Collective Resistance, Group Participation and Violence Crime

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Abstract. This paper explores the consequences of violence crime and the role of participants in collective resistance. The study found that violence not only has resulted in serious economic and social consequences, but also has a subversive impact on collective action itself. In small collective actions, violence crime is relatively easy to be prevented. But in large-scale collective resistance, it is more difficult to control violence crime. One of the most important factors that affects the occurrence and severity of violence is the situation of the participants themselves, including the rationality of ordinary participants, the existence and action strategies of the leaders/organizers, the number of activists and their execution ability. Therefore, in collective resistance, it is necessary to provide guidance for the participants through certain mechanism, so that they can keep rational in their actions and try their best to prevent violent crimes. As the result, there will be positive consequences of collective action, and the negative effect can be reduced.

1. Introduction

In contemporary China, collective resistance is common. Since the last mid-1990s, a large number of collective resistances have broken out in both urban and rural areas of China. Due to the awakening of the awareness of rights and interests, and the changes of social environment, more and more people take various collective actions to articulate their interest when facing the violating their lawful rights by commercial organizations and local governments; these actions include collective sitting in, petition, demonstration, destroying construction site and even traffic jams. In most of the collective protest actions, the participants are quite rational and the means adopted are quite moderate. However, in recent years, with the changes of social conditions such as social psychology and information dissemination channels, many collective rights protection actions began to appear serious violent crime such as beating, smashing and robbing, which caused serious social consequences. In the past, most of these events were aimed at commercial organizations and local governments, given the widespread distrust on local authorities, many people did not care to reflect on this phenomenon in depth. However, in the recent demonstrations like in Hongkong in 2019, many violent crime directly targeted some innocent people. Therefore, the phenomenon of violent crime in the collective actions needs to be deeply investigated.

2. Violence in Collective Resistance: a Relatively Neglected Controversial Issue

Collective resistance and social movements have always been important issues of social science. Researchers in this field have also developed many theoretical frameworks to explain the mechanism of these actions [1, 2]. Although the research under these theoretical paradigms has achieved fruitful results, there are still deficiencies; one of the important problems is that the mechanism and consequences of violent conflicts in the collective resistance are not fully paid attention to and examined. The main reason for this, as Mueller (2002: 22-24) pointed out, is that in order to simplify the research object, the mainstream resource mobilization theory limits the research object to the social movements that only pursue the goal of middle class articulating interests which normally avoids using violence and conflict as struggle strategy or tactics. These studies focus too much on the analysis of structure and organizations, so that they neglect the more expressive, spontaneous and destructive role of violent struggle. As a result, it is difficult for these theories to be used to explain the violent struggle of some lower social groups [3]. In fact, in the collective resistance of Western democratic countries, violent conflicts also occur from time to time.
According to Tarrow (2005:126-128), violence is the most easy form of collective action to be taken by angry people who are isolated and ignored, and can be launched without a large number of coordination organizations. This kind of strategy is greatly affected by the political system. In non-democratic countries, protesters lack legal ways to participate in politics, so they have to use violence as the main expression. In democratic countries, although violence is relatively rare in general, it is also common for specific groups [4].

Although a few researchers have explored the mechanism of violent conflicts, there is also a great controversy on the effectiveness of violent strategies. Some studies found that in the collective resistance, some participants consciously take initiating violent conflicts as a kind of resistance strategy, and the adoption of this strategy is closely related to the social position of the participating groups. The social position of the protesters plays a key role in deciding whether to use violence and conflicts in the strategies and means of the movement (Mueller, 2002: 23) [3]. Some scholars also examined the relationship between specific social groups and violent struggles through empirical research. For example, Piven and Cloward examined the movements of the poor in the history of the United States, and found that these vulnerable groups in the society, due to the lack of effective organizational resources, used destructive means such as violence to disrupt the normal social order in their resistance, so as to make the political elites pay attention to their claims, and thus achieved the goal that peaceful strategies could not achieve [5]. But in fact, violence is not merely a special strategy of the lower social groups. In the history of the United States, all classes of protest groups have used violence, and many have achieved success [6]. At the same time, violence is also the last effective means adopted by middle-class protesters who are increasingly marginalized in the declining stage of the protest cycle [7]. Others question the effectiveness of violence strategies in collective resistance. Tarrow (2005: 128-129) believed that violence has a serious limitation in social movements, that is, it may scare away the sympathizers, thus affecting the support of the public. Violence also divides the resistance and coalition systems and provides a pretext for repression from those in power. In many movements, there is division over the use of violence. Therefore, the use of violent strategies may have a serious negative impact on the protests themselves [4]. Therefore, compared with the analysis of the structure and organization of social movements, the research on the mechanism and consequences of violent conflicts in this field in contemporary western countries is still insufficient. Under the influence of the theories of European and American social movements, many scholars have used a variety of analysis and interpretation frameworks to analyze the collective resistance of contemporary Chinese society. One of the main research directions is to investigate the strategies of protest actions, that is, the means and tactics used by the protesters according to the constraints of social structure and environment. In the study of contemporary Chinese peasants' actions, Li lianjian, O'brien (1997) and Yu Jianrong (2004) used the interpretation framework of "rightful resistance" [8, 9]. Ying Xing (2007), however, put forward the explanation of "grassroots mobilization". He believed that the collective mobilization of peasants' activists was expedient in the choice of interest expression, dual in organization and fuzzy in politics [10]. Shi Fayong (2005) found that, in addition to legal means, civil protesters are good at using guanxi networks as mobilization means [11]. Chen Yingfang found that most of the protest movements of the middle class are highly organized and have strong ability of rational strategies [12].

These studies help us understand the action strategies of China's collective resistance. However, for the increasing violent crime in the current protest movements, the existing research is also lack of comprehensive investigation. This may be due to the above deficiencies in contemporary western social movement research, which makes the Chinese researchers guided by their theories lack of attention to this issue. The existing theories of contention have suggested that the micro mobilization mechanism of collective action is very important. The existence of social discontent groups and the low governance ability of the government are universal, but most of the resistance did not appear serious violent crime while a few appeared. This requires us to explore the main affecting factors of these violence crime and their specific consequences. Therefore, this study focuses on the following questions: what are the consequences of violent crime on the collective
action itself? What effect does the situation of the participating groups in the collective resistance, including their social positions, have on the violence crime?

3. Discussion: Consequences of Violence and the Impact of the Situation of the Participants

3.1 Consequences of violence

Based on the inspection of many cases, we find that many collective resistances of urban middle class are aimed at the local governments, but they have succeeded finally. In addition to the reasonable and legal appeals, these are mainly attributed to the proper strategies and means under the leadership of competent organizers [13]. However, although the Anti Japanese demonstrations in 2012 were tacitly approved by the government, due to a large number of violence crime, it has caused serious economic losses and social consequences, and almost subverted people's views on the justice of the Anti Japanese demonstrations themselves. Therefore, this nationalist protest movement was almost a failure. It can be seen that, in the original purpose of the legitimate collective resistance, if the strategies and means are improper, serious violence will occur, which will cause great harm to many actors.

Specifically, in the case of the Anti Japanese demonstrations in 2012, the violence crime brought many consequences. The first is serious harm to the safety of others, including the innocent. Many Japanese product users were intimidated and beaten, Li Jianli, the owner of a Japanese car in Xi'an, was seriously injured, and some police maintaining order were also slightly injured. Secondly, it causes huge economic property losses. During the whole Anti Japanese demonstrations in 2012, a large amount of personal and enterprise properties destroyed nationwide. Third, it has seriously impacted the legal order. These acts of violence, in the name of "patriotism", directly violated the most important rights of others, so they are criminal acts; the large-scale occurrence also posed a serious challenge to the legal order. Fourth, it has resulted social unrest and division. Serious violence has unnerved people in the city where the demonstration took place. For a long time after the demonstrations, there was still a huge controversy about the violence. The main social groups argued against each other for this, which further aggravated the psychological division of the masses and damaged the social unity. The fifth, it has made the objective of the collective protest movement itself ignored or even distorted. Because of the violence in the Anti Japanese demonstrations, the international and domestic public opinion focused on the violence itself, which greatly weakened the attention to China's territorial sovereignty claims, and the demonstrators were also labeled as "mobs". In fact, in other collective resistances against local interest groups, once violence occurred, it often provided the local government with an excuse to distort the legitimacy of rights protection actions, and to take repressive actions [14]. These anti Japanese demonstrations, also because of a large number of violent crimes, made the government stopped more protest actions. Sixthly, it has led to a huge negative international impact. In the age of the Internet, some of the barbaric acts of violence that have taken place in the demonstrations quickly spread around the world. Under the attention of the international media, these atrocities made foreign people have the impression that Chinese people are irrational and violent. Therefore, these behaviors made the country and the nation shamed, and further vilified the image of China in the world. It is difficult to reverse this negative impact in the short term. Especially in the current territorial disputes between China and many neighboring countries, these negative effects will further make China be in a disadvantageous position in international public opinion. It is precisely because of the above serious consequences that the violence in the Anti Japanese demonstrations has aroused the deep reflection of all parties.

3.2 Impact of participants

In large-scale collective action, because of the effect of group psychology, it is easy to initiate radical violence. But through the above case study and the existing literature analysis, we find that the situation of the participants themselves has a great impact on the occurrence of violent crimes in the collective protest movements.
1. The rationality of ordinary participants. Having a large number of rational participants is the basic condition for the success of collective resistance. On the one hand, only the emergence of a large number of participants can make the object of resistance feel strong public opinion demands and pressure; on the other hand, these participants must be rational in order to ensure the peace and order of the action, so that the powerful object of resistance cannot find an excuse for suppression. In Western democracies, citizens are quite rational. After a long period of social movements, the participants have gradually become mature. They know that the demand for rights is as important as the observance of the rule of law. Therefore, in the course of the protest, in addition to the usual sits and demonstrations, participants sometimes take some relatively minor violent actions, such as throwing eggs. Most of these acts of violence are symbolic, and there are few serious crimes of smashing and robbing. When emergencies occur in collective actions, participants can also treat them calmly. And they also understand that after moderately expressing their demands, they should withdraw from the scene to avoid the government's repressive means. As the existing research has pointed out, in western countries, middle class behavior is relatively rational and nonviolent, and the technology to achieve the goal and the technology to accumulate resources are carefully designed [3].

In China, due to the sensitivity of the resistance action and the strict control of the government before the 1990s, people lacks relevant experience and it is difficult for them to grasp the boundary of the action. In the collective resistance of farmers and laid-off workers, because they belong to the marginal groups of society, their livelihood is relatively difficult, they feel angry, and their education level is low, they are more likely to lose their mind, so some violent behaviors often occur in the resistance action; a typical case is the Tonggang Incident in July 2009, because the state-owned enterprise equity adjustment triggered the resistance event, the workers surrounded the general manager, and beat him to death. In contrast, in the urban middle-class citizens' resistance, most of the participants are relatively rational. Although the middle class has a strong sense of rights, their higher living standards and education level make them more cautious and rational in collective actions, and they are rarely willing to violate the law. In the anti PX event of Xiamen citizens in 2007 and the anti PX event of Shanghai citizens in 2015, the peaceful way of "walking on streets" is typical examples of rational rights protection. In a word, in the large-scale collective resistance, if the public can't keep their rationality, there will be interaction based on the fanatical scene at that time. With the encouragement and the infection of a few radical people, more people may participate in violence. This kind of violence will changed the nature of the original purpose of the collective protest, which will evolve into social anger release event.

2. The existence of leading organizers and their action strategy. The existing research has fully illustrated the importance of strong protest leaders or organizers for the success of actions. In the Western social movements, there are many relevant organizations responsible for making plans and action strategies, so as to ensure that the protest actions can effectively mobilize participants, effectively express their demands, and ensure the orderly progress of the protest, limiting potential violent actions to a controllable range [15]. In China, since non-governmental organizations of this type are not allowed to exist, leaders are particularly important for the success of collective action. Previous studies have found that most of the leaders of China's urban and rural rights-protection actions are the persons who have relatively "seen the outside world" in the local communities, such as teachers with higher education level in the countryside, or veterans, they are more likely to become the initiators and leaders of collective action [8-10], while most organizers of the rights-protection actions of laid-off workers in the reform period of state-owned enterprises are middle-rank cadres of the factories [16]. The organizers of urban homeowners' collective resistance generally have some common characteristics. First, they are mostly knowledgeable and have a deep understanding of law, state policies and local political systems. They know how to deal with relevant affairs, how to clarify their interests, to appeal and lobby others. Secondly, most of them are eloquent, have strong communication skills and a number of friends, they thus can gather supporters, and sometimes even get support from some government agencies. This enables them to mobilize strong support in all kinds of resistance. Third, most of them have rich experience in
organization and struggle during the "Cultural Revolution" [11, 17]. In general, it is these qualities and abilities superior to other community peers that make them to be leaders in collective resistance.

3. The number of activists and their executive ability. An important topic of social movement theory is the formation mechanism and role of activists [18]. The activists are the backbone of collective resistance. Their main role is to implement the plans and strategies formulated by the protest organizations or leaders, to transmit information, to mobilize ordinary participants, and to assist in maintaining order on the sites. In the collective resistance of developed countries, there are often activists to form a working team. They are usually dressed in clothes that are significantly different from others, and they tell the ordinary participants precautions at the beginning of the demonstrations. Because participants are not all likely to be mobilized by the organizers, other groups may join in the collective actions at any time. Then the activists should try their best to maintain the order and to stop radical actions in the collective resistance, so as to make the protest be orderly according to the plan of the organizers. In China's urban middle class resistance, some actions are just like this. In contrast, in the Anti Japanese demonstrations in 2012, due to the lack of organized network of activists to help maintaining the order on the sites, the demonstration crowd fell into a frenzy under the effect of a few mobs; many participants lost their minds and participated in the violence of beating, smashing and robbing.

In addition, the organizers and activists of the collective protest actions play another important role in implementing effective information dissemination. In large-scale collective actions, effective real-time information is an important factor to keep the action in order. In the community resistance, due to the small number of participants, the organizers and other activists can communicate face-to-face with each other, so that the real information can be timely transmitted to other participants, which further ensures the order of actions. However, in the Anti Japanese demonstrations, due to the lack of leaders and activists who would transmit relevant real-time information, most participants only received mixed and unclear information from various sources including the Internet and mobile phones, and some people were seriously misled and thus participated in violence crime.

4. Conclusion

This paper initially discusses the consequences of violent crimes in collective resistance and the influence of participants' group status. We find that violence not only results in serious economic and social consequences, but also has a subversive impact on collective resistance itself. Violence is relatively easy to be prevented in small-scale rights-protection actions. But in large-scale collective resistance, it is more difficult to control violence crime. Except for the influence of social psychology and social structure factors mentioned in the existing research, whether or not violence may occur and its severity depends on the situation of participants, including the rationality of ordinary participants, the existence of leaders/organizers and their action strategies, and the number of activists and their implementation ability, etc.

With the further intensification of China's social transformation in the future, the outbreak of a large number of collective protest movements is inevitable. For the government, it should realize that this is a way for citizens to express their interests legally, and dealing with this issue correctly will reduce social tensions and result in the long-term stability of the society; but for the participants in the resistance, they should also realize that, to ensure the success of the collective resistance, more peaceful ways such as "walking on the streets" should be adopted to express their interests instead of violence. For large-scale protest actions, to achieve this, organizers must provide action guidance for participants through certain mechanism building.

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References


