million *yuan* for the road construction project within the Fanya Project. To restore the construction, the developers gave Yang eight million *yuan* as a down payment, and Yang used this money to recruit between seven hundred and one thousand thugs from the surrounding areas (Yunnan Province Kunming Intermediate People's Court, Verdict in Criminal Case. 2015, No.166). With the local government's help, Yang also purchased used police equipment from the market: police uniforms, long staves, electric prods, riot shields, tear gas, helmets, stones, and more. First, Yang and his team dispatched eight people to scout Fuyou village, but they were caught when they were found eating breakfast at a rice noodle shop. They were then held as hostages. This did not deter the constructor side. They continued their invasion, and both sides eventually clashed with each other. According to most domestic media reports, the "worker" side used violence first (The Beijing News, October 17, 2014). The hostages' hands were tied, and they were forced to kneel on the ground as they

¹⁰² I used contractors, developers, constructors interchangeably, all meaning the developers' side.

¹⁰³ Their true identity was thugs. Here, I use "police" to describe them because they dressed like police when they were arriving to Fuyou village.

were splashed with petrol. They were the most vulnerable party during this clash. In the end, four of the hostages died, the youngest being only eighteen. At least two villagers died: one from Fuyou village and one from a neighboring village.

In total, the Fuyou conflict caused at least eight deaths.¹⁰⁴ Among the casualties, at least six “workers” died during the clash, four of whom were hostages. According to domestic media reports, two villagers died, but according to the interviewees, only one of them died because of the conflict, and the other died from disease. But, according to one of the interviewees, there was another villager who came from a neighboring village who died due to the conflict. In addition, a worker died after he was sent to the hospital. According to domestic media reports, eighteen people were injured because of this clash. But, according to some of the interviewees, the number of injured villagers could have been as high as fifty to eighty people. Many villagers who were injured did not dare go to the hospital for fear of retaliation by the local government.

In terms of who used violence in this conflict, both the villagers and “workers” used violence during the clash, but villagers’ side used it first because they kidnapped 8 “workers” at the beginning of the incident. The local government was not directly involved in this conflict, though there were some local government officials at the scene, and they were on the “workers” side when the bloodshed happened (Yunnan Province Kunming Intermediate People's Court, Verdict in Criminal Case. 2015, No.166).

¹⁰⁴ Those numbers came from early domestic media reports on this incident. Later, some domestic media outlets reported that a “worker” died at the hospital, so the new number of casualties was nine. But, according to some of the interviewees, one of the two villagers who were reported to have died during the conflict actually died from disease. But there was another villager who came from the neighboring Baisha village who died because of the clash. The number of casualties was still nine people, but the details were different between the reports and reality. According to another source, eleven people died during the conflict, but I could not verify this claim.

Why then, would violence lead to a successful land protest? The reason, I argue, is due to media coverage, as the more violent a protest is, the more likely it is to be reported on by the domestic media.¹⁰⁵ As one of my interviewees clearly pointed out:

“One of the reasons why we choose to fight with those invaders and beat them to death is that we want to draw the media and the public’s attention to our cause through the media’s reports and the public’s attention so the central government will know our cause and grievance. We hope the central government will choose to intervene in this incident and help us solve our land problem.....If nobody dies, then no people will know about our case or grievance. We choose to use violence to draw the media’s attention because this was our last choice.....” (Interview L, February 22, 2019)

In this case, villagers treated violence as a strategy they used to draw the domestic media’s attention, but their final hope was to receive attention from the central government. The villagers’ reason was quite simple: if their case was reported on by China’s domestic media, then the possibility of the central government intervening was high. The outcome of this protest validated the villagers’ strategy, though in the end they paid a high price for their victory.

After the clash, dozens of China’s domestic media outlets dispatched journalists to Fuyou village to report on this incident, such as *The Beijing News*, *Beijing Times*, *Beijing Youth Daily*, *The Paper* and so on. Not only did the commercial-oriented domestic media report on this incident, but also national, Communist Party-controlled media outlets, such as *Xinhua News*, *China Youth Daily*, and even the *People’s Daily* also published commentary articles in the villagers’ favor. Those factors persuaded the central government and the Yunnan provincial government to deal with this matter carefully, even if it meant making

¹⁰⁵ Since 2009’s Tang Fuzhen Incident, China’s vulnerable people have learned to use self-immolation and violence to protect their rights. On the Tang Fuzhen Incident, see (Xinhua News, December 4, 2009).

concessions to the villagers. If the local government did not handle this incident appropriately, the central government could lose its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens; for the local government, if they did not handle this matter carefully, their political career would be in peril. Therefore, this can explain why, in the short term, the Fuyou villagers' protests were successful.

Overall, the short-term outcome of this protest fits with the hypothesis, which is "the more violent a land protest, the higher the likelihood of success." But, as discussed earlier, the long-term outcome of this protest did not fit with the hypothesis.

6.3 Medium level of violence (Guangji, Shangpu and Liantang)

The climax of the Guangji case happened on October 22, 2013. On that day, hundreds of police clashed with hundreds of Guangji villagers. Twenty-four officials (mostly police officials¹⁰⁶) were taken by villagers and held as hostages. This incident caused forty officials (mostly police officers) to be injured, including three who were seriously injured (Jin, October 30, 2013); over thirty villagers were wounded, including two who were seriously injured (Wang, April 24, 2014); and thirty cars were damaged by villagers (Jin, October 30, 2013).

One of my interviewees described the situation when the villagers captured two students from the local government side,

"Some of them were real police, but some of them were not real police. There were two girls among the police; we later found out they were students of Yunnan University of Finance and Economics (YNUFE), but they dressed like police, dressing in police uniforms and wearing helmets. They were in front of the real police and confronting villagers. At that time, we did not know their real identities, and we thought they were

¹⁰⁶ Some of them were not real police officers but were still students (Interviewee E, February 19, 2019).

real police, so they were beaten by villagers because they were no match for the villagers, as the villagers had more strength because they are used to farm work. So, they were held as hostages by villagers. After the villagers took off their helmets, the villagers realized they were not the police, but students. So, the villagers stopped beating them. Then, they were kept as hostages to pressure the local government to release protest leaders that were arrested earlier that day I asked them why they were there with the police. They said they were students of YNUFE, and the local government asked them to be interns but did not tell them the details and the risk of this job. They dressed in the police uniforms without knowing the risks of doing so, and they were taken to Guangji village with the police, and they were not aware what they were up for We wanted their parents to pressure the local government and the university to save them so we could exchange the hostages with the police/government. We said that it was irresponsible for the government to let these students go in the front of the real police, and in doing so they were putting their lives in danger because many villagers were farmers who had their weapons—steel bars used in the greenhouse. If some villagers did not control themselves and beat these students to death, the consequences for this would have been unimaginable.....” (Interviewee E, February 19, 2019).

The scale of violence in the Guangji case is coded as “medium,” and both sides (villagers and the police) used violence during the clash.¹⁰⁷ The villagers were very united during the process as is shown by the recollection of the village committee members. The outcome of this protest was successful.

After the conflict happened, both the central government and the Yunnan provincial government learned of this incident. The then-minister of the Ministry of Public Security of

¹⁰⁷ According to Jin (2013), 41 police officers were injured during the clash on October 22, 2013, including 3 who were badly injured. At least 20 Guangji villagers were injured during the conflict (Interviewee F, February 19, 2019).

the PRC gave instructions (*pishi*) on this matter, and the then-secretary of Yunnan province also gave instructions on this matter. On the second day of the clash, the Communist Party secretary of Kunming city, who was also a member of the Standing Committee of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee (SCYPPC henceforth), along with another member of the SCYPPC, and the head of the commission for political and legal affairs of the CPC Yunnan provincial committee went to Guangji village to deal with this incident (Police Command Division of Kunming Public Security Bureau, October 23, 2013). The provincial government intervened in this incident, and, in the end, the Guangji villagers succeeded in their protest.

Why did the violence lead to a successful ending for the Guangji villagers in this case? Although no one died in this case, the Guangji villagers took twenty-four government officials, most of whom were police officers, including two students, as hostages on October 22, 2013. The stakes were high for the authorities. Also, the Guangji villagers were very united on this matter, as over eighty percent of the villagers were against the land expropriation, and they elected eleven villagers as their delegates. After the local government released two villagers who had been arrested, these two villagers did not keep their word to persuade the villagers to release those officials who were kept as hostages. Then, the local government side lost their bargaining chips with the villagers. To rescue those government officials, their only choice was to make concessions to villagers' demands, which were to give up expropriating villagers' lands for the *gudian wangguo* project. Finally, after an over twenty-four-hour standoff, under pressure from the central government,¹⁰⁸ the local government gave in to the villagers' demands. If the central government had not intervened, this incident could have ended with the villagers either being badly hurt or dead if the local

¹⁰⁸ According to inside information provided by one of my interviewees, after the clash happened on October 22, 2013, the central government, in this case the minister of the Ministry of the Public Security, gave instructions (*pishi*) on this incident, because the minister of the Ministry of the Public Security is a state councillor, so he can represent the central government.

government had chosen to use force to rescue those hostages. On the other hand, the situation for those hostages could have become even worse, and they might have died if the local government had not acted in time to solve this problem. Either way, this was not good for the central government, because it would either lose its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens if villagers had died during the conflict, or some government officials would have lost their lives in this incident. Although it did not reach a “high” level of violence, this case fits perfectly with my second hypothesis: “the more violent a land protest, the higher the likelihood of success.”

The Shangpu protest started on February 22, 2013. Two days later, thousands of Shangpu villagers clashed with about one hundred thugs who were hired by a company that leased Shangpu villagers' lands in January 2013. This protest escalated on March 10, 2013 when 3,000 security forces cracked down on this protest using tear gas, truncheons, and stun grenades, causing injuries to thirty to forty people (The Daily Telegraph, March 12, 2013; Canberra Times, March 12, 2013; The Guardian, March 12, 2013; China Daily, March 13, 2013). The scale of violence of this protest is “medium”, as over twenty-five people were injured.¹⁰⁹ Both sides (villagers and the police) used force. This protest was successful, as the court nullified the land contract, and the village head was arrested (The Guardian, March 12, 2013; Democracy & Legal System Times, April 14, 2014). Another sixteen people were detained.

This protest was successful because, after this incident happened, the Jiexi county government chose to intervene by dispatching county government officials, township government officials and village cadres. Altogether, 300 people went to Shangpu village to

¹⁰⁹ This number of injuries is from the villagers' side; we did not know how many police officers were injured. The local government said the injuries from that conflict were only four people, see (Jiexi county government information office, March 11, 2013). According to international media reports, about sixty villagers were injured during the second clash, see (Canberra Times, March 13, 2013).

do villagers' thought work (BBC Chinese, March 1, 2013). Because this protest was reported on by both domestic media and international media, and as this incident happened during the *lianghui* period, the pressure put on the Guangdong provincial leader to solve this problem smoothly was high at that time.

Why did violence lead to a successful ending for the Shangpu villagers? Limited media reports suggest that the timing of this protest may have had an impact on its outcome. When the second clash happened during the *lianghui* period, the Publicity Department of the Communist Party issued a reporting ban for domestic media (China Digital Times, March 16, 2013). This also suggests that the central government had started to intervene in this incident. Because many people were injured in the second clash and because it happened at a sensitive period, the central government chose to intervene in this affair. The intervention from the central government put pressure on the local government to handle this matter appropriately, inducing the local government to deal with this matter carefully and perhaps even to give in to villagers' demands, such as nullifying the leasing contract and punishing those local cadres who failed at their jobs. Therefore, this case fits with my second hypothesis, though no one died during the conflict: "The more violent a land protest, the higher the likelihood of success. In turn, the less violent a land protest, the less likely it is to succeed." This observation is in line with Chen's (2009) study, which suggests that the timing of a protest matters.

At the beginning of the Liantang protest, villagers were peaceful, as they chose to petition to different levels of government, from the sub-district government to the district government and the municipal government. But all those governments did not give them a satisfying answer to their request. Thus, on July 7, 2014, the tensions between villagers and the local government escalated into violence.

On that day, the police arrested some protest leaders for gambling behavior. however, the villagers did not believe those people were truly caught gambling; they thought the real reason for their arrest was because they were their protest leaders. So, later, thousands of villagers gathered at the stage of Liantang village. They went to the Liantang police station and took three police officers as hostages and took them to a “shame parade” in Liantang village. Then, they blocked a national road, and they clashed with hundreds of police officers later that night. This clash caused forty-seven police officers to be injured, dozens of villagers were injured, and eleven police vehicles were damaged. During the first violent confrontation, both sides used violence, but because the villagers held three police officers as hostages, it is fair to say that the villagers' side used violence first.

The second violent clash happened two months later, on September 26, 2014. On that day, thousands of villagers walked about fifteen kilometers to the Shantou municipal complex and demanded that the municipal government investigate the issue of their lands. They wanted the municipal government leaders to talk with them directly, but no one came out of the municipal government building and spoke to them, so they started to shake the gate of this building. Eventually, they were fighting with hundreds of police officers. Both sides received injuries during the clash, and, according to some accounts, ninety-five police officials were injured during the conflict. There was no exact number of how many villagers got hurt, but from the photos shown, many villagers were bleeding after this clash, and according to some Chinese-language international media outlets, about thirty villagers were injured in the conflict.

In terms of the scale of violence, the Liantang case is coded as “medium” because more than twenty-five people were injured during this conflict, but no one was killed.¹¹⁰ Although

¹¹⁰ There is no exact number of how many villagers were injured during the protest from domestic media reports, but some Chinese-language international media reported that about twenty people were injured during the protest on September 26, 2014.

the Liantang case reached a “medium” level of violence, this protest did not end with a successful result for its villagers as the previous two cases did. The main reason why I believe it was not successful is that during these two clashes, villagers used violence first, especially during the first clash on July 7, 2014. Thus, this gives the local government an excuse to suppress them and frame this incident in their favor to China's domestic media. Because the villagers used violence first, they lost the moral ground to protect their lands, as using violence is not legitimate in a society that treats peace as propriety for the society. Although Chinese society sometimes does have sympathy in cases in which the vulnerable side used violence to air grievances or achieve justice such as in the Ji Zhongxing case,¹¹¹ Jia Jinglong case,¹¹² or Zhang Koukou case,¹¹³ the public generally has a lower tolerance for people who use violence to protect their rights. As a result, this gave the local government a good opportunity to frame this incident in their favor, though those affected villagers did not recognize the local government’s framing. But, in China's society, where many things happen every day, after the municipal government held a press conference and domestic media reported on what the local government had said, Liantang villagers lost their chance to draw domestic media attention and air their grievances in front of the public. Hence, in the end, the Liantang villagers lost this battle.

¹¹¹ Ji Zhongxing was beaten by some public security members in Dongguan, Guangdong province in 2005 and became disabled. He had petitioned to local government three times for justice for his treatment by the local government, and he was not satisfied with the result. So, in 2013, he went to Beijing Airport and set off an explosion at the airport. He was injured from the explosion. The court sentenced him to six years of imprisonment for his crime.

¹¹² Jia Jinglong’s home was demolished by the local government through force in 2013. His fiancée cancelled their wedding because of this incident. So, he went to petition but did not get any result. He killed the village committee director of his village, who he thought was responsible for his home’s demolition in 2015. He was sentenced to the death penalty by the court in 2015.

¹¹³ In 1996, Zhang Koukou’s mother was beaten to death by two brothers. One of the culprits, who was only a teenager at that time, received a seven-year sentence from the court but was released three years earlier. Zhang’s family received about 10,000 yuan in compensation from the culprits’ family. But, in 2018, Zhang Koukou went after these two brothers who killed his mother over twenty years ago and killed them both as well as their father. Zhang Koukou was sentenced to death by the court and was executed in 2019.

Secondly, some protest leaders made mistakes by participating in gambling activities,¹¹⁴ as this gave the local government a perfect chance to arrest them and use this as an excuse for explaining why so many villagers joined the second violent confrontation. Hence, in the end, although the scale of violence in this protest was “medium,” this protest did not succeed. Therefore, this case does not fit with my hypothesis, but it may point to the importance of who uses violence first. If the villagers’ side use violence first, the chances for the villagers to succeed appear to be lower. Thus, this case suggests that not only does the level of violence matter, but also which side uses violence first matters when deciding the ultimate outcome of a protest.

6.4 Low level of violence (Tianmu)

The Tianmu case represents the low level of violence category. Although the Tianmu case is the one that lasted the longest, it was a relatively peaceful protest. It first started on January 12, 2015, when thousands of villagers gathered at the front of the Tianmu village committee, and protest leaders gave speeches to their fellow villagers to encourage them to join their cause and fight against the current Tianmu village cadres.

From January 12, 2015 to January 30, 2016, thousands of villagers gathered at the front of the village committee and listened to protest leaders' speeches; some protest leaders even dressed in traditional petitioning garb¹¹⁵ while they were delivering their speeches. The local government did not intervene much during this period. Although on March 25, 2015 and December 30, 2015 the police department ordered to finish the assembly, villagers did not stop their protest. Then, on January 30, 2016, about one thousand police were dispatched to disperse this protest, with dozens of protest leaders being arrested, and some villagers getting

¹¹⁴ Gambling culture is prevalent in Guangdong province, and Macao is next to Guangdong province.

¹¹⁵ Traditional petitioning garb has a big Chinese character “冤” (*yuan*) (which means wronged) on it.

injured during this process. Two key protest leaders stayed in prison for over five hundred days. Other protest leaders were arrested and remained in prison or a detention center for a shorter time.

This protest failed because it involved a low level of violence.

Also, no domestic media reported on this protest, so most Chinese people did not know about this incident. As a result, the central government did not have any urgent need to intervene in this case. Thus, in the end, Tianmu villagers did not succeed with this protest.

In terms of who used violence in this protest, some villagers were injured when about one thousand police came to disperse the villagers' protest on January 30, 2016, so it is fair to say that the police used violence in this protest. Also, villagers in this protest were generally moderate as they did not use violence against those heavy-handed force on that day.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the role of violence in affecting land protest outcomes.

When the level of violence is high, especially when protesters died during the conflict,¹¹⁶ the outcome of that protest tended to be successful. This was because when a high level of violence occurred, it was more likely to be reported on by domestic media, making it more likely to draw the central government's attention and lead to intervention. This was confirmed by the Fuyou case. Although it seems that Fuyou villagers initiated violence during the “10·14” Incident, compared to the opposite side, which was better equipped and had the advantages of numbers, they were the weaker side, and they were the victims of land expropriation processes. Therefore, in the eyes of public opinion, they enjoyed some kind of moral ground, as reflected by the majority of domestic media's reports of this incident. So, in the end, Fuyou villagers won this protest.

¹¹⁶ In the Fuyou case, the majority of the deaths were from the developers' side, which had the local government's support. At least two villagers died as a result of that conflict.

It also showed that although violence can induce a favorable outcome for villagers in the short term, it does not necessarily mean it will also ensure a good result for villagers in the long term, as there may be other factors (e.g., the cost for the local government to give-in, whether or not the villagers were united, etc.) that can influence the outcome in the long-term. Thus, although Cai's (2010) theory can explain most of the cases, it fell short of recognizing the difference between short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes.

When the level of violence is “medium,” the outcome of that protest also tends to be successful, but under some conditions it may end in failure. Two of the three cases (Guangji and Shangpu) coded as involving a medium level of violence ended with successful outcomes for protesters. One case (Liantang) did not end in a successful result because during these two clashes, the villagers’ side used violence, which gave the local government side the perfect excuse to frame the protest in their favor. So, the conditions that will not bring a good result for villagers are if villagers use violence first and when the local government finds a reason to justify suppressing the protestors and can frame the issue in their favor. For the Guangji case, even though it also belongs to the “medium” category of violence, because at least two villagers and three police officer were severely injured during the clash (Wang, 2014; Jin, 2014), the severity of the situation is close to “high” level of violence; thus it explained why this case ended with a successful outcome for Guangji villagers. Thus, although Cai’s (2010) theory can explain many cases, under some conditions, villagers’ use of violence will not bring a favorable outcome for themselves, especially when they choose to use violence first.

When the level of violence is low, the outcome of the protest tends to fail. This is because if there is no violence, both the domestic media and central government are not going to pay attention to their cause, and the central government is less likely to choose to intervene; therefore, the likelihood of achieving a successful result is low, as shown by the Tianmu case.

Thus, generally speaking, Cai (2010), Chen (2009, 2012), and Li's (2016) theories stand up quite well, especially Cai's (2010) argument that the more violent a protest is, the more likely the central government is to intervene. However, he failed to recognize that there were differences between short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes. In some cases, such as the Fuyou case, the villagers won in the short term, but they lost in the long term. Cai (2010) and Chen (2009, 2012) also did not realize that villagers' use of violence will not always lead to a favorable outcome for themselves, especially when they use violence first, and the local government finds an excuse to "fool" them as the Liantang case showed.

Overall, the findings of this research are more in line with Yang's (2016:2190) conclusion, which is that "violence is a necessary but insufficient condition for large-scale non-environmental protests' success."

Chapter Seven: The Impact of Timing on Protest Outcomes

7.1 Introduction

Scholars have found that if an environmental protest happened at the early stage of a developmental project in China, the local government was more likely to give in and adopt tension reduction strategies, but if an environmental protest occurred at a later stage of a project, the local government tended to use a suppression strategy to push that project forward and ignore protesters' grievances (Li, 2016). This analysis is based on cost-benefit analysis from the viewpoint of the local government of the area where the environmental protest occurred. If the protest happens at the beginning of a project, the cost for the local government to give up this project is small because the local government or private companies will have little money and resources invested in the project by that point. However, if a protest occurs at the end stage of a project, at that point, a lot of money/resources have been invested in the project, and the cost for the local government/company to give it up is high. Therefore, the local government has a strong incentive to use force to suppress those protesters and finish the project. This analysis not only applies to environmental protests in China, but I would argue that it also fits with land protests in China. In this chapter, I will examine how the timing of a large-scale protest affects the outcome of the protest.

Table 7.1 summarizes the relationship between the timing of a protest and the outcome of that protest. As we can see, two incidents (Guangji and Shangpu) happened in the early stages of the project, and both protests succeeded in the end. One incident (Fuyou) happened in the middle stage of that project, and because of the occurrence of violence, this protest also ended with a successful outcome for the villagers.¹¹⁷ Two incidents happened at the end stage

¹¹⁷ As mentioned in previous chapters, the outcome is defined within a one-year frame. The long-term outcome for Fuyou villagers is a failure or a standstill at best.

of the project, and both protests ended up failing. In the next part, I will describe the details of each protest.

Table 7.1 The timing of the protest and the outcomes

Incident name	Timing of the protest	Outcome
Guangji	early stage	successful
Shangpu	early stage	successful
Fuyou	middle stage	successful
Liantang	end stage	failed
Tianmu	end stage	failed

7.2 Protests occurring at the early stage of the project (Guangji and Shangpu)

As the summary of the events in Guangji in Chapter Four highlights, the protests happened at the beginning of the *gudian wangguo* project before the local government started to expropriate their lands. It is crucial that Guangji villagers agreed early on that the local government's compensation was too low compared to their current income, so they needed to protect their lands from the local government. Moreover, because they became familiar with national and local laws and the process of land expropriation, they knew which documents the government had to produce. Because this project was only approved by the Yunnan provincial government, and they did not get the state council's approval, the villagers knew the Yunnan provincial government's behavior had violated the < Land Administration Law >, and they felt justified in protesting. Guangji protesters ultimately won, as after the 10·22 Incident the Jinning county government promised to give up expropriating their lands for the *gudian wangguo* project. The local government gave in after the 10·22 Incident because this project had not yet started, and the losses experienced due to giving in to those villagers was relatively small. They only needed to change the plan for the *gudian wangguo* project and exclude Guangji village from the plan.

Like the Guangji case, the Shangpu case¹¹⁸ also occurred at the beginning stage of the project. In January 2013, a company named Wanfeng Investment Development Co., Ltd (Wanfeng company hereafter) signed a land leasing contract with the Shangpu village committee. Because this contract was not approved by Shangpu villagers, Shangpu villagers started to protest against this contract from February 11 onwards. On February 22, 2013, the first clash happened between Shangpu villagers and the developer side. On that day, Shangpu villagers defeated about one hundred thugs that had been hired by the developer's side. The villagers also burned 29 cars left behind by those thugs. The tensions between villagers and the local government/developer's side remained high between February 22, 2013 and March 10, 2013, when the second major conflict happened. On that day, the local government dispatched 3,000 police and armed police (*wujing*) to Shangpu village and dispersed the protest, causing about sixty villagers to be injured.

Nonetheless, according to China's domestic media reports, this protest ended with a successful outcome for Shangpu villagers, as the county government/court nullified the land leasing contract. Also, the Shangpu village committee director was arrested (The Guardian, March 12, 2013; Wang, April 14, 2014). The local government deposed both the Communist Party secretary and the mayor of the Mianhu township government after the second clash. In addition, the local government arrested fifteen people by March 14, 2013, and another twenty-three suspects were wanted by the police (Zheng, 2013). Wu Guicun, the main culprit of this protest, was sentenced to twenty-five years of imprisonment, and another accomplice received a nineteen-year sentence (Lin, Lin, Fan, Zhang, and Lin, July 21, 2014).

One of the reasons for Shangpu villagers' success was that this protest happened at the beginning stage of the building of the industrial park, which occupied Shangpu villagers' four

¹¹⁸ This part mainly referred to journalist Wang Han's report, which was published in < Democracy & Legal System Times > on April 14, 2014.

hundred *mu* of lands. This protest only happened one month after the Shangpu villagers had lost their lands to the village cadre, which signed the land leasing contract with Wanfeng company secretly, so the cost for the local government to reverse this contract was low because the local government did not need to invest any money to satisfy those discontented villagers.

7.3 At the middle stage of the project (Fuyou)

The Fuyou case happened at the middle stage of the project. In 2010, the Fanya Project¹¹⁹ started to occupy Fuyou village lands for construction.¹²⁰ At that time, there were not any land expropriation agreements between villagers and the developers¹²¹ behind the Fanya Project. On July 4, 2011, the Fanya Project started the first phase of its construction. In February 2012, the Fuyou village committee announced through its speaker that the Fanya Project was going to expropriate Fuyou villagers' lands. Some villagers asked the village committee whether or not the local government had approval (from upper-level government, such as the provincial government or central government) to expropriate their lands. Yet, the villagers did not get any answer from the village committee. Thus, some villagers opposed the expropriation of the lands at the very beginning.

On March 17, 2012, the village committee posted a bulletin that showed that the Fanya Project was going to expropriate 1730 *mu* of Fuyou villagers' lands, and those lands involved eight small groups from Fuyou village.¹²² In the announcement, the village committee stipulated that the deadline for villagers to clear their crops and ground attachments was

¹¹⁹The full name of the Fanya project is the Yunnan Fanya Business Logistics Center for Industrial Products; henceforth, I will use Fanya Project for simplicity.

¹²⁰ This case was mainly based on Wang and Guo's work (2016).

¹²¹ According to the media's report, in the beginning, three "developers" were behind the Fanya Project: the Shiyan Chamber of Commerce, Chengdu Chamber of Commerce, and Fujian Province's Z-Stone Co., Ltd.

¹²² As I mentioned earlier, there are eleven small groups in Fuyou village.

March 21, 2012, and if the villagers did not clear their lands, the local government would do it themselves, and villagers would not be compensated for the loss. But, by March 28, 2012, the majority of the villagers involved had not cleared their lands for the expropriation. So, the Jincheng township government organized a group of people to clear the lands, such as by bulldozing anything on the ground, which was met with villagers' resistance. A clash occurred between the local government officials' side and Fuyou villagers, and some villagers were hurt in the conflict.

On March 21, 2012, the deadline for villagers to clear their lands by themselves, eight villager representatives went to the Department of Land and Resources of Yunnan Province (DLRYP hence after) to petition. Their question was whether the (provincial) government had approved the Fanya project's land expropriation plan. Yet, they did not get an answer from the DLRYP, as the DLRYP passed on those villagers' petition to its subordinate department (Kunming City Bureau of Land and Resources) to answer the villagers' question. But, the Kunming City Bureau of Land and Resources also did not reply to them. Although the Fuyou villagers did not agree with the land expropriation plan, they accepted the local government's compensation at the price of 43,000 *yuan* per person for giving up 1730 *mu* of land to the Fanya Project.¹²³ The majority of villagers accepted this money, not because they accepted the land expropriation plan, but for the loss of clearing the lands.¹²⁴ Yet, they signed their names on a blank paper. But the local government thought the villagers had accepted the land expropriation compensation standard because they now had the villagers' signatures on a blank piece of paper, so they could put what they wanted on that paper as proof showing that the villagers had agreed to the land expropriation compensation standard. This compensation

¹²³ As I mentioned earlier, in reality, the Fanya Project occupied over 3,000 *mu* of Fuyou villagers' lands for that project. But on paper, this project only expropriated 1,730 *mu* of Fuyou villagers' lands.

¹²⁴ The loss of destroying the crops on the lands and other infrastructure such as greenhouses on the ground.

was one-off, and the local government promised to give Fuyou villagers *fanzufei* for those whose lands had been expropriated by the local government (Huai, 2014), (Interviewee L, February 22, 2019).

On September 4, 2012, villagers went to the DLRYP to petition again. On September 6, 2012, villagers went to the Yunnan People's Procuratorate to petition. On September 10, 2012, villagers went to the Yunnan Provincial Public Security Department to petition. On October 31, 2012, three large projects at the Yunnan Fanya Business Logistics Center for Industrial Products (Fanya Project) started their construction. When those projects were started at Fuyou village or places around Fuyou village, villagers did not cause trouble at that time because they were afraid of the developers' side. After that event, villagers continued their petition activities: On January 22, 2013, they went to the Yunnan People's Political Consultative Committee to petition; on January 31, 2013, they went to the Yunnan Provincial Public Security Department to petition again; and, on June 30, 2013, they went to the Yunnan Provincial Bureau for Letters and Calls to Petition. All those petitions did not bring Fuyou villagers any information about whether the Fanya Project had the central government's approval for expropriating their farmlands.

In May 2014, Fuyou villagers found that the Fanya Project had occupied one of their main roads connecting the village and the provincial Highway 102. The villagers did not receive any notice indicating that the road was included in the Fanya Project, so they were angry with the developers, and they were not satisfied with the compensation package. So, when they realized that one of the main roads was occupied by the developers, they tried to stop the construction of the Fanya Project. On June 3, 2014, the developers' side clashed with the Fuyou villagers. According to villagers and journalists, about one thousand people were involved in this conflict, including about five hundred to six hundred people from the

developers' side (most of whom were thugs recruited by the developers' side). Dozens were hurt in this conflict, but the villagers won the battle. Since then, the construction at Fanya Project has stopped by the developers. In the meantime, the villagers have continued their cause through petitions to different levels of government. On September 10, 2014, they went to the Kunming municipal bureau of state land and resources to petition and to verify whether the Fanya Project had got approval from the central government or the provincial government of Yunnan and, if so, where were the documents. They received no answer. Again, villagers went to the Kunming municipal bureau of state land and resources to petition and ask the same question as in September, but they got the same response as last time. Four days after this petition, the "10·14" Incident happened. The result of that event was at least eight people killed and dozens injured. Since then, the Fanya Project has been stopped indefinitely on the Fuyou village's territory.¹²⁵

In the Fuyou case, the land expropriation of the Fanya Project at Fuyou village started as early as 2010, but at that time, the villagers did not know what the land expropriation was for, and they did not get any compensation from the local government or developers. Since 2012, the local government has openly expropriated Fuyou villagers' lands for the Fanya Project, and the local government forged the villagers' consent for the land expropriation. The villagers were not satisfied with the compensation standards/package of this land expropriation plan. They accepted the money provided by the local government, but they thought the money was only for the compensation for the ruined crops and construction on their lands, and not for losing control of their lands. Gradually, they realized the compensation money they received was not enough to maintain their current living standard in the long term. They also came to learn that the local government was colluding with the

¹²⁵ The Fanya Project also involved other villages' lands, but not as much as the Fuyou village, so a small part of the whole Fanya Project was able to continue the construction after the "10·14" Incident and was finished by the time of my fieldwork in February 2019.

developers to cheat villagers because the local government did not get official land expropriation approval from the central government as the <Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China > required. The Fuyou villagers were inspired by the behavior of their neighboring villagers at Guangji in October 2013, as they successfully won their battle against the local government for giving up the land expropriation plan for the *Gudian wangguo* Project completely. The result of this protest, however, was not as satisfying as the Guangji case because their protest happened at least two years after the Fanya Project begun, and when the protest occurred, a lot of construction had already been done by the developers. A lot of investment had been made in this project, so the stakes for both the developers and the local government were very high compared with the Guangji case if the local government decided to give in to villagers' demands, such as raising the compensation standards for the Fuyou villagers. Yet, in the short term, Fuyou villagers won this protest, as the local government stopped the construction of the Fanya Project, and the local government promised to give Fuyou villagers *fanzufei* by March of each year, and they received one year's *fanzufei* after the land protest. However, in the long term, the Fuyou villagers were not the winner of this protest, but neither were the local government or the developers, as the Fuyou villagers never got back their expropriated lands, and after receiving one year's *fanzufei* after the "10·14" Incident, the local government failed to deliver the *fanzufei* from the years 2014 to 2018. Also, when I was doing my fieldwork at Fuyou village, the village committee was trying to use the five years (2014–2018) of *fanzufei* to induce Fuyou villagers to give up the last lands they still controlled by themselves and hand them over to the village committee. Most villagers were against this policy, but a few dared to organize another protest again, which was dangerous, considering that those protest leaders in the "10·14" Incident received very severe sentences from the courts. One of my informants told me that only about twenty families refused to hand back their lands to the village committee, and the

rest complied with the village committee. Thus, in the long term, the Fuyou villagers were not the winners, as the local government was able to take advantage of the Fuyou villagers' weakness and control almost all the Fuyou villagers' lands.

7.4 At the end stage of the project (Liantang and Tianmu)

The Liantang case fits with the category of "at the end stage of the project." To be specific, there was not a particular project involved. Still, the protest happened as a result of a pattern of behavior that lasted about twenty years; that is, the local government was selling Liantang villagers' lands to private developers at a relatively low price, and the Liantang villagers did not get a penny from those deals.

Liantang village has a complicated history compared to most of China's villages; this can be seen from its history of changing the names and size of its communities. Liantang village has a long history and can date back to one thousand years ago. As a village, it has too many villagers to manage from the perspective of administration management, so in 1997, the Liantang village was divided into five small villages or neighborhood committees (*juweihui*): Lianrong, Lianhua, Lianfeng, Lianguang, and Lianmei. At that time, most of the villagers' lands were not divided into five communities, and into each family as the household contract responsibility system (*jiating lianchan chengbao zerenzhi*)¹²⁶ required. Instead, the local government created a Liantang village collective assets management leading group (LVCAMLG henceforth) to manage many collective assets, including lands. Thus, the majority of Liantang villagers' lands had not been controlled by Liantang villagers but by the LVCAMLG since 1997. This leading group was controlled by village cadres,

¹²⁶ China's Reform and Opening-up policy began with the implementation of the household contract responsibility system in the rural area in 1978. This policy divided those lands in the rural area into each household to stimulate villagers' initiative in promoting the efficiency of the yielding of the lands. But in rare cases, some villages did not implement this policy.

neighborhood committee directors, and other government officials. They had been selling/leasing out Liantang villagers' lands during the last twenty years without getting Liantang villagers' consent, and they did not give those villagers any compensation for selling their lands. As one of my interviewees said:

"Many of these problems that villagers are protesting date back to 20 years ago.

Although Liantang village as a village does not exist anymore, there was a Liantang village collective assets management leading group that controls many collective lands and other assets (this group had dissolved by December 2014.)In the past few years, the mountains and the land (in our village/community) have been taken away by local government (village/community level) and sold to private companies. These mountains have been dug up and look ugly. But us villagers did not get a penny from these corrupt officials. Where is the money for selling our lands and mountains?"

(Interviewee B, March 4, 2019)

Thus, when the Liantang protest happened on October 25, 2012, the LVCAMLG had already sold/leased out many Liantang villagers' lands to private companies/persons. Because those transactions were protected by the < Contract Law of the People's Republic of China >, it is difficult for the local government to reverse those contracts. So, I define the situation at Liantang village as occurring at the "end-stage of the project," although there was no particular project involved that triggered this protest. Rather, it is the local government's pattern of behavior of selling/leasing Liantang villagers' lands without their consent and not providing them with any compensation in the last twenty years. The price for the local government to reverse those lands selling/releasing contracts was very high, as those contracts were protected by the <Contract Law> of the PRC. So, the outcome of this protest for those villagers was a failure, as the local government did not give back their

lands, nor was the local government able to provide them with a significant amount of compensation for selling/leasing their valuable lands.

The Tianmu case is another example that fits in the category of “at the end stage of the project”. Also, the situation at Tianmu village was similar to the Liantang case, as there was no particular project involved, but rather the local government was selling their lands and not giving the villagers any benefits. In 1985, Mu Xiangyou became the Tianmu village deputy party secretary and general manager of the agricultural, industrial and commercial company¹²⁷ of Tianmu village. In 1986, Mu Xiangyou was appointed as the Tianmu village party branch secretary, a position he held until September 2018. In 1987, he was elected as a member of the NPC, a position he held until March 2018 (Yang, 2007). Since 1986, he had been the most powerful person in Tianmu village, and many policies were made under his guidance. Because Tianmu village’s position is very important and due to China’s fast speed of urbanization in the last four decades, Tianmu village had become increasingly important because of its location, which connects Tianjin’s urban area and the suburb areas and now has become an urban area itself. At the same time, the lands have become a scarce resource for urban development. During the last three decades, since Mu Xiangyou became the “first fiddle” of Tianmu village, Tianmu villagers have lost thousands of *mu* of their land. Some of the villagers thought the Tianmu villagers sacrificed themselves for many infrastructure projects that were sponsored by the government. As one of my interviewees stated:

¹²⁷ The agricultural, industrial and commercial company of Tianmu village was founded in 1986. It controls collectively owned assets, including thirty-plus collectively owned enterprises in the 1980s and 1990s (Wei, 2017), and those collectively owned enterprises employed about 1,700 Tianmu villagers. According to *Tianmu cunzhi* (the local records of Tianmu village), 2007, there were fifteen collectively owned enterprises by 2003. But by 2015, only one collectively owned enterprise was left (Wei, 2017). Tianmu villagers were discontent with the fact that all but one collectively owned enterprise had collapsed because of those village cadres’ bad management.

“There was 7,000 *mu* of land at Tianmu village in 1948, but now we only have about 1,000 *mu* of land left, the majority of which are villagers’ homesteads. Many of our lands were expropriated by those infrastructure projects sponsored by the government. Us villagers made a great contribution to our country, but we received little compensation for our sacrifice at that time.” (Interviewee BB, February 3, 2019)

The majority of Tianmu villagers blamed those corrupt village cadres for selling their lands without asking their opinions or giving them any compensation for selling/leasing their lands to private companies or businesspersons. One of my interviewees said:

“Tianmu village is our root; the village committee should provide each villager with a suitable job as it did during the commune period. The village committee sold off all of our lands. Where can we villagers find jobs? We are farmers; we should at least have a piece of land to grow. If we have a piece of land, we can grow our vegetables. The problem is that we do not have any land left now. When the local government needs money, the township government and village committee have a discussion, and then they sell a piece of land off. They will not think about villagers when they are making decisions to sell our lands.” (Interviewee Z, February 2, 2019)

Some of the protesters were unsatisfied with the compensation they received from the local government, which expropriated villagers’ lands for infrastructure projects such as roads. One interviewee said:

“My case is different from theirs,¹²⁸ but what is the same is the unfairness involved. My house was not expropriated by the ‘urban village reconstruction project,’ but, instead, it

¹²⁸Many of those protest participants were people who were forcefully evicted from their houses by the local government. This was the trigger of the Tianmu protest, which started on January 12, 2015.

was expropriated for the ‘expanding the Jingjin Road Project.’ After I signed a contract with the local government, I saw a local government document that showed the compensation price for expropriating my house should be 28,000 *yuan* per square meter.¹²⁹ But, in reality, I only received 5,250 *yuan* per square meter. My case happened several years ago. My house is about sixty square meters, so I only received about 400,000 *yuan* as compensation, which means I lost 1,200,000 *yuan* for losing my home and homestead. I think the village committee embezzled my money. Where is the justice?” (Interviewee T, January 31, 2019)

The Tianmu village committee selling villagers’ lands without their consent and not giving them any compensation for selling/leasing their lands provided the most grievances and greatest motivation for Tianmu villagers to participate in this protest. But, the trigger of this protest was forced eviction, which started as early as 2011. As one interviewee put it:

“We are against both corruption and Mu Xiangyou. Mu Xiangyou controlled the power in Tianmu village for more than 30 years. Not only has he never given a penny to villagers these years for selling our valuables, but he also forcefully evicted us from our houses during the recent urban village reconstruction process. Besides the above-mentioned, he also beat us when evicting us from our houses..... He started to use force during the house demolition process in 2011, and he has forcefully evicted about 50 households in Tianmu village since 2011. Villagers began to protest when they reached the end of their forbearance of Mu’s behavior. Take me as an example. I started to protest after I was evicted from my house by Mu, and because I am articulate, I was ‘elected’ as one of the leaders of this protest.” (Interviewee O, January 31, 2019)

¹²⁹ The compensation price, including compensation for the house itself and the homestead, in which the building was based.

During the last twenty to thirty years, the village committee under Mu Xiangyou's influence sold off thousands of Tianmu villagers' lands, but never gave them any compensation. When the Tianmu protest erupted in January 2015, those land transactions had been completed, and because of the <Contract Law> of the PRC, it is difficult for the local government to reverse those land selling/releasing contracts. So, the outcome of this protest came without any surprise, as it ended with failure for those protesters. Further, Mu Xiangyou is still free of investigation, even under the massive anti-corruption campaign launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013. Also, the Tianmu villagers have not received fair compensation for both losing their lands and their houses and homesteads for the restructuring village project.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the role of timing—i.e. at which stage of a development project large-scale land protests happened. If the protests happened at the early stage of a project, such as in the Guangji case and Shangpu case, the chances for protesters to achieve their goals were much greater, as little money had been invested by that point. If the protest happened in the middle of the project, it was more difficult to predict the outcome; it could be successful, as in the case of Fuyou. But that case also showed that a positive short-term outcome might not necessarily mean a positive long-term outcome for protesters. Moreover, if it is financially or symbolically costly for the local government to give in to protesters; for instance, if important sums of money have already been allocated, or if reversing the project would mean 'losing face,' the protests could experience a failed outcome. Although my case studies did not support this prediction, in theory, it could turn out this way. Finally, if large-scale land protests happen at the end stage of a project, when villagers' lands have already been sold off for many years, the likelihood for this kind of protest to succeed is very low, as

the Tianmu and Liantang cases showed. Overall, these findings are in line with Li's (2016) findings on environmental protests in China.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

During the last three to four decades, China has experienced rapid economic growth, and the country is now the second largest economy in the world. However, this growth has taken place at the same time as many protests, many of which have been over land. So far, however, there has been limited research conducted on the factors that contribute to the outcome of those land protests, especially influential large-scale land protests.

After examining five of the largest land protests that occurred in China between 2012 and 2017, I argued in this thesis that three factors affect the outcome of large-scale land protests in China. Protests are more likely to “succeed” and achieve their goals when 1) domestic media reports on this protest are supportive or on the protesters’ side, 2) the protests are violent, and 3) when the protests occur at the early stage of the developmental project. However, as the empirical evidence that drew on 244 media reports and 30 interviews showed, these factors did not work in isolation. Rather, my research finds that those variables all happen to coincide with the successful outcomes of the protests that I investigated in this research. For instance, if a protest was violent (e.g. if some protesters were killed or severely injured at the hands of local government forces or their proxies), it was more likely to be reported on by domestic media, and the majority of those reports were supportive of those protesters. However, if a protest was peaceful, it was less likely to be reported on by domestic media, and it was less likely to draw the central or provincial government’s attention. Therefore, it was less likely to succeed. Still, that does not mean that they *must* come together for demonstrators to win, and further research with more cases might show one variable is actually more important than the others.

8.1 Contributions to the literature

Researchers have explored the importance of the influence of domestic media on protests for a long time, and most studies have focused on environmental protests in China (Mertha, 2008; Li, 2016; Cai, 2010). My research substantiates some of their findings. My research found that Mertha (2008) and Li's (2016) theories can be applied to other types of protests, namely land protests, in China. My research added to this conversation by differentiating between two roles that domestic media can play in protests: "catalyst" and "watchdog." In the Fuyou case, domestic media played the role of "catalyst" for the protest to succeed. While, in the Guangji case, domestic media played the role of "watchdog," because those protesters had already won that protest before domestic media reported on that case.

My work also contributed to the literature on protests by differentiating between short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes: i.e. if protesters "win" in the short term, that does not guarantee that long-term outcomes will also be favorable. Although protesters in Wukan and Fuyou got what they wanted in the short term, they lost in the long term after the local government decided to retaliate against those protest leaders one year or two years later when no media was paying attention to them. Previous studies tended to focus mainly on the short-term outcomes of these protests. As this study shows, it is also important to pay attention to the long-term outcomes of protests, including the strategies the local government uses to change the outcomes of those protests.

A third contribution of my work to the literature on protests is its emphasis on the role of domestic media—rather than international media—in China. International media can affect the outcome of a protest, as Hess (2015) demonstrated through the story of the Wukan protest, but domestic media can also play a significant role in determining the outcome of a protest. My research also found that not all domestic media reports are favorable to protesters. When

domestic media is on the local government's side or adopts the local government's framing, the outcome of a protest is more likely to fail.

My findings also concur with Cai (2010), Chen (2009, 2012) and Li's (2016) research, which showed that violence plays an important role in deciding the outcome of a protest: the more violent a protest is, the more likely it will be to succeed. But if villagers use violence first, it may give the local government an excuse to frame the protest more favorably to the local government's side, thereby further affecting the domestic media's reporting on this protest, which may result in the protest failing.

Lastly, my research on large-scale land protests also concurs with Li's (2016) research on environmental protests, which indicated that the timing of a protest will affect its outcome: If a protest occurs at the earlier stage of a project, it is more likely for the protesters to succeed; if the protest occurs at the end/late stage of the project or if it happens many years after the local government expropriated their lands, it is more likely that those protesters will get a failing result.

8.2 Future Research

There are some limitations to this study; for example, because I chose these five cases, but not other cases that may be more influential, or because I used the keyword "China" when I was searching the LexisNexis database, I may have missed some media reports that did not use the word "China," thus affecting my case selection as well as my data collection. Besides that, those cases that have not been reported on by either domestic media or international media or by both could not enter the sight of this research; this may lead to bias against those cases. Therefore, the findings of this study may be limited and can not be applied to all cases.

A second limitation of this research is its time-period—i.e. from 2012 to 2017, when China's domestic media's environment was relatively unrestricted compared to the years after

2017, as there has been almost no domestic media reporting on any large-scale land protest in China since 2017. Thus, the findings of this research may not be used to explain today's situation.

Since President Xi came to power in 2012, China's domestic media has changed: many investigative reporters have lost their jobs (Gao, 2018), critical reports are becoming less common, and fewer domestic media dare to report on protests. At the same time, the ability of international media to cover China's news on the ground has become more limited (Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, 2018). Since 2014, the Chinese central government has also tightened control over domestic and international NGOs. Thus, under this new environment, do my findings still stand? This is unclear, especially regarding the role of domestic media. In addition, would my findings apply to other types of protests, e.g. protests over what Yang (2016) calls "open", "half-open" or "closed" issues?

Future research would also do well to investigate why some large-scale land protests were reported on by domestic media while others were not. This may answer whether there is a "hand" that decides whether or not a protest can be reported on. Also, this issue is related to whether or not China's domestic media can decide to report on a protest. If they have the freedom to report, then their reports can indicate their influence on society. If they do not have the freedom to report, then they are just acting on the government's decision on whether or not they can report on a protest. Therefore, their influence on determining the outcome of a protest should be questioned. How does this relate to the outcome of that protest? In addition, future research may also focus on the role of social media in influencing the outcome of a large-scale land protest. Yang's (2016) research found that social media can affect the outcome of a protest (i.e., the Wukan protest). But, because of the prevalence of China's censorship (Roberts, 2018) on social media, it is difficult to collect data on China's social media. Then, if future research could find enough data to answer this question, it would enrich our understanding of social

media and its influence in authoritarian regimes. Finally, future research should ask whether my findings also apply to other authoritarian regimes. My prediction is that the later two factors may also apply to other authoritarian regimes, but the first factor (the role of domestic media) may only be found in China. My reason is that only the Chinese government can reach that level of domestic media control, while most other authoritarian regimes cannot not achieve this.

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Appendix: Additional Information on Interviews

Interview Tianmu village (January 31, 2019 – February 10, 2019)

	Date	Place	Type	Location of interview	Duration of recording	Number of respondents
1	January 31, 2019	Street intersection	General public	Tianmu village	10	1
2	January 31, 2019	Restaurant	Elite	Beichen district	30	2
3	January 31, 2019	Street intersection	General public	Tianmu village	53.50	7
4	February 1, 2019	Street intersection	General public	Tianmu village	34	1
5	February 1, 2019	Street	General public	Tianmu village	40	1
6	February 1, 2019	Street intersection	General public	Tianmu village	21	1
7	February 2, 2019	Street inside of Tianmucun	General public	Tianmu village	15	1
8	February 2, 2019	Library	Elite	Tianmu village	15	1
9	February 10, 2019	Street intersection	General public	Tianmu village	10	1

Interview Guangji village (February 19, 2019 – February 24, 2019)

	Date	Place	Type	Location of interview	Duration of recording	Number of respondents
1	February 19, 2019	Villager's home	General public/Elite	Guangji village	3 hours	6
2	February 24, 2019	Villager's home	General public/Elite	Guangji village	3 hours ¹³⁰	7

¹³⁰ The recording of this interview was not successful.

Interview Fuyou village (February 21, 2019-February 26, 2019)

	Date	Place	Type	Location of interview	Duration of recording	Number of respondents
1	February 20, 2019	Villager's home	General public	Fuyou village	60	1
2	February 22, 2019	Villager's vehicle	General public	Fuyou village	25	1
3	February 22, 2019	Villager's home	General public	Fuyou village	60	2
4	February 22, 2019	Villager's home	General public	Fuyou village	24	2
5	September 5, 2019	Wechat	General public	Wechat	30	1

Interview Liantang village (March 1, 2019 – March 9, 2019)

	Date	Place	Type	Location of interview	Duration of recording	Number of respondents
1	March 1, 2019	Restaurant	General public	Liantang village	20	1
2	March 4, 2019	Ancestral Hall	Elite	Liantang village	30	1
3	March 6, 2019	Villager's home	General public	Liantang village	52	1