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Villagers and Popular Resistance in Contemporary China

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It is hardly novel to say that post-Mao rural China has seen considerable economic growth and commercialization; what is less well known, however, is that recent reforms have also, in some villages, been accompanied by worsening mass-elite relations (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989; Li Xiwen, 1989; Wang Zhenyao, 1991a, 1991b). As newly autonomous farmers become more demanding, rural cadres in many locales are finding it increasingly difficult to govern.¹ Lacking reliable, institutionalized means to obtain funds and ensure acceptance of their commands, many grassroots leaders all too frequently turn to coercion; in response, angered villagers sometimes rise up and engage in various, often spirited forms of resistance. The result is that violent clashes and rural unrest have grown in recent years such that, in some

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villages, collecting taxes and enforcing birth control quotas have become life-threatening assignments that cadres openly loathe (Liu Chuijiang, 1992: 194-96; Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 2-6).

Besides "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1985) and collective violence, which have been examined in China (Zweig, 1989b; Perry, 1985a, 1985b) and elsewhere (Colburn, 1989; Scott and Kerkvliet, 1986), new forms of popular contention are emerging and spreading in the Chinese countryside. Most notably, more and more villagers are turning to what might be called "policy-based resistance" to defend their "legitimate rights and interests" (*hefa quanyi*).² Individually, policy-based resisters cite laws, government policies, and other official communications when challenging over taxation and the use of force, and they shower officials with complaints, asking for the dismissal of corrupt cadres and demanding improved accountability. Collectively, they organize visits to government offices to protest rigged elections and lodge complaints that demand the repeal of "local policies" (*tu zhengce*), the removal of "local emperors," and the lifting of illegal local impositions. Aggrieved villagers these days have little sympathy for cadres who fail to live up to official norms and promises made by central officials. During the past few years alone, individual protests, mass demonstrations, and formal collective complaints have increased (Cheng Tongshun, 1994; Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989; Zhonggong cixian xianwei zuzhibu, 1993; O'Brien and Li, 1995), and at least two major riots have occurred, partly because local officials turned a deaf ear to villager petitions (Bernstein, 1994: 72-82; Sung, 1993).

When accounting for conflict between villagers and rural cadres, Chinese and foreign press reports often highlight popular anger with corruption and excessive fees. Western scholars, for their part, tend to emphasize frustration over limited mobility and underdeveloped social welfare policies (Selden, 1988), growing inequality and excessive extraction by a predatory state (Zweig, 1989a; Friedman, 1990; Bernstein, 1994), and collective efforts to defend agricultural interests (Bernstein, 1994). At the same time, research on rural violence has identified spiraling financial burdens (Bernstein, 1994), communal competition (Perry, 1985a, 1985b), and exploitation by state representatives and wealthy villagers as major causes of popular discontent (Zweig, 1986, 1989a). To this point, however, analysts have paid only

limited attention (excepting Perry, 1985b, and Bernstein, 1994) to changes in the *content* and *form* of popular contention, particularly changes that occurred after rural income growth slowed during the mid-1980s and after institutional reforms such as rapid marketization, cadre responsibility systems, and village political and administrative restructuring (White, 1992; O'Brien, 1994) began to take hold.

Important questions concerning the shape of popular action and the villagers who employ it remain to be addressed. What forms does resistance by rural Chinese take? Which forms are more or less effective? On what grounds are popular claims made? Do proactive claims pressed by some policy-based resisters signal the emergence of citizens who possess rights? This article sketches answers to these (and other) questions by (1) developing a set of descriptive types³ and (2) examining new policy-based forms of contention and the villagers who use them.

THREE TYPES OF VILLAGERS

Not all Chinese villagers engage in popular resistance, and not all those who do have turned to new forms of contention. From their perspective as local leaders and policy implementers, rural cadres commonly identify two kinds of villagers. First, the great majority of rural residents are "honest and reasonable folks" (*laoshi baixing*)—people who resemble imperial *shunmin* (obedient, tractable subjects who accepted new rulers after a dynasty fell). These individuals, by and large, listen to cadre instructions and are receptive to persuasion and most state demands. But there are also a small number of "nail-like persons" (*dingzihu*) or "shrewd and unyielding people" (*diaomin*) who "reject the guidance of national policy, who refuse to carry out national, township and village tasks" (He Weiliang, 1992: 1) and who "brutally retaliate against village cadres" (Yan Wenxue and Shao Qijiang, 1989: 5). Making up a small but appreciable of the rural population, according to one estimate, these villagers have become "tigers who block the road" (He Weiliang, 1992: 7) for many rural cadres.

Whereas some officials and analysts use the terms *diaomin* and *dingzihu* interchangeably, several township leaders (Interviewees 3,

23) and rural experts (Interviewees 22, 24) with whom we have spoken make a further distinction. They point out that although many dingzihu or diaomin are lawless near rebels, others are defiant yet law abiding. These observers use the term dingzihu to refer to villagers who ignore and violate laws and policies and have little concern for public welfare, and they reserve the word diaomin for those who make use of laws, policies, and other official communications to defend their interests. In this construction, diaomin are much more threatening than dingzihu because dingzihu can usually be ostracized or dealt with through ordinary legal procedures; cadres can mobilize the township police or village militia to suppress or frighten dingzihu, they can prosecute them for criminal acts, and they can isolate them by framing their behavior as antisocial. Actions taken against dingzihu may even win the applause of other villagers and are often held to be analogous to "yanking out nails" (*ba dingzi*) (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 4), as if cadres were carpenters restoring scrap boards for reuse.

Handling diaomin, however, is much more complicated. One township Party secretary in Hebei, for example, was skillful at outwitting and overpowering dingzihu. When a farmer's refusal to be sterilized emboldened other villagers to do the same, the Party secretary visited him and convinced him to undergo the operation. But this official, who was known for his toughness, was later outmaneuvered by a group of wily diaomin, who lodged a collective complaint against one of his most conscientious village cadres. The village cadre in question was a model birth control implementer but was vulnerable to charges of embezzling a few thousand yuan and organizing a retaliatory theft of another village's transformer. After the township secretary insisted on protecting him, a group of farmers charged the township secretary with "suppressing the masses" and "harboring an evildoer," leaving him little choice but to sanction the cadre's removal lest he risk his own career if the complainants proceeded to higher levels. When asked what made his job difficult, the township official said,

Why is it hard? Because my township is full of diaomin! They are much harder to handle than dingzihu. They don't take orders, neither do they break any laws. In fact, they know laws and policies better than many cadres do. If I am not tough, they don't listen to me; but if I am just a little bit too tough, they lodge complaints [Interviewee 3; also see Yue Chao, 1993].

In this article, we examine representative *shunmin*, *dingzihu*, and *diaomin* (whom we call compliant villagers, recalcitrants, and policy-based resisters, respectively) and their actions.⁴ We argue that distinguishing their differing responses to economic appropriation and political domination is crucial for understanding emerging political and legal claims and the evolving rural "repertoire of contention" (Tilly, 1986: 390-91). Taking repertoires to be "learned cultural creations that emerge in political struggle" (Tilly, 1993: 264), we focus on the incremental experimentation (McAdam, 1983) that is producing a policy-based repertoire as well as the repertoire's capacity "to be utilized by many social actors against a variety of targets, either alone or in combination with other forms of resistance" (Tarrow, 1994: 33). In the course of defining three types, we review some common reactive claims against market dislocation and state appropriation (Perry, 1985b; Tilly, 1976) while also identifying new proactive claims (Tilly, 1976) that demand greater control over grassroots political power.

In the eyes of local officials, policy-based resisters are a formidable presence because they observe laws and policies while undermining rural cadres' authority. At a time when rural cadres often find it necessary to bend or even violate "the spirit of the center" to meet their targets (or to line their pockets), it is policy-based resisters rather than recalcitrants who pose the greatest challenge to cadre power and the existing local political order (Interviewees 15, 23).

COMPLIANT VILLAGERS (*SHUNMIN*)

In recent years, collecting taxes, imposing fees, enforcing birth control, and implementing funeral reform have become the "most difficult jobs" that rural cadres face (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989; Duan Zhiqiang and Tang Jinsu, 1989; Bernstein, 1994: 65). Using force to collect fees (*tiliu*) and compulsory fund raising, in particular, have drawn national attention and have provoked continuing conflict between villagers and rural cadres. Two major riots in 1993, for example, were triggered largely by the imposition of huge, clearly illegal fees.

Although many villagers are suffering from stagnating incomes and increasing demands, their response to state impositions has varied.

Typical compliant villagers may complain privately about staggering fees and harsh treatment but, in a defining act, they fail to engage in public resistance. Perhaps because they “fear officials” (*paguan*) or perhaps because they fail to distinguish between lawful and unlawful actions (Lu Fang, 1992: 7), compliant villagers are generally unwilling to defy even famously incompetent or corrupt cadres and refuse to challenge them even when they feel they have been personally mistreated.

Compliant villagers operate under a dual burden of caution born out of experience and limited knowledge of how to act effectively against grasping, partial, or corrupt cadres. They may not know, for example, about the 5% limit on economic burdens established by the central government and may regard all taxes and fees to be an unconditional obligation that must be remitted to the emperor (*huangliang*) (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 17-18), or they may not have been informed of village electoral reforms and may still believe that all cadres are to be appointed by the township (Interviewees 2, 7, 9). Yet, even when they become aware that fees have been imposed illegally or that elections have been withheld or tampered with, compliant villagers usually remain diffident (unless they are mobilized by others) and steadfastly maintain that openings rarely exist to challenge cadres (Interviewee 9).

In explaining their characteristic meekness, compliant villagers often emphasize their lack of organization and say that the costs of open resistance are likely to be high whereas the pay-offs are uncertain (Interviewees 1, 4, 9, 19). They may also rationalize their exploitation and inactivism: if excessive demands have not touched them personally, they may hope to avoid a cadre's attention; if they have been mistreated, they may accept it on grounds that they are far from alone in their suffering (Interviewees 8, 9). Compliant villagers may grumble, and indeed often do grumble, but they fail to act—individually or collectively. They may shrug and claim they are resigned to misrule or are apathetic, saying things such as “It's useless; even if the Guomindang comes back, it doesn't matter. I'll still eat three meals a day” (Interviewee 9). Or they may argue that efforts to improve village governance will not succeed insofar as ordinary farmers are weak and higher levels are either hypocritical or unable to control even the most “disloyal” local power holders (Interviewees 7, 9). According to

several self-proclaimed compliant villagers, in one village where other villagers have been struggling to oust a corrupt cadre for several years, these efforts will certainly come to naught given that poor leaders can rarely be removed because "officials shield each other" (Interviewees 8, 9, 19). Most compliant villagers assume (and see) a world of well-fortified adversaries who are impervious to even reasonable demands. They are unaware of potential allies, inside or outside the village, and judge government authorities to be mighty and unified, providing few points of access for mass initiative (Interviewees 1, 9). Typical compliant villagers fail to perceive (or deny) precisely what policy-based resisters believe and act on: that economic reforms and other institutional changes have markedly improved the prospects for popular resistance.

Even if a cadre can be toppled, compliant villagers often argue that resistance will have little long-term effect or may backfire. In their view, when a cadre is replaced, village governance may not improve or may return to its former (or a worse) state relatively quickly. Fairly honest and competent cadres may be deposed only to be replaced by leaders who exploit a village more rapaciously. Two sayings, the first old and the second new, capture the characteristic fatalism of compliant villagers well: "all crows under heaven are equally black" and "when a full tiger leaves, he will inevitably be replaced by a hungry wolf" (Interviewees 1, 9, 19).

Compliant villagers may be either misinformed and timid or uninformed and timid; or they may correctly sense how weak they are in relation to uncommonly strong or ruthless village and township authorities. Whatever the case, compliant villagers generally believe that they have few resources, and this affects all their calculations, leaving them deferential and risk averse. Although at times some compliant villagers may be driven into resistance, it is usually for a fleeting moment and in an underground form. For instance, a usually agreeable farmer may delay a fee payment or a couple may flee when a woman becomes visibly pregnant with an unauthorized child (Hong Renzhong, 1992; Interviewees 6, 11). Generally, these everyday forms of resistance can, however, be defeated by cadres who are willing to impose heavy fines, to hold relatives hostage, or to use other forms of coercion (Interviewee 3). So long as the "political opportunity structure" (Tarrow, 1994: chap. 5; Kitschelt, 1986) appears to be extremely

unpromising *to them*, acts of resistance by compliant villagers tend to be occasional, furtive, and comparatively unthreatening.

RECALCITRANTS (DINGZIHU)

Unlike compliant villagers, typical recalcitrants or dingzihu (literally, "nail-like villagers") react vigorously to state extraction and cadre demands. They boldly defy orders as well as policies and laws and frequently challenge village leaders who confront them. They show little deference to township officials and may even threaten to use violence against village cadres who offend them. When cadres appear to collect taxes and fees, recalcitrants may refuse to pay, claiming, "[I] stand up to state taxes, [I] hold out against local fees, everything is mine" (Interviewee 20; also see Shang Guizhong, 1992). Or they may respond even more dramatically: "If you want my life, I have one. If you want my money or grain, I have none" (Li Xueju, 1994: 33). Recalcitrants are more than willing to resort to force to defend their harvest and to employ violence when cadres crowd them.

Recalcitrants typically direct their attacks against dishonest, incompetent, and partial cadres, and they often respond to mistreatment (or perceived mistreatment) with threats to disrupt cadre assignments. Yet, in disputes concerning family planning, for instance, what recalcitrants regard to be mistreatment may in fact be implementation of central policy, and their resistance is often against the law or, at best, arguably legal. For example, one farmer in Hebei who had seven daughters but no sons refused to be sterilized despite pressure from township birth control inspectors. When the inspectors refused to relent and to allow another child, he went to the township government and threatened the life of any official who dared to end his family line (Yuan Ruiying, 1991). Or, in a Hunan county, as soon as a village Party secretary appeared at the door of a birth control resister, the recalcitrant swung an ax at him. The Party secretary ducked just in time for the blade to shatter the door frame instead of his skull (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 2).

Recalcitrants are clearly prone to dramatic acts of defiance. Press reports and our interviews suggest that they frequently act out of rage, spontaneously, without an elaborate weighing of costs and benefits (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 2; Gao Zuoming, 1993). But this

does not mean that recalcitrants are irrational or motivated mainly by unfathomable, bellicose passions. The birth control policy deeply offends many villagers; in fact, it may drive sonless families toward desperate and ill-considered resistance. Taxes and fees are high, in agricultural villages sometimes exceeding 30% of the poorest villagers' income (Interviewee 25). The defiance of recalcitrants is that of villagers who see intrusive cadres making demands they may not be able to back up—individuals who wish to discover exactly how much the political opportunity structure has changed and how far the reach of local authorities extends.

Recalcitrants in many villages have ample reasons both to be angry and to believe that their combative, disruptive form of resistance may succeed. Village cadres, for one, have been structurally weakened since decollectivization and the dissolution of communes. They can no longer use class labels to stigmatize "backward elements," and they do not control villagers' livelihoods to the extent they did in the past. At the same time, unpredictable and frequent policy fluctuations have emboldened (perhaps even enticed) many villagers to test cadre resolve. During the past fifteen years, rural residents have seen waves of strict policy implementation come and go: one year birth control is enforced strictly, the next year less so; one year all those who die in a village must be cremated, the next year burials are winked at again. When facing a state imposition, some villagers understandably act as if it always pays to explore the limits of the permissible (Bao Yonghui and Li Xinrui, 1991: 58; Duan Zhiqiang and Tang Jinsu, 1989: 26).

Further, the pugnacious resistance characteristic of recalcitrants sometimes succeeds. During the past decade, many rural cadres have been injured or killed by angry villagers, whereas in some "paralyzed" and "run-away villages" (O'Brien, 1994) rural administration either has ceased or has turned wholly away from state extraction and policy implementation. All the same, despite their occasional victories, in most clashes recalcitrants ultimately lose. If recalcitrants openly violate birth control regulations or use violence to combat ordinary revenue collection, they all too often attract the attention of law enforcement authorities or the public security apparatus. Defied cadres, among many other options, may begin legal proceedings when recalcitrants build unauthorized homes on village land (Interviewee 6); they (or the township police they call in) may rough up and detain

tax recalcitrants on charges of "hampering government work" (Interviewee 3); when violence appears likely, they may even use public funds to buy firearms or hire bodyguards (Interviewee 13; Zhengding xian minzhengju, 1991). Unless recalcitrants have unusually permissive or weak cadres in their villages and townships (or other special circumstances such as influential clan members willing to defend them), individual open defiance of national policies and state-sanctioned appropriation is seldom an effective way to sidetrack cadre demands (Gao Zuoming, 1993).

To subdue recalcitrants, rural cadres often visit them and at least nominally try to gain their cooperation via persuasion. If unsuccessful, however, "after three minutes, many [cadres] use force." They make it "impossible for recalcitrants to breathe" and "let loose a hurricane" (He Weiliang, 1992: 2). They may mobilize the township police or village militia to seize their grain, confiscate their appliances and furniture, or even tear down their homes. For birth control resisters, dozens of rural cadres may surround a pregnant woman's home in the middle of the night and demand her "surrender" (Interviewee 6; He Weiliang, 1992: 2). When standoffs ensue and both sides dig in, violent confrontations frequently occur and many recalcitrants strike back. Incidents that we have heard about include placing a funeral wreath in front of a cadre's house on New Year's Eve, destroying a cadre's ancestral graves, felling fruit trees, burning haystacks, destroying crops, poisoning livestock, picking quarrels with a cadre's family members, and even fire bombing a cadre's home (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 3; Wang Zhenyao, 1991b: 44; Zhang Chenggong, 1993).

In the end, despite their bravado and determination, resistance by recalcitrants usually proves ineffective. Even when recalcitrants hound village cadres out of office and paralyze village administration, their efforts infrequently reduce cadre demands for long. Much as typical compliant villagers fear, toppling a cadre can invite appointment of new, tougher leaders, possibly former criminals or "local bullies" (*eba*) (Lu Fengjun, 1993) who may be even more difficult to defy. It can also lead to punitive enforcement of unpopular policies. If township officials must personally collect taxes or oversee sterilizations, for instance, they typically impose heavy fines for evasion and refuse to listen to special pleading (Interviewee 3; Ouyang Bin, 1993).

"You can't let villagers take advantage of having no village head," said one township official. "I must make them realize that having no village leadership will have truly unpleasant repercussions" (Interviewee 3).

Why is resistance by recalcitrants seldom successful? Our research suggests that three factors conspire to limit its effectiveness: (1) it is subject to legal punishment, (2) it often backfires, and (3) it rarely attracts widespread public support. As noted earlier, recalcitrants fail to recognize that only some cadre demands violate "the spirit of the center," and they frequently resist national policies such as family planning and ordinary revenue collection. Recalcitrants, it is true, may courageously reject unlawful fees, but they may also then turn around and refuse to pay authorized state taxes and other legal levies. When pressing their demands and making their accusations, recalcitrants also typically fail to make legal and political claims and may even rashly attack several levels of government simultaneously, thereby encouraging higher officials to join forces with grassroots leaders against them. Given these blind spots and tactical limitations, village cadres can easily label recalcitrants "disruptive troublemakers" and officials at higher levels may ignore problems they identify. Moreover, when their defiance is discovered, publicized, and punished, their credibility among potential allies may plummet and even their "reasonable" acts of resistance can be tainted. Recalcitrants, in sum, characteristically fail to distinguish legally constituted directives from prohibited acts by incompetent, overeager, and corrupt cadres, and they weaken their standing by indiscriminate attacks on both legitimate authority and illegitimate abuses of power.

Second, actions by recalcitrants often backfire. Many recalcitrants regard grassroots cadres to be "shameless beggars" or "bandits in official uniform" who are undeserving of deference (Interviewee 22; Bao Yonghui and Li Xinrui, 1991). Fellow villagers, if asked, might agree; in some villages, cadres undoubtedly are parasitic. All the same, if a recalcitrant damages the property of even a widely despised village leader, for example, it can harm a whole village when the cadre seeks compensation. One village leader in Hebei deterred further resistance from a recalcitrant by announcing on the village loudspeaker, "You can't frighten me. You may burn 100 yuan worth of my hay, but I will receive 200 yuan compensation. It's up to me to report the size of my loss. [Because you are a villager and the compensation will come from

a village levy,] you, the arsonist, will pay toward the compensation, and other villagers will curse you because you made them pay for what you did" (Interviewee 4). When ill-considered resistance has unexpected and baleful consequences for one's neighbors, it obviously can harm a recalcitrant's reputation. This is particularly true when cadres use an impulsive act by a person widely considered to be a hothead to stir up antirecalcitrant sentiment.

The final, related reason recalcitrants tend to be ineffective is that they and their actions typically lack public support. Recalcitrants are often among the least popular people in a village. According to one detailed account (He Weiliang, 1992), many villagers cold-shoulder them and cadres often discriminate against them. Other villagers rarely enter their homes and they are allotted few loans, relief grain, or goods from above. Recalcitrants reportedly also meet obstacles in finding jobs in township enterprises or in joining the army, and they may be treated as if they are on a blacklist. Over time, it is said, recalcitrants frequently come to feel they are not of equal status with other villagers, and this may encourage precipitate acts of defiance.

Finally, recalcitrants may undercut their resistance even further by ignoring village norms and aggravating their isolation. They may command little respect because they refuse to contribute to community welfare or because they seek small advantages when dealing with neighbors (Interviewee 12). A recalcitrant might build a pigpen on common land in front of a neighbor's home or let his or her livestock graze on other people's land. Recalcitrants may also intimidate cadres and other villagers and engage in what is perceived to be selfish behavior. In a representative case, a recalcitrant threatened to use force when cadres demanded that the contracted land of his daughter, who had married into another village, be returned for reallocation (Xin Zhongnan, 1993). Or a recalcitrant may seek to monopolize pleasant jobs that other villagers would like. In Shandong, when a recalcitrant discovered that a village cadre wished to reassign him and to appoint a new forest guard, he hid an ax in his shirt and confronted him. When the cadre refused to reverse his decision, the recalcitrant opened his jacket and displayed the ax, saying, "If you recall me, I'll kill you and then myself." (In this case, the recalcitrant's resistance was successful; force or the threat of force, of course, sometimes works [Interviewee 22].)

The isolation of recalcitrants becomes especially apparent when a village undertakes democratic reform. In a Hebei village where the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees⁵ had been fully implemented, villagers were allowed to organize electoral groups on grounds other than residence. No group would accept the village's recalcitrants, and so they had to form their own electoral group although most of the recalcitrants reportedly disliked each other intensely (Interviewee 12).

POLICY-BASED RESISTERS (DIAOMIN)

Unlike compliant or recalcitrant villagers, policy-based resisters or diaomin (literally, "shrewd and unyielding people") pursue a path between quiescence and individual, often impetuous resistance. They do not revere or fear rural cadres, nor do they reject them out of hand as grasping agents of the state. Instead, policy-based resisters use laws, policies, and other official communications to defy local leaders. They accept their duty to observe laws and policies but also insist it is their right to observe only laws and policies. To defend (and advance) their interests, policy-based resisters challenge unlawful cadre behavior and strive to ensure that potentially beneficial policies are implemented scrupulously.

Before acting, policy-based resisters typically identify policy violations by local cadres (Interviewees 3, 5). To become more knowledgeable adversaries, they may subscribe to newspapers and magazines, read cadre work style manuals, listen to radio broadcasts, watch television news, or gather stories of successful resistance from villagers returning from other places (Cheng Tongshun, 1994; Interviewee 17). Using their knowledge of government directives and guidelines, policy-based resisters next gauge the legality of orders they have received, especially those concerning "economic burdens." Then they remit what is required but no more. On tax payments, for example, typical policy-based resisters do not regard the grain tax to be an unconditional obligation, but neither do they deny the government the right to collect revenues.

Since the introduction of the household responsibility system, more and more villagers appear to conceive of their relationship with the state in contractual terms (see Ross, 1989: 63). Under the current grain purchase policy, for instance, farmers commonly enter into contracts

with township governments that oblige them to sell grain to the state but that also oblige the township governments to supply production materials. A policy-based resister, as a rule, is willing to fulfill his or her state obligations, but only if the township government honors its obligations. If the township fails to deliver promised supplies, often because officials have illegally resold earmarked goods, a policy-based resister may simply refuse to provide his or her contracted grain. In one Liaoning case, when a farmer received only 10 kg of his 200 kg quota of low-priced fertilizer and no contracted diesel fuel, he responded, "Failing to carry out the 'three-linkage-policy' amounts to unilaterally breaking a contract. I have the 'right' (*quan*) not to pay the grain tax. You have broken the contract; how can you ask me to honor it?" ("Shixin haiyao feili," 1993).

Policy-based resisters may also invoke a contractual logic when resisting local fees. To deflect an exorbitant financial demand, they may link their legal responsibilities with political and legal claims and use the regime's legitimating myths (and other "promises") to justify their resistance (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 5; Li Jingyi, 1992). They may accept extraordinary exactions, for example, only if they are accompanied by detailed explanations and a promise of accountability. When new local fees are announced, they may first question whether a levy is authorized by higher levels. Then they may calculate whether the total assessment exceeds the legal limit of 5% of a village's previous year's income. If the fee is unauthorized or excessive, they may then refuse to pay, claiming the fee contravenes this or that regulation or contradicts a pledge made in a recent speech by a national leader (see Bernstein, 1994; Cheng Tongshun, 1994).

On smaller, legal levies, which unmistakably fall within local jurisdiction, policy-based resisters sometimes go much further and assert "democratic claims" to sidestep extraction. Because local fees are raised and spent within a township or village (on road building, schools, enterprise development, etc.), they may demand that rural cadres justify every levy and disclose all expenditures as soon as they are incurred. If these stipulations are ignored, they may again refuse to pay such and such a fee—now citing a cadre's "undemocratic work style" and the center's commitment to "enhance villagers' autonomy" (Li Jingyi, 1992; Interviewee 10). Policy-based resisters seem, ever gingerly, to be linking prior consent with compliance and to be staking

out claims to hear reasons along with demands. As one Liaoning farmer explained when facing yet another unforeseen and unexplained levy, "I don't know what kind of fee you are asking me to pay. When I know, I'll hand over any amount requested" ("Shixin haiyao feili," 1993).

Echoing early, locally based, proactive resisters in other nations at other times, policy-based resisters demand financial disclosure and greater accountability. "Shrewd and unyielding villagers" know their legal responsibilities and those of rural cadres, and they appreciate that the current political opportunity structure permits significant tactical innovation and adaptation of conventional repertoires of contention. They see openings (that are lost on others), which allow the invention of new, broadly applicable resistance routines that may be effective against a range of local actors and various misdeeds. They are developing skills and perspectives that enable them to exploit official measures and statements that provide any conceivable grounds for defiance by holding cadres to exacting legal and behavioral standards and demanding increased accountability.

Policy-based resisters seem to view taxes, fees, and other demands in terms of exchanges that imply mutual obligations. They see their relationship with cadres partly in terms of enforceable contracts and fulfill their responsibilities so long as rural cadres treat them as equals and deliver on promises made by officials at higher levels. This approach to authority, unsurprisingly, can create nearly unresolvable dilemmas for many village cadres. Rural leaders are subject to numerous nearly (or genuinely) incompatible demands: extract resources without using force, build roads without raising levies, enforce birth control through persuasion, conduct democratic elections while preventing the selection of "untrustworthy" cadres, develop the village economy while living up to the ideal of "hard work and plain living." Most rural cadres are hard-pressed to meet such a daunting list of expectations; however, as soon as cadres break a law or disregard some aspect of the "spirit of the center," watchful, policy-based resisters step in and charge them with prohibited behavior. Cadres who are under attack then typically argue that such individuals are intransigent and unreasonable—villagers who should be lumped together with recalcitrants and summarily suppressed. Often they succeed—at least in the short term—and policy-based resisters are cowed into submission or

subjected to coercion. But sometimes they fail. Treating skillful policy-based resistance as unlawful, antigovernment defiance frequently produces collective complaints and perhaps a sympathetic hearing from officials at higher levels (O'Brien and Li, 1995; also see Bernstein, 1994: 58; Zweig, 1989b: 152-53).

This is one reason why in up to 60% of collective complaints (Fang Guomin, 1993), complainants bypass one or more levels of government when proceeding up the state hierarchy; the higher one goes, it is widely believed, the more successful one is likely to be. (On bypassing intermediate courts during the Qing dynasty, see Ocko, 1988; on "nonfinality" as a Chinese legal value, see Edwards, 1986: 47.) It is also a likely reason why a popular saying in the countryside goes, "The center is our benefactor (*enren*), the province is our relative, the county is a good person, the township is an evil person, and the village is our enemy" (Zhang Houan and Meng Guilan, 1993: 42; Interviewee 20).

Policy-based resisters exploit not only obvious violations of policies and laws but also more subtle forms of cadre manipulation and selective implementation. Rural cadres may intentionally misread central policies, tailor them, or conform to vague, incomplete statutes while ignoring their spirit. In regions where the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees has been implemented only partially, for instance, township officials have often used it to strengthen their control over villagers and village cadres. Township cadres in these areas may appropriate nomination of candidates, at times handpicking a small group of representatives to elect villagers' committees. In such places, villagers may rise up and reject the results of a rigged election or lodge complaints concerning procedural irregularities. In one telling example, when a township government in Liaoning monopolized nominations and did not allow secret balloting, nearly twenty villagers traveled at their own expense to the county town, then the provincial capital, and finally Beijing to lodge complaints. They knew the Organic Law by heart and recited its chapters when petitioning officials for a new election (Tian Yuan, 1993; Interviewee 15).⁶

A recent Ministry of Civil Affairs report (Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan jianshesi nongcunchu, 1993) further confirms the existence of considerable popular dissatisfaction with the 1992-93 villagers' committee elections: dissatisfaction conspicuously associated with

procedural violations that Chinese villagers are usually said to ignore. Among many other cases, hundreds of Shanxi villagers besieged the Yuncheng county government, demanding that an election be nullified after a candidate accompanied a mobile ballot box as it moved from location to location (Interviewees 15, 21). Or, in a similar incident, nearly a hundred Hebei villagers went directly to the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission in Beijing to lodge complaints concerning election irregularities. Their township Party committee had insisted that the village Party branch nominate candidates, whereas the complainants claimed a Party branch had no right to nominate village cadres. Because the Party was the "leader," they argued, the election would be pointless if the Party branch selected candidates; "wouldn't voting for other candidates amount to defying Party leadership?" (Interviewee 21).

When contesting election results and procedural infractions, policy-based resisters make claims based on laws and policies that rural cadres (and higher authorities) have ostensibly agreed to implement. Policy-based resisters sometimes also assert much more. This occurs when villagers claim protections and privileges granted by the center that rural cadres have refused to recognize. Although this sort of resistance may not appear to be proactive vis-à-vis central authorities, it is decidedly proactive in the local context. For example, in some villages, policy-based resisters have managed to spur the enforcement of electoral laws and regulations limiting "peasant burdens" that have been concealed from them. (Such measures are unknown to many villagers because township and village cadres in some areas have chosen to withhold documents or to ignore oral communications they have received from higher levels.)

In one poor Hebei village, for instance, a group of farmers lodged numerous complaints against several village leaders requesting their removal. After the township rejected all their appeals, the villagers decided to station several rotating groups of petitioners in the township to press their complaint. One day, one of the villagers happened on a copy of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees lying on a desk in a township office. He read it, immediately realized its significance, and showed it to his fellow activists. The activists collectively studied the law for a while and resolved to "lodge complaints against the township government for violating the Organic Law by not holding

democratic elections.” The complainants then hatched a scheme to increase their leverage and to ensure they would not be ignored. They divided themselves into three “teams,” two of which went to the township government and the county civil affairs bureau while the third, consisting of village Party members, traveled to the county organization department. Facing mounting pressure from angry complainants demanding implementation of a law that had been blithely ignored throughout the region, the township government quickly relented and agreed to convene village elections. In the ensuing balloting, the villager who had originally discovered the Organic Law in the township office was elected chairman of his villagers’ committee (Bao Yonghui, 1991b).

Rural cadres, of course, are not alone in exploiting ambiguous policies and laws or in interpreting central documents to their own advantage. In fact, villagers can be as selective and deceptive as the cadres they defy. Policy-based resisters may, for one, attach exaggerated importance to Party propaganda or cite rescinded measures to support their claims. Or they may creatively misread laws and vague and ambiguous national policies (see Kelliher, 1992: 63-64, 68) to push for political changes that even central authorities might not sanction. According to one official from a perennially unstable township, artful villagers (including some Party members) have used two central documents to notable advantage of late: first, the Party Constitution (particularly its vague clauses on selecting branch secretaries and its language on democratic centralism) and, second, the Electoral Law of the National People’s Congress and Local People’s Congresses of 1979 (revised 1986), particularly clauses that allow villagers to elect deputies to county and township people’s congresses. Both documents are well publicized but are not, strictly speaking, applicable to most claims that most policy-based resisters make. Even so, village Party members in one Hebei township have disingenuously used the Party Constitution to urge the democratic election of village Party secretaries, whereas ordinary villagers in the same township cited the Electoral Law to establish or strengthen (however implausibly) their claim to elect village cadres (Interviewee 3).

At the same time, some villagers have summoned high-sounding Party propaganda to support demands that rural cadres be clean, fair, and willing to “serve the people” (Interviewee 10). At least one village

activist we have met claims to be truly motivated by "Communist values." He has seen films and television programs that depict model behavior by village cadres, and he has acquired and read a Party propaganda manual that describes appropriate cadre work style. He finds his village Party secretary morally lacking and has mobilized other villagers to oppose him on the grounds that he is not an authentic Party member (Interviewee 10; see also Wang Wanfu, 1992, on a farmer "searching for the real Communist Party"). Other interviewees have also related stories of how villagers slyly use defunct regime norms and elements of the pre-reform repertoire of contention to challenge rural cadres. In Hebei, a county official told us about villagers even drawing on the no longer constitutionally protected Cultural Revolution-era "four greats" (speaking out freely, airing views fully, holding great debates, writing big-character posters) to justify putting up big-character posters that exposed cadre corruption and inviting neighbors to join them in lodging collective complaints (Interviewee 6).

It is in these sorts of actions that local proactive resistance takes on its widest import, for it is here that we may see the beginning of efforts to transform still-contested claims into enforceable rights—rights that may eventually be claimed throughout the political system. When policy-based resisters cite the people's congress system as a model to transform villagers' representative assemblies into true authority organs (Interviewees 11, 12) or use the Party's principle of mass line democracy to seek the right to vote in primary elections for village Party committee members (Zhou Ziqing and Zhao Zhenji, 1992: 6), their resistance has become simultaneously policy based and proactive—a way to pursue their interests within existing channels and to open avenues of participation that few power holders at any level of government could have foreseen.

These and other policy-based strategies, of course, by no means always succeed. Particularly when resistance is vaguely policy based in that it has only a veneer of legality, appeals to outdated measures, or rests on mostly empty propaganda, it can be countered by savvy cadres and their allies at higher levels. Cadres' superiors know perfectly well that grassroots leaders are subject to innumerable conflicting demands, and they tend to be sympathetic, for example, to pleas that coercion cannot be avoided when collecting fees, requiring cre-

mation, or enforcing birth control (Interviewees 3, 5). Still, when policy-based resisters cite patently illegal and "undemocratic" behavior or obvious evasion of central intent, their legal and contractual policy-based form of contention can generate considerable pressure on rural cadres while also making it difficult to justify suppressing them as if they were recalcitrants.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE FORMS OF POLICY-BASED RESISTANCE

In their disputes with cadres, rural policy-based resisters engage in both individual and collective action. Acting alone, they seek to curb cadre abuses or, at a minimum, to ensure that local leaders realize their misdeeds and policy violations have been observed. When cadres appear to demand, say, additional grain, the head of a household may refuse to hand it over and may instead pepper them with embarrassing questions such as, "Central policy says that after farmers fulfill their contractual obligations, we can sell our grain freely on the market; why don't you obey? If you don't listen to the center, then we won't listen to you. . . . Are you cadres of the Communist Party?" (Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, 1989: 4-5).

If goading and embarrassment do not succeed, then policy-based resisters often link their demands for improved accountability and better leadership with threats to interfere with economic appropriation. They may, for example, confront cadres and refuse to pay even legal taxes and fees, pending the removal of "unqualified" leaders or improvements in their "democratic work style" (Benkan Guanchayuan, 1991; Bao Yonghui, 1991a: 12). In defending such actions, they may claim they are perfectly willing to satisfy their legal obligations, but only if cadres fulfill demanding and open-ended central commitments such as "serve the people" and "develop the economy" (Bao Yonghui and Li Xinrui, 1991: 54-55). In a few villages in a Hebei township, for instance, a number of villagers (reportedly acting independently) withheld their taxes and fees until the township government removed or disciplined village cadres who were charged with failing to bring prosperity to their villages, practicing favoritism, and refusing to disclose village expenditures (Interviewee 3).

To put additional pressure on incompetent, coercive, or dishonest cadres, individual policy-based resisters also visit higher ranking officials, write letters of complaint to higher levels, and expose local opposition to central policies in the media. Letters to newspapers and magazines, in particular, have attracted enterprising journalists to investigate accusations of cadre malfeasance nationwide. These efforts to win the attention of well-connected outsiders, although risky, can strengthen a policy-based resister's position remarkably. Should a charge be judged to have merit, and if officials at higher levels agree, publication of even a single letter or report detailing a case in *People's Daily*, *Legal Daily*, *Township Forum*, or *Peasant Daily* can instantly nationalize and legitimize a focus for popular action (Interviewee 16).

If policy-based resistance frequently begins with individual villagers acting alone, it often balloons into village-wide defiance. Resistance may spread particularly rapidly from a household or two to an entire village, for example, when other villagers learn they are being overcharged to make up for payments withheld by their neighbors. Even usually compliant villagers, in these circumstances, may refuse to pay for the policy-based resistance of others and may agree to remit only what they owe or nothing at all, awaiting a response from higher levels (Interviewee 3). In one paralyzed Hebei village, where cadres failed to manage production and public affairs well, "the number of villagers who refused to pay taxes and fees increased every year. In 1983 it was 5%, in 1985 it was 50%, in 1987 it was 70%, in 1988 it was 90%" (Minzhengbu cunji zuzhi jianshe zhuangkuang diaochazu, 1989: 6).

When individual action proves ineffective or collective action fails to snowball on its own, policy-based resisters may also actively mobilize other villagers to take part in organized collective resistance. Groups of policy-based resisters may, for example, arrange protests after township leaders give glowing introductions to favored nominees or ban unapproved candidates from running for village office (Liu Zhenqi, 1992; (Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan jianshesi nongcunchu, 1993: 83-84). Or, they may even join together to boycott or disrupt improperly held village elections. When residents of one Hunan village found themselves facing an illegal snap election, two young men organized some fellow villagers to plaster seventy-four posters all around the village, calling on voters to reject handpicked candidates and to "oppose dictatorial elections." The village's walls were literally

covered with oversized single characters, all written on white paper (a color that is associated with death and ill fortune). This frightening and provocative act attracted the attention of county officials, who investigated their charges and ruled that the balloting should be rescheduled and nominations should be reopened. Although the policy-based resisters were ultimately ordered to cover their posters with ones written on red paper, their defiance successfully delayed an election that violated the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees and relevant local regulations (Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan jianshesi nongcunchu, 1993: 80).

In a similar case, a group of policy-based resisters in Hubei successfully disrupted a villagers' committee election in which nominations were not handled according to approved procedures. At the exact moment when ballots were being distributed, one villager leaped to the platform where the election committee was presiding, grabbed a microphone, and shouted, "Xiong Dachao is a corrupt cadre. Don't vote for him!" Immediately, several of his confederates stood up and started shouting words of support, seconding his charges. To further dramatize their defiance, the assembled protesters then tore up their own ballots as well as those of other villagers who were milling about waiting to vote. The balloting was halted briefly but later resumed. Although township officials at first sought to prosecute the policy-based resisters for "impeding an election" and the county procurator accepted the case, the provincial people's congress, after consultation with the National People's Congress, decided it was "not appropriate to regard their actions as illegal" (Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan jianshesi nongcunchu, 1993: 99-100) because the original nominating process had been conducted improperly. The results of the original interrupted election were declared null and void and the balloting was rescheduled.

Besides interfering with unlawful grain procurement and disrupting undemocratic elections, some collective, policy-based resisters go beyond organizing defiance in their villages and seek to draw congenial officials at higher levels into their disputes. "In recent years, seeking audiences and lodging collective complaints (*jiti shangfang gaozhuang*) has become a popular form of peasant political participation" (Cheng Tongshun, 1994; see also O'Brien and Li, 1995; Minzhengbu jiceng zhengquan jianshesi nongcunchu, 1993). Operat-

ing within their legal rights, policy-based resisters may mobilize other villagers to petition officials at higher levels. A collective complaint may involve dozens or even hundreds of villagers (Li Buying, 1990; Fang Guomin, 1993; Interviewee 3), who proceed en masse to the township or county to present a formal co-signed letter of complaint. Because collective complaints usually crystallize only after individual efforts have failed to "reform" rural cadres, many aim to topple local leaders (Zhonggong cixian xianwei zuzhibu, 1993; Fang Guomin, 1993; Interviewee 3). The targets are usually village cadres, but township officials who protect village leaders can also be implicated (Interviewees 3, 10). Common accusations leveled against cadres range from selective policy implementation to flagrant violation of laws and policies, to protection of alleged wrongdoers (Fang Guomin, 1993; O'Brien and Li, 1995).

As key activists, policy-based resisters often play an indispensable role in preparing the necessary documents, recruiting the complainants, and maintaining pressure on a targeted cadre. They also may take the lead in collecting incriminating evidence, either independently or with others. In Shandong, for example, when a Party secretary gave a village flour milling machine to his brother-in-law, a policy-based resister immediately recorded this, and every other illegal act the cadre committed, on the inside of his door, just waiting for his chance to denounce the cadre (Interviewee 23). In a Hebei village, the collection of evidence was even more organized. A year before a collective complaint was filed, several villagers began circulating examples of a cadre's corruption and a list of procedural irregularities concerning his appointment to the village Party branch. A young, formerly apathetic woman noticed telltale signs of impending conflict and said, "There are some sensible people (*mingbai ren*) in our village. They have kept careful accounts for several years. They are waiting for their time to come. As soon as somebody leads an attack, his [the Party secretary's] days are numbered" (Interviewee 1).

To gather public support for a collective complaint, policy-based resisters often publicize their charges and their intent to compete with the current power holders. In the Hebei village just mentioned, for example, a former cadre and several other villagers came forward with their plan to challenge the Party secretary a year before acting (Interviewees 7, 10, 14). This served two purposes: it tested the strength of

the accused cadre, and it offered other usually compliant villagers an alternative slate to the current leadership. To convince fellow villagers they would break with their rival's ways and end village misrule, the activists further announced they would convene a free and fair election as soon as the cadre was ousted, and they promised to establish a discipline inspection committee on which no current Party members would be allowed to serve (Interviewee 10).

As in their individual efforts, villagers who organize collective policy-based resistance typically support their claims with reference to applicable laws and policies. Appealing to central documents, Party propaganda, and official communications can protect activists and may help mobilize other villagers to join a complaint. With proof that a cadre has violated relevant regulations, policy-based resisters can confidently call for punishment and defuse the fears of less bold neighbors (and other potential allies) that retaliation will invariably follow.

Policy-based resisters, as a rule, are more sensitive than compliant villagers to changes in the political opportunity structure and more realistic than recalcitrants about what those changes might imply. What this means, in essence, is that they choose their targets and time their assaults carefully. During the last few years, perceptive policy-based resisters have taken advantage of drives for (1) clean government (*lianzheng*), (2) rule by law, and (3) village democratic reform to attack cadre abuses (Interviewees 6, 18; Li Buying, 1990; Bao Yonghui, 1991b). Acting behind a protective shield of loyalty to the regime and its stated ideals, grievances concerning corruption, unlawful fees, undue coercion, and leaders' "undemocratic" work style have become available for redress. For similar reasons, many policy-based resisters have shown themselves to be extraordinarily attentive to cadre violations of birth control measures (Interviewees 10, 18). This is probably not so much because they desire conscientious enforcement of family planning but rather because any infraction of an important "national policy" (*guoce*) can be used to cripple a cadre and secure high-level support.

Policy-based resisters may be troublesome "prickly devils" (*ciergui*) to rural cadres, but they are often "natural leaders" to other villagers (Bao Yonghui and Li Xinrui, 1991). By doing "what rural cadres fear most" (Interview 3) and doing so in the name of government policy,

they can often blunt the many advantages of grassroots cadres and prompt collective action where previously there was mostly quiescence.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RIGHTS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

This article has distinguished three types of Chinese villagers based on their resistance routines (or lack of resistance) and their orientations to local political power.⁷ Typical compliant villagers, we have argued, are largely quiescent, either because they are skeptical that opportunities exist to outmaneuver rural cadres or because they fail to recognize openings that recalcitrants and policy-based resisters exploit. Typical recalcitrants, on the other hand, react strongly to cadre demands and respond to perceived mistreatment with threats to disrupt rural governance. Although some recalcitrants may simply wish to be left alone (Interviewee 2), when confronted, many engage in violent acts that test whether impassioned defiance will provoke repression or go unpunished. Policy-based resisters resemble recalcitrants in some respects, but not others, because they challenge overeager or corrupt cadres who infringe on their interests but use laws, policies, and other official communications to do so. Policy-based resisters typically demand that contractual obligations be enforced and link their legal responsibilities with political and legal claims; they seek detailed explanations of local impositions and a measure of accountability from cadres who may be unwilling (or unable) to comply with directives issued by higher levels as well as the "spirit of the center."

Although recalcitrants and compliant villagers deserve further attention, this article has focused on policy-based resisters. This is largely because policy-based resisters have several traits rarely associated with Chinese villagers. First, they are politically well informed; they know which policies and laws are potentially beneficial and which have been "stolen" (*tanwu*) or poorly implemented. Second, policy-based resisters regard rural cadres to be equals (or near equals) before higher authorities. They do not regard village and township leaders to be simple agents of the central government who must be obeyed as if they were dispatched from Beijing; instead, they treat

rural cadres as if they were bound by policies and laws to respect the interests of villagers. Third, policy-based resisters assert (and act on) political and legal claims. For representative (and probably more numerous) compliant and recalcitrant villagers, policies, laws, and leadership speeches are essentially instruments of domination that facilitate control and promote the exercise of political power; they are not weapons to be deployed in disputes with rural cadres. When justifying their occasional everyday acts of resistance, compliant villagers may appeal to "heavenly principles" (*tianli*); when facing down rural cadres, recalcitrants more commonly rely on run-of-the-mill power calculations. Neither compliant nor recalcitrant villagers root their resistance in a belief that villagers enjoy protections from even the most arbitrary cadre behavior. Policy-based resisters, by contrast, are aware that they have been granted certain protections, and they act on this awareness.

Unlike disillusioned intellectuals in China's cities, who file symbolic lawsuits they fully expect to lose (Alford, 1993; Potter, 1994), rural policy-based resisters expect redress and hope (perhaps even expect) to win. They therefore are not symptoms of an "alienated legal culture" (Potter, 1994: 357) or of a broader cynicism bred by long experience with arbitrary rule. Their goals do not center on embarrassing a regime that claims to derive its legitimacy partly from adherence to law but that is often unwilling to live with the procedural justice it makes available. Instead, policy-based resisters act as if they have a right to due process and strive to make the best of the gap "between professed ideals and lived reality" (Alford, 1993: 58). Theirs is a "realistic radicalism" (McCann, 1994: 233, 276), and their view of central policy (and the opportunities it provides) is as a potential source of entitlement, inclusion, and empowerment.

But does this mean that policy-based resisters are emergent citizens who enjoy recognized rights? If we reason within the Chinese constitutional tradition of changeable, government-sanctioned rights that are not subject to independent review or accompanied with popular sovereignty (Nathan, 1985: chap. 6), we might conclude that Chinese villagers have a right to engage in policy-based resistance. To our eyes, however, this conclusion would obscure as much as it clarifies. Rights should not be equated with claims, particularly claims of uncertain priority. Policy-based resisters exist at the sufferance of higher levels,

and the "rights" they currently act on are (1) conditional (they can be withdrawn, as the "four greats" were shortly after the reform coalition gained power) and (2) programmatic (they can be withheld until conditions are "ripe," as is the right to elect national leaders). Policy-based resisters undoubtedly affect the exercise of local power, but they still act opportunistically in what might be called a "zone of implementation" rather than legitimately in a defined and protected "zone of immunity" (Tang Tsou, 1986: xxiv).

Moreover, most proactive claims made by policy-based resisters are mindful and circumscribed, local and parochial, rather than national and autonomous (see Tilly, 1986: 391-93). Policy-based resisters typically claim "rights" that pertain to immediate economic interests and village governance; they generally do not, in our experience, claim more general civil and political rights to association, expression, and unlicensed participation. Although policy-based resisters use central laws and policies innovatively when challenging local cadres, we have seen little evidence that they question the legitimacy of central laws and policies, not to mention the right of unaccountable leaders at higher levels to promulgate laws and policies. Although the defiance of policy-based resisters is typically civil, it attests to the presence of an incipient civil society only if that term allows for a remarkably heavy dependence on the tolerance of central authorities (see Chamberlain, 1993).

Policy-based resisters, in our view, might best be thought of as occupying an intermediate position between subjects and citizens. They do make proactive claims that spark institutional changes and open channels of participation in their villages, unlike, say, "capital petitioners" in the Qing dynasty (Ocko, 1988) or rural petitioners to Beijing during the late 1970s (He Li, 1991), who pursued mainly private grievances within existing channels. But their claims largely demand entry into the *local* polity. Although it is possible that their local, community-based resistance may find elite patrons (or generate political entrepreneurs) who organize villagers into regionally or even nationally significant pressure groups, we have yet to see it. Up to now, the intervillage organization and national aspirations of most policy-based resisters appear to be rather limited. Typical policy-based resisters

we have encountered make few efforts to constrain central authorities, particularly avoiding challenges that might alienate allies at higher levels who they need to enforce their many claims against local authorities.

This said, it would nonetheless be a mistake to conclude that policy-based resisters share the same orientation to political power as do compliant or recalcitrant villagers, for it is policy-based resisters alone who argue that some of their wants are entitlements and so are worthy of special consideration. We may indeed be witnessing, if not the exercise of recognized and enforceable rights, the early stirrings of rights consciousness in the Chinese countryside (see Zweig et al., 1987). Although it is true that policy-based resisters continue to speak in the vocabulary of the regime and, at times, employ familiar forms of contention, their actions may still be affecting how they see themselves by giving rise to new understandings, new commitments, and new aspirations. In other words, even though policy-based resisters generally frame their challenges in terms of policy implementation and eschew revolutionary goals, their resistance invariably depends on imaginative reformulations of existing "rights talk" and may lead to new identities and heightened expectations (on similar developments in the United States, see McCann, 1994; Minow, 1987).

And, in the longer term, this growing rights consciousness may eventually help make rights real. Although impressive lists of political and civil rights are enumerated in fine-sounding constitutions nearly everywhere, history shows that they are more often won, one by one, through gritty political struggles and painstaking extraction of concessions. Perhaps in China, astute villagers will incrementally turn bits and pieces of the zone of policy implementation into a zone of immunity and then gradually expand it. Deft policy-based resisters are already teaching rural cadres that they must acknowledge villagers' claims or face the consequences. Short of another revolution, new enforceable rights and the identities that underlie them may ultimately arise from strategic exploitation of existing promises, ideals, and policies by villagers who are developing a contractual understanding of their relations with local authorities.

APPENDIX: Interviewee List

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1. Villager—September 1993, May 1994
 2. Villager—September 1993
 3. Township official—October 1993, July 1994
 4. Villager—October 1993
 5. County official—October 1993
 6. Former township Party secretary and then county official—October 1993
 7. Villager—October 1993
 8. Villager—October 1993
 9. Villager—October 1993, May 1994
 10. Villager—October 1993, May 1994, June 1994, August 1994
 11. Deputy village Party secretary—October 1993
 12. Village Party secretary—October 1993
 13. Villager—October 1993
 14. Former village cadre—November 1993
 15. Civil Affairs Ministry official—June 1994, July 1994
 16. Editor of a journal—November 1993
 17. University rural researcher—December 1993
 18. Village cadre—May 1994, June 1994
 19. Villager—May 1994
 20. University rural researcher—May 1994
 21. Civil Affairs Ministry official—June 1994
 22. Rural researcher in a provincial academy of social science—July 1994
 23. Former township Party secretary and currently county civil affairs bureau official—July 1994
 24. University rural researcher—July 1994
 25. Rural researcher in a provincial policy office—July 1994
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NOTES

1. In this article, the term "rural cadre" refers to both township officials and village cadres. Village cadres, however, are not "officials" because they are not members of the state bureaucracy.

2. Here, we use the term "policy" in its Chinese sense; policies include anything authoritative, ranging from Party documents, laws and regulations, and leadership speeches to quasi-official communications such as major newspaper editorials and even political propaganda. Consequently, a policy may be as general as a guideline (*fangzhen*) that cadres should "serve the people" or as specific as a regulation that forbids local governments from levying fees that exceed 5% of one's previous year's income. Policies may also be as formal as the Constitution or as informal as a top leader's casual remark that "people's communes are good."

3. We speak of "descriptive types" rather than "ideal types" to underscore that the categories compliant villagers (*shunmin*), recalcitrants (*dingzihu*), and policy-based resisters (*diaomin*)

were constructed empirically rather than deductively. In other words, each of the three terms refers to a "family" of villagers whose members share certain defining characteristics.

4. It should be noted that in the mouths of rural cadres, *dingzihu* and *diaomin* are pejorative terms and *shunmin* is at least somewhat condescending. For us, however, the translations of these words simply denote neutral, descriptive categories. No peasant, of course, is an ideal compliant villager, recalcitrant, or policy-based resister, and the evidence we use to construct our types is drawn from many individuals and incidents.

5. The Organic Law empowers villagers to elect villagers' committees comprised of three to seven members who serve for three years, and it defines villagers' committees as basic-level mass organizations of self-government.

6. Unfortunately, our source does not relate the outcome of this petition.

7. The argument in this article has hinged on differentiating levels of the Chinese state and unpacking Chinese society. We have avoided using concepts such as "state" and "society" (unlike Zhou Xueguang, 1993) that might conceal, for example, how policy-based resisters work the territory between rural cadres and officials at higher levels. In this research, it has been more useful to begin with a rough notion of the "center" and "higher levels" rather than the state and to conceive of rural cadres and three types of villagers as engaged in multiple dialogues with each other and higher levels. As villagers well know, the Chinese state is far too fragmented to treat as a unified actor. When dealing with (and exploiting) its many faces, villagers quite rightly see diverging preferences and interests, not a monolithic force that stands united above an undifferentiated society. More broadly, we would suggest that discussions of claims and rights, of interests and interest groups, or of civil society and democratization could benefit from similarly disaggregating notions such as state and society and from paying close attention to the dangers of concept stretching (Huang, 1993). Policy-based resisters, as we have seen, engage in organized, sometimes proactive, collective action to further their interests. And they may indeed be in the process of becoming polity members at the local level. But are policy-based resisters citizens, potential members of interest groups, signs of nascent civil society, or a force for democratization? The precise relationship between local policy-based resistance and autonomous participation by citizens using associational forms to influence national politics cannot be assumed or foretold; it awaits further research, careful conceptualization, and developments in Beijing and below.

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