

## Protecting the rights of home-owners:

### Urban resistance in a Shanghai neighbourhood

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#### Abstract

After the housing reform, the home-ownership rate in urban China soars, and urban residents begin to claim their rights as home-owners. The last few years have witnessed lots of urban resistance by home-owners at neighbourhood level. Existing literature emphasizes the fragmentation between municipal government and Street Office (the basic level of local government agency) as political opportunity. Yet, this is not the only political opportunity home-owners can exploit. Based on a case study of home-owners' collective resistance in Shanghai, I argue that both political opportunity and resources are the keys to understand the success of home-owners' resistance. In this case, property management agency gives a commercial company permission to install a cell site in the neighbourhood without the authorization of home-owners, which triggers the collective action. By months of mobilization, collective appeal to government, negotiation and direction action, home-owners finally win the battle. In this case, the receptivity of local government and home-owners-government intersection are important dimensions of political opportunity, which are under-studied in existing literature. Besides, as the Internet becomes more and more popular, the Internet contributes to collective action as mobilization structure, information disclosure channel and platform of deliberation. At the end of this study, the socio-political implications of home-owners' collective action are discussed briefly as well.

Key words: Urban resistance, collective action, political opportunity, Internet

## 1. Introduction

Since 1978, China's transition from a planned economy toward a market economy has resulted in profound changes in every aspect of the society, including the provision and consumption of housing (Huang 2004; Ho and Kwong 2002; Lee 2000; Wang and Murie 1999). From mid-50s to the late 1980s, housing was considered as a welfare benefit in urban China. Public rental was the dominant housing tenure with the state being responsible for housing maintenance. As early as 1978, the state conducted a pilot experiment on housing reform which aimed to increase housing consumption through privatization and creation of a housing market. After much trial and error, the State Council announced the end of public rental housing in 1988. Since then, the housing reform has been launched nationwide. Housing reform turns China into a nation of homeowners. With the privatization of housing, property management service becomes a commodity. Accordingly, commodity housing enclaves has become the new unit of urban governance (Wu 2005). As new type of residential space, neighbourhood also becomes venue of social contestation, most noticeably home-owners' resistance (e.g. Cai 2005; Shi and Cai 2006; Read 2003, 2008; Shi 2008; Tomba 2004, 2005; Zhu 2004; Chen YouHong 2009; He YanLing 2007; Meng Wei 2007; Zeng Peng 2008).

From the English literature, researchers have put forwards several theoretical framework to explain home-owners' resistance in urban China, such as middle class theory (Cai 2005; Tomba 2004, 2005); political opportunity theory, especially state-fragmentation (Shi and Cai 2006; Read 2008), social capital theory (Shi 2008). Yet, they are inadequate.

- First, little attention has been paid to the responses of government officials. Home-owners resistance is an interaction process between home-owners, opponents and third parties, which shapes the development of the home-owners resistance. As an important party of the process, how the government officials respond and why they responds in a specific way are one crucial aspect to understand home-owners' resistance.
- Second, existing literature correctly point out the importance of state fragmentation as political opportunity, but they fail to appreciate the roles of state-home-owners' intersection in home-owners resistance. Such ignorance might lead to over-emphasise the significance of individual activists and the social capital of their own. Actually, both "social base" and "social force" have their own position in urban protest (Pickvance 1977), we need to take into consideration both to better understand the dynamics of home-owners' resistance.
- Third, with the popularity of the Internet, it becomes an important tools in home-owners' resistance. Yet, existing studies have not explored the Internet's roles comprehensively.

The next section is literature review, I will present a brief summary of the theory of state-movement theory and Internet and contentious politics. Section 3 describes the dynamics of the case. Followed are analyses of the case. The last section is a brief discussion.

## 2. Literature review

### **Movement-state intersection theory**

The basic ideas of this theory can be found in early studies such as Piven and Cloward (1979). They did put emphasis on the role of political context in explaining the emergency and forms of contentious politics. The term “political opportunity” is first used by Eisinger (1973) explicitly. He focuses on the openness of urban government to conventional participation. He finds that both low level and high level of openness may hinder the rise of urban riots, while middle level of openness can facilitate the rise of urban protests. Since then, theory of political opportunity has been used in many scholars and extended to different types of contentious politics (e.g. McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1989; Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1995; Tilly 2006). Though theory of political opportunity has been criticised by scholars (see Meyer and Minkoff 2004). It does provide a framework to understand how political context shapes the development and outcome of contentious politics (e.g. Kolb 2007).

Most social movement study concentrates on the social movement organizations as the major actors, while the role of institutional activists is under-theorized (Santoro and McGuire 1997). Actually, the participants of a social movement are not always outside the political system, some participants may hold position in the formal political institution while they pursue the same goals of social movements. Banaszak (2005) propose three dimensions of state-movement intersection. First is the number of activists within the state. The second dimension is the type of social movement outsider status. The third dimension of state-movement intersection is the locations within the state where the intersection occurs.

Institutional activist can provide supports for the social movement activities, grant non-institutional participants access to the resources at their disposal. Besides, because they hold formal political position, they have routine, low-cost access to decision-makers, through which they can exert political influences on relevant policies. Based on statistical analysis of two policies in 32 states, Santoro and McGuire (1997) find that female elected official were important players in states' comparable polices.

State-movement intersection can influence the social movement strategies, but scholars have different opinions on the direction of the effect. Some argue that incorporation of social movement elites into state institution will moderate and demobilize protest (Piven and Cloward 1979). Critics have pointed out that such relationship should be hypothetical and subject to empirical examination (e.g. Banaszak 2005). From the perspective of political opportunity structure, the effects of state-movement intersection on tactical choices are

contingent. The perception of political opportunity is as important as objective political opportunity structure (e.g. O'Brien and Li 2006, Meyer 2004). Even institutional activists cannot change the objective political opportunity structure; they are in a favourable position to gain information on the available political opportunity structure. It is their perception of political opportunity determines the tactical choices. When the institutional activists are aware of the array of political opportunity within the state, they are likely to employ insider tactics. On the contrary, if they have information that inside opportunity is really closed, they are likely to utilize outsider tactics as well. The preliminary empirical evidence shows that the institutional activists may not use tactics different from the activists outside the political institutions. The feminist activists within the state usually use insider tactics, but they will participate in a protest when the insider tactics are ineffective. Even the feminist activists are not moderate in ideology even they use institutional approach to pursue their goals of social change (Banaszak 2005).

### **Internet and contentious politics**

The Internet has gained much attention of social scientists recently. The existing studies of the Internet and social movements have been reviewed by Garrett (2006). Though the number of empirical research is growing, it is far from enough, little have been done in term of Internet's impact on contentious politics (Diani 2003; Brake 2005).

Information flow has been studied by students of conventional politics and contentious politics. In a pioneering research, Shah and his colleagues found that only informational use of Internet have positive effects on trust and civic participation (Shah, McLeod and Yoon 2001). Bimber (2000) even argues that features of information rather than technology really matter for civic participation. According to the orientation of information-providers, information flow can be categorized into fact-orientated information, opinion-orientated and mobilization-orientated information. The fact-orientated provides information about what is going on. Opinion-orientated information aims to provide shared personal views on particular issues, and mobilization-orientated information tries to raise public support in favor of a cause (Rosenkrands 2004). The Internet-based information flow features high-speed, global reach, relative less state control and commercial manipulation, all of which accelerate the circulation of information relevant to social movements. Thus, the Internet will accelerate the diffusion process of social movements, shorten the cycle of protest and intensify the conflicts (Garrett 2006). Circulation of information may increase the salience of social issue across a broader region, leading to further actions. In study of civil society in China, Tai argues that the Internet fosters the public debates about the "Sunzhiguang event" in online communities almost across the nation (Tai 2006); in this process, high-speed and wide reach of information circulation plays a crucial role. Yang (2003) arrived at similar conclusions. The Internet does not only play a role in national and international contentious politics, empirical study also shows that the neighborhood-based can online community creates large-scale dense networks of relative weak social ties, which in turn facilitate the collective action to pressure the developer into addressing their problems and concerns within that neighborhood (Hampton2003). The existing studies provide a good analytic framework. However, why and

how the Internet matters for contentious politics an empirical question, which is related to specific social conditions (Yang 2009), an nuanced understanding of Internet's roles in home-owners resistance of urban China need empirical examinations.

### **3. The case: home-owners' rights-defending activities**

Data are mainly collected from home-owners' on-line forum, neighbourhood's website. All of the relevant posts from the on-line forum are retrieved, and imported to software (RQDA) and coded. The author tracks the on-line posts from the beginning of the resistance, thus the retrieved data are quite comprehensive. To evaluate the validity of the on-line data, several face-to-face interviews are conducted in July 2009.

The neighbourhood is located in North-east of Shanghai. Most of the home-owners are middle-class, at their 20-30. There are proximately 1000 households. The neighbourhood is relatively new. The first batch of home-owners moved in this neighbourhood in 2007. Until the incident happened, some home-owners have not moved in yet. Thus, there are not many social ties between neighbours. However, there is an on-line home-owners forum and a virtual community at QQ group, a popular instant message system. There is overlap of membership at the two virtual communities. As to the on-line home-owners forum, there have been more than 10 thousands of posts and more than 3100 threads till Jan 2009. The topics are various, from everyday life to information about property management. It seems that home-owners are well-connected at the two virtual communities.

In late 2008, home-owners accidentally found that property management agent granted a contractor permission to install a cell-site in the neighbourhood without the consensus of home-owners. This action outraged many home-owners, since the impacts of cell-site on health are not clear, at least from home-owners' perspective. Some active home-owners post photos and messages at home-owners' on-line forum, which triggers a flurry of discussions. Active home-owners called for collective action via on-line platform as well as door-to-door mobilization. By collective resistance, the cell-site project was finally called off approximately two months later. The incident can be classified into three stages. The details of the development of this urban resistance are as follows.

#### **Stage one: Unauthorized project was found and confirmed**

- 2008-08-23, some home-owners note there is a project at the neighbourhood, but they don't know what is going on yet.
- 2008-09-17, home-owners found that a cell site is installed at the neighbourhood, and the information began to spread via on-line home-owners' forum. The project is not authorized by home-owners.
- 2008-09-19, A volunteer association XYLYH collects evidences of the installation of cell site, and evidence was circulated via on-line home-owners' forum on 2008-09-22.

#### **Stage two: collective endeavour to solve the problem**

- 2008-09-24, XYLYH calls for collective rights-upholding activities on-line and off-line.

Meanwhile, the association seeks authorization to represent home-owners' rights and interests in the case. The construction works stop for the time being.

- 2008-09-25, collective petition is hold at the neighbourhood. Meanwhile, property management agent planned to consult home-owners' opinions on the installation of cell site. In the following days, some home-owners destroy the installed instruments, individually and spontaneously.
- 2008-09-26, negotiation meeting was hold between 10 representatives of home-owners, Residents' Committee and property management Agent. Collective appeal to Street Office.
- 2008-09-27, home-owners express their opinions against the proposal of consultation by property management agent. A coordination meeting by Street Office, Housing authority was planned to be held in Oct. after home-owners' petition.
- 2008-09-29, Petition continues. Over half of home-owners (about 500) signed to support the rights-defending activities. Volunteers circulate educational leaflets at the gate of neighbourhood. Contractor tried to continue the project. Home-owners found and stopped it.
- 2008-09-30 to 2008-10-01, volunteers lodge a complaint to China Mobile. In the process, volunteers learnt that ownership of the cell site belongs to contractor before formal handover to China Mobile.
- 2008-10-03, letter appeal to District government.
- 2008-10-06, urge property management agent to stop the project and eliminate all the negative effects on the neighbourhood.
- 2008-10-07, District government response to the letter appeal.
- 2008-10-08, the head-quarter of the property management agent response to home-owners' complaint and promise to respect home-owners' will.
- 2008-10-09, Official of Letter and Petition Office inform home-owners that coordination meeting which was scheduled on 11 Oct. was postponed.
- 2008-10-17, Official of Letter and Petition Office visited the neighbourhood, attempting to persuade that the cell-site is harmless. Home-owners urge the official to organize coordination meeting no later than 24 Oct.

#### **Stage three: coordination meeting and solution**

- 2008-10-22, Volunteers got the notice on arrangement of coordination meeting, which is scheduled on 24<sup>th</sup>. This arrangement triggers sensational discussions online. A consultation session was held evening by volunteers.
- 2008-10-24, Coordination meeting.
- 2008-10-25, Activists call for home-owners to supervise the process of removal of the cell-site.
- 2008-10-27, A discussion session is held to settle a plan for removal of the cell-site.
- 2008-10-28, Contractor ran away. Property management agent was responsible for the removal of cell-site.

#### **4. Political opportunity: governmental responses**

The theory of political opportunity argues that external political context can shape the rise and falls of contentious politics. Though the concept of political opportunity is vague and criticized by students of social movements, it provides an important framework to unpack the political context, which is crucial to understand development of contentious politics in urban China. This study mainly focuses on responses of the government.

In this case, the government does respond to the claims of home-owners, but they only send a mixed signal to home-owners. On the one hand, though the government responds to the appeal of home-owner, their responses are symbolically most of the time and only sometimes substantively. On the other hand, the government tends to ally with property management agent. It will not put the interest of home-owners first when they make decisions. During the early stage of the collective resistance, active home-owners have an informal meeting with Residents' Committee, an extended branch of Street Office; director of Residents' Committee expresses the will to solve the dispute and to build a harmonious community. The director admits that property management agent acts against the will and interests of home-owners. More importantly, the legitimacy of the voluntary organization of home-owners is acknowledged preliminary by Residents' Committee, providing that it can secure enough support from home-owners. (Meeting record, 20080826) This is of significance as organization has great impacts on the development of collective resistance. From existing evidence, displacement of active member of Home-owners' Association has been common counter-tactics used by Residents' Committee and it is quite efficient (Interview 20061230). However, these responses are symbolical only from perspective of home-owners (Interview 20090727). After the incident has been solved, the Residents' Committee tries to prevent the active home-owners from becoming candidates of Home-owners' Association and regards the activists as "trouble-makers".

To understand the seemingly proactive response of Residents' Committee, we need to take into consideration of the community building practices, direct election of Residents' Committee and decline of social control capacity of Residents' Committee.

- First of all, proactive response of Residents' Committee has something to do with the practices of community building (see Bray (2006) for details of community building practices). By community building, Shanghai government tries to establish the residential community as the new basic unit of urban governance, and re-gain control over the process of urban governance. In this practice, the problem-solving ability of Residents' Committee is one of the key indicators of its performance. This can explain the seemingly high level of responsiveness of Residents' Committee. It is in stark contrast with Residents' Committee in Guangzhou, which is less responsive to disputes of residents and home-owners. An activist from Guangzhou told the author that they cannot get much response even they appeal to Residents' Committee and Street Office actively (Interview 20080806). As a strategy of community building, Residents' Committee direct election has been promoted by Shanghai Civic Affairs Bureau. The grassroots direct election activates social capital (Liu 2007), residents' interests in local affairs, and thus boosts their participation in collective resistance unintentionally. Survey data collected in Shanghai (2006-2007) shows that those who

vote in Residents' Committee direct election are more likely to go petition (Shang fang), appeal to government by joint-signature letters, file suggestions to Homeowners' Association, take part in community hearing meeting and discuss community affairs on-line (details of statistical analysis are not shown here).

- Second, due to its weak capacity of social control, Residents' Committee can not dominate the development of the collective resistance. It seems that weak capacity of Residents' Committee is a necessary condition of collective resistance, especially those resistances last for a period of time. From the interviews of six cases, all the Residents' Committees are relatively weak in the sense that they cannot mobilise enough home-owners to counter the efforts of activists. Generally speaking, empirical evidences reveal that Residents' Committee's social control capacity has been in decrease since the last decade. Though statistical analysis shows that Residents' Committee and local branch of Chinese Communists Party still can mobilise party members more effectively than that of ordinary residents (result not shown here), it is also obvious that it becomes much more difficult than it used to be. Residents' Committees have complained the difficulty from time to time during the Residents' Committee direct election. In this specific case, the Residents' Committees is established recently and thus has even weaker mobilisation capacity.

After first meeting with Residents' Committee, several home-owners visit Street Office to lodge a complaint and consult relevant policies and regulations. Officials from Street Office admit that the action of property management agent is outrageous, and they did not know the agent act without the consensus of home-owners. After discussion, official endorse the idea that the volunteers can call for a collective petition. If volunteers can secure signatures of more than two-third of home-owners, the cell-site must be removed. Besides, the Street Office is willing to be coordinator to help solve the dispute. The two decisions shape the ensuing development of the collective resistance, suggesting that the final solution might be achieved within the institutions of community governance by and large. Response of government is the key to the development of the collective resistance. This is because:

- First of all, it is important determinant factor of success of collective resistance. As extant studies show, without the support of government, enforcement of a solution becomes a huge problem when the opponent refuses to cooperate; this even applies to a court ruling (Zhang XiaoJun and Pei XiaoMei, 2007). Evidence from Guangzhou also reveals that without the support from the government, volunteers have difficulties in putting their decision into enforcement even if they secure mass support from other home-owners (Interview 20080806). This is because home-owners do not have the power of enforcement which is the terrain of public power.
- Secondly, the legitimacy of the collective resistance predicated on "supports of two third of all home-owners". This explains why collective petition becomes a crucial strategy.
- The coordination meeting give home-owners a chance to confront officials face-to-face collectively. This is crucial to achieve their claims. On the one hand, this is perfect occasion to show the "power of number" if there are many home-owners show up at the meeting. On the other hand, the officials are not likely to defy laws

and policies overtly, thus, face-to-face confrontation give home-owners an advantage to win official supports by presenting compelling evidence.

Most of the time, Residents' Committee and Street Office respond symbolically. During the process of the collective resistance, officials from Petition and Visit Office try to convince home-owners that the cell-site is harmless, and try to persuade them to call off the rights-defending activities. At the final stage, Street Office schedules the coordination meeting on Friday without consultation to home-owners. This arrangement is convenient for the government officials, but it is inconvenient for home-owners as they have to take a job leave if they want to participate in the meeting. Moreover, the notice of the arrangement goes public only a day before the meeting. All the evidences show that the Street Office and other governmental departments are not really committed to home-owners' interests. In the coordination meeting, officials are on the side of the property management agent most of the time; at least it is the case from the perspective of home-owners. Sometimes, them do endorse home-owners' arguments and appeals. As a home-owner says on the on-line forum:

In the coordination meeting, Mr. Wu from Petition and Visit Office and Mr. Han from Housing Authority do admit that property management agent infringes the rights and interests of home-owners, and this action is improper. Thanks them for being on our side at the critical moment (Meeting record, 20081024).

It should be mentioned that the substantive responses are the results of pressures from home-owners and compelling evidences. There are confrontations as well during the coordination meeting. By scheduling the meeting on Friday, it mobilises more home-owners to participate the meeting unintentionally as the schedule is interpreted as being biased towards property management agent. It turns out that more than 30 home-owners participate the meeting. Officials face lots of pressure from home-owners at the meeting. Besides, the whole meeting is audio-recorded, which makes official less likely to defy policy and regulations overtly. In face of strong evidences of infringement of rights, officials have to respond the demands of home-owners properly. Though public coordination meeting is not extra-institutional, it is no doubt that it could be contentious. Confronted by home-owners face-to-face, officials have to make concession from time to time. As an on-line post shows:

At the beginning, the organiser tries to block home-owners without formal invitation letter from entering the meeting venue. An activist confronts the organiser and says, "We are home-owners, why cannot we attend the meeting?" This confrontation helps all home-owners attend the meeting successfully.....When the time off work approaches, officials try to end the meeting and reopen the negotiation next time. They totally disregard our difficulties. We are workers too and it is not easy to take a leave. At this moment, Ms Tang goes the door and speaks out loudly: "No one leaves until the problem is solved".....When an agreement is reached, home-owners want a written agreement. However, the officials are reluctant to sign their names on the agreement. Then, Ms Tang put a pen to the hands of the officials and "forces"

them to sign the agreement (Post 20081025).

## 5. State-home-owners intersection and its implications

State-home-owners intersection plays an important role in the rights-defending activities. By state-home-owners intersection, I refer to the fact that some home-owners of this neighbourhood work at government departments (administrative or juridical departments) or worked at government departments before they are retired. They are remarkably crucial since they can provide internal information. A volunteer describes how state-home-owners intersection helps the rights-defending activities.

"Two home-owners drop by. They are law-practitioners and work at high level of juridical department. They are angry with such right-fringed project and offer their help to defend home-owners' rights and interests. Then, they give us valuable suggestions on procedures. Their suggestions help us avoid wrong decisions on what to do next."

In another post, an activist explains why they encourage home-owners keep calm and do not damage the equipment. Though home-owners do damage equipments individually and spontaneously, it never becomes a collective strategy.

"A volunteer who work at juridical department pays close attention to the progress of the rights-defending activities, and gives use many experiences from previous cases. Another volunteer also remind us that we should be clam and act strategically, and should not give any chances to opponents by acting improperly. Especially, we should not touch the equipment by ourselves, not mention to destroy them. From the previous cases, opponents may even damage equipment themselves, and then transplant the responsibility to home-owners successfully."

In other occasions, internal information from state-home-owners intersection shapes the development and tactics used by home-owners. As an interviewee told me,

"We appeal to the government and write letters to Letter and Petition Office, contact the official directly by cell-phone. Ur, home-owners who work inside political institutions know whom we should contact directly. They give us the officials' cell-phone numbers. Thus, we can send our claims to officials directly. Of course, we should never tell the official how we get their cell-phone numbers."

When I ask if officials from government departments (e.g. Street Office, Letter and Petition Office) are responsive to home-owners claims proactively. Interviewee told that,

"No. We have to call them daily after the letter has been submitted to government. Sometimes, we thread to instigate collective visit to government, or collective-walk in public space. You know, they have to respond to us because they are afraid we can stage a collective incident, though their responses are not entirely satisfying."

Interviewer: "How do you know they are afraid of collective incidents?"

Interviewee: "Well, those working inside governmental institutions tell us that information. Actually, collective incidents have final sayings in their annual evaluation. If there is a serious collective incident, it doesn't help even if you work extremely well in other works."

When officials respond to the claims of home-owners symbolically, they might use the excuse of "beyond its jurisdiction". As an ordinary citizen, it is hard to tell it is an excuse or it is the real situation. State-home-owners intersection helps overcome such asymmetry of information flow, and increase the chance of substantive response from government officials. In an on-line post, an activist calls for home-owners to demand administrative penalty at the negotiation meeting and adds that according to internal information of a volunteer who works inside government, Housing Authority has the right to penalize property management agent when the agent infringe rights and interests of home-owners. Without the internal information, activists cannot put forward such a call with absolute confidence.

Those working inside can and are willing to provide material supports if necessary, but in this case, material support from state-home-owners intersection is less visible. Instead, from the empirical evidence, it is clearly that the most important resource state-home-owners intersection can provide is information. The information can be categorized into three types.

- Contacts of relevant government department and officials. It helps to send the claims of home-owners to officials in charge directly. Otherwise, it takes much more time to reach relevant officials.
- Choice of contentious strategies. The most effective strategy is to send a message to government that the current issue is really a social issue, and need to solve as soon as possible. Though many activists know the importance of creating signs of social instability, it is not easy to know what to do unless you know how the government operates. Home-owners intersection provides crucial information about the meaning of different tactics to the government officials, thus helps activists to choose the effective strategies.
- Information about counter-tactics of government officials. This kind of information is the key to avoid using wrong tactics to get themselves into troubles. From this perspective, state-home-owners intersection has a moderating effect on choice of tactics. However, the moderating effect is predicated on the expectation that the moderate tactics are effective, and such expectation is based on the available information. Moreover, this effect only applies to the organized efforts of right-defending activities. In this case, the organized collective actor keep itself constrained, but many home-owners still take the risk to damage the equipment

individually and spontaneously.

State-home-owners intersection plays an important role by providing insider information. These facts have something to do with the political context of urban China.

First, government has to response to the severe grievance of citizen in order to maintain its legitimacy. Maintaining social stability and building harmonious society top the government agenda. As one home-owner told me that besides the solidarity of home-owners, "Building harmonious society" is a very good timing and is a favourable opportunity for their rights-defending activities (Interview 20090727).

Second, information on how government operates, especially the decision-making process of government is inaccessible to ordinary citizens, though it has been improved much recently (Min and Heng 2009). During interview of other case, interviewee also complains that "we all know that instigation of collective action to show our human power is important, but it is very hard to maintain it on the right track. Small scale of collective action does not help to incur response from government, but overdoing might bring too much risk to participants. "(Interview 20090707) By providing critical information, state-home-owners intersection helps to overcome the institutional hurdle. Thus they can secure government response without causing too much political risk.

Third, the nature of state-home-owners' intersection shapes how such intersection helps home-owners activities. For example, the nature of the political institutions have double-edged effects on home-owners' resistance. As a home-owner's post says:

I am working in disciplinary department, collective visit to government department is not allowed.... Anyway, I definitely support our rights-defending activities with whatever I can offer. Please let me know if you need supports.  
After all, home is ours.

Those work in government offices know how government department works, and provides crucial information to front-line activists. Meanwhile, they are afraid that Residents' Committee, property management agent or other government officials lodge complaints to their work-institutions. Though such complaints are not necessary adversary to their career, it is really unpleasant experiences and may have potential effects on how leaders evaluate their performance. Thus, those working in government official, Institutional Unit, and University are reluctant to be front-line volunteers. In this case, they do not sign the petition themselves, but other member of their family sign the petition. Compared to information from other cases, it seems that if the state-home-owners intersection resides at high-ranking position has crucial effects on the working mechanisms during housing activism. If home-owners are high-ranking government officials, they might prefer to exert their political influence directly. Perhaps, this is because the high-ranking government officials enjoy greater political protections. As a journalist told me in an interview, news media has lots of freedom when reporting misconduct of low-ranking government officials, but the room for reporting on

high-ranking government officials are much limited (Interview 20090724). Based on these evidences, I propose a typology of how state-home-owners intersection matters to housing activism in urban China.

Table 1 typology of state-home-owners intersection in housing activism

<b>State-home-owners intersection</b>	<b>Mechanisms</b>
Disciplined services departments Low-ranking government officials Workers of institutional unit	Information: 1. the logic of government operation 2. contacts of key government officials 3. policies and regulations
High-ranking government officials	Direct political influences

## 6. The roles of Internet

In this case, the Internet plays an important role in the collective resistance. Information flow is one major mechanism through which Internet can shape the development of contentious politics. According to the orientation of information-providers, information flow can be categorized into fact-orientated information, opinion-orientated and mobilization-orientated information (Rosenkrands 2004). Yet, to better understand the roles of the Internet in home-owners' resistance, we need to make sense of the relevant social context. It is not the pure technological property of Internet determines its role. Instead, how Internet is used reflects the social conditions. For this case, Rosenkrands' typology seems not fine-grained enough and need refinement. Based on the content of on-line posts, I propose new typology of Internet's role: a. Internet as mobilization structure. b. Internet as discussion platform. c. Internet as information disclosure platform. d. Internet as linkage social capital. The first three are similar to Rosenkrands' typology, and last one is a new type added by current study.

### **Internet as mobilization structure**

Volunteers have posted several waves of posts to call for collective actions. In the cyber-spaces, there are two types of mobilization. The first is to mobilize home-owners to sign the petition to show supports of the activities. The second type is to mobilize active home-owners to be representative of each building, who are responsible to distributes information and mobilize other home-owners to join the collective action. Internet is an important mobilization structure as property management agent takes advantage of its control of public facility, and prevents home-owners from circulates information about the cell-site incident. Notices are torn up shortly after they are posted. Under such circumstance, activists have to circulate information on-line or in a door-to-door way. Besides, on-line posts have their own advantage. It is low-cost, convenient, and wide-spread. An activist describes the role of Internet in a post. It says:

A home-owner of Room 102, XX Building sent me an email to authorize me to sign the petition... At about 10:00, a couple come for the petition. They learn about the rights-defending activities on-line. Though they have not move in this

neighbourhood, they still concern what is going on here.

### **Internet as discussion platform**

Multiple-actor interaction is easy in cyber-space. Almost all users can engage in an on-line interaction and share their opinions. In this case, the Internet can be regarded as a discussion platform. Before the collective action, on-line discussion helps to the framing process. Home-owners share the interpretation of the cell-site project and its potential impacts on health in the cyber-space. Thus, it helps to reach a consensus which is the essential foundation of the following actions. During the collective resistance, active home-owners discuss a lot to figure out suitable strategies. They predict different potential scenarios of interactions between home-owners, property management agent and government officials. Thus, it helps to choose effective tactics. Besides, potential counter-tactics, the framing of their demands, the content and the wording of the petition letters are all the important topics of on-line discussion. Generally, by on-line discussion, home-owners can better prepare for the ensuing contentions with opponents and government officials.

### **Internet as information disclosure platform**

By information disclosure, it refers to the fact that active home-owners disseminate information of progress of collective resistance via the Internet. The information flows from activists to other home-owners. The content includes decision-makings, responses of officials to home-owners' claims, progress of rights-defending activities, etc. Information disclosure plays two different, but equally important roles.

- It helps to build a connection between the active volunteers and home-owners, thus keep all the home-owners as a cohesive collective. The voluntary organization presents the interests of all home-owners, and they are proxy of other home-owners. Trust is the key; otherwise the legitimacy of the voluntary organization is in doubt. Information disclosure keeps the whole process transparent, which can help build and maintain the trust between volunteers and other home-owners.
- It can trigger on-line discussion, and thus mobilize home-owners to participate in relevant activities. For example, when volunteers reveals that the arrangement of coordination meeting is make public only two days ahead, and it is scheduled on Friday. This information activates a flurry of on-line discussion. The topics cover the intention of officials, possible negative impacts on the solution, and the possible actions to show their supports. Generally speaking, the on-line discussion frames the arrangement as a sign of unfavourable stance of government official, which indicates potential negative impacts on the solution. Many of the home-owners decide to take a job leave to participate the meeting because of their dissatisfaction with the arrangement. It turns out that around 40 home-owners did show up at the meeting.

### **Internet as linkage social capital**

Existing studies have pointed out that linkage social capital is important sources of information. In urban resistance, linkage to government officials can provide crucial information on struggle tactics, among other things (Shi, 2008). In the information era, home-owners can access similar crucial information on-line even if they lack of linkage social capital. During my fieldwork, many interviewees mention that they act according to regulations, policies and laws. They emphasise that their actions and claims are lawful because they find supportive legal and governmental documents on-line. Some activists even buy a computer and set-up Internet connection for their rights-upholding activities. Internet as linkage social capital differs from Internet as discussion platform as the information flows inwards rather than outwards, that is, from outside to activists. Based on the content analysis of on-line posts, the Internet can provide different types of information and each plays a different roles.

- Use on-line factual information to answer the question of "what is going on". The factual information helps to reduce the uncertainties of the events. As an activist puts it, "We are still not totally sure if a cell-site is installed at our neighbourhood, hoping that is just a misunderstanding. Until recently, we find pictures of cell-site equipments from the Internet. They are exactly the same as those found at our neighbourhood. Now we are sure what is going on here." It is non-trivial since factual information is not always accessible to home-owners, especially when opponents do their best to conceal the true story. For example, Residents' Committee tried to persuade home-owners that the cell-site is national property. If so, home-owners have slim chances of success. Under this circumstance, home-owners need to figure out what is going on before they lay out their strategies of rights-defending activities. In this sense, the so-call "problematization" process is not just skilful articulations of the issues at stake, but also a process of discovering social facts.
- Use on-line information to frame the issues at stake. First of all, home-owners use the Internet to find regulations on cell-site installation, which stipulates that home-owners must be informed and their consensus is precondition of a legitimate project (Regulations of Telecommunications, 2000). This is the legal basis of the resistance. They also cite news reports to support their arguments of cell-site's potential impacts on health. This resembles the diagnosis framing process. It seems that regulations are more crucial. As an activist summarizes the lessons of the resistance in retrospect, "We have gained from the law-learning and law-defending activities." Second, home-owners use precedent successful cases to justify their strategy of collective action, and to demonstrate the potential success of their own action.

## 7. Discussion

This study shows that both responsiveness of local government, state-home-owners intersection and the Internet are crucial for the development and outcome of home-owners' rights defending activities. This study echoes the theoretical of how political opportunity

influences contentious politics. Activists do not make claims without knowledge of political context or to act rationally with comprehensive understanding of political context. In reality, they act in face of uncertainty. On the one hand, the objective political opportunity delimits the potential space for rights-defending activities. Without expansion of political opportunity, it is hard to understand the recent upsurge of home-owners resistance in urban China. On the other hand, whether activists can exploit the existing political opportunity depends on their knowledge of the opportunity. This is extremely crucial given that information about logics of political institutions and decision making process is inaccessible to ordinary home-owners. To overcome the informational hurdle needs various resources. In this sense, researchers need to investigate the conjunctural effects of political opportunity and internal resources available to home-owners. I argue that state-home-owners intersection and the popularity of the Internet are two favourable conditions for activists to learn about political opportunity and take advantage of it.

It should be mentioned that state-home-owners intersection is different from ally. The former is not an external agent, and it might not be involved in the decision making process directly. The concept of state-home-owners intersection is interesting as it proffers a possible way of combining insights from political opportunity theory and resource mobilisation theory. From this study, it is also obvious that researchers can gain better understanding of home-owners rights-defending activities by differentiating frontline activists from its “social base”. Though it is true that many of the frontline activists are the retired, housewife, etc., it is misleading to ignore “forces” from backstage. Thus, the composition of neighbourhood populations in general, and state-home-owners intersection in particular, should be examined in study of home-owners rights-defending activities.

The Internet is an important tool and platform for home-owners rights-defending activities. This study tries to classify how the Internet matters for the contestation. What is unclear is when it fails to favour home-owners’ rights defending activities and why. It is not uncommon that the on-line forum might lack of participants, or fails to unite participants to protect their rights and interests. This question needs further investigation.

At last, though the implications of home-owners rights-defending activities on macro-political institutions are unclear, it is no doubt that such activities have changed the landscape of community governance. Residents’ Committee can no longer dominate the local governance. Even it is true that home-owners do not participate in local affairs; they do stand out when it is deemed necessary. The actors in community governance are more diverse than it was. How social conflicts might change the mode of local governance is another question to pursue.