

Connected Contention: Social Resources and Petitioning the State in Rural China*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effects of social resources on strategies of complaining in rural China. Repertoires of contention are, to an important degree, produced by contextually specific institutions that give value to different kinds of social resources. In the Chinese context, political connections and elderly women are two social resources that increase the probability of making direct appeals to higher authorities in the event of a grievance. In an institutional context in which the legal system is fused to the government bureaucracy, political officeholders serve as gatekeepers to the courts. In an institutional environment that demands politically nonthreatening forms of contention, older female family members are strategically mobilized to escalate claims to higher levels of authority. The findings presented in this paper underscore the need to bring social resources into survey research on disputing, the mobilization of law, and access to justice.

In light of the recognition that resource mobilization in contentious behavior includes the mobilization of social resources (e.g., McAdam 1986; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Gould 1995; Diani and McAdam 2003; Yu and Zhao 2006), the total absence of survey research on the question of whether social resources improve access to justice for aggrieved individuals and families is surprising. This paper thus calls for extending what I term the *connected contention* approach—an approach already well-established in research on social movements and collective action—into law and society research on dispute processing and the mobilization of law in popular efforts to redress everyday grievances, sometimes called “little injustices” (Small Claims Study Group 1972; Nader 1979). The theoretical and methodological implications of the findings I present in this paper extend beyond family-level strategies of contention, the unit of analysis in this paper. Research on larger-scale Chinese rural protest (Perry 2001; Bianco 2001; O’Brien 2003), collective petitions including administrative litigation in rural China (Tang 2005; Bernstein and Lü 2003; O’Brien and Li 2004, 2006), and grassroots efforts to organize and mobilize protest in rural China (Johnson 2004; Yu 2004), a literature in which the effects of different kinds and quantities of social resources have thus far been neglected, will also benefit from the connected contention approach.

As social conflict in rural China intensifies and the ranks of disgruntled villagers swell, the volume of rural petitioners—villagers making direct appeals to higher levels of the state—is likewise expanding (Bernstein and Lü 2003; O’Brien and Li 2006; Thornton 2004; Unger 2002; Tang 2005; Johnson 2004; Chen and Chun 2004; Perry 2001; Minzner 2006; Kahn 2004b, 2005b; Goodman 2005). Rural petitioners, in their efforts to get the ear of a sympathetic government official or journalist, have become in recent years an indelible and highly visible part of the urban landscape as they congregate in “petitioners’ villages,” shantytowns in which transient

villagers live when they are not wandering from one government office to another in China's large cities (Zhao 1999; Su 2004; Liao 2005). The very little we know about the demographic composition of this population comes from scattered anecdotal evidence and journalistic case studies. Using data from a survey of real-life grievances and real-life strategies of redress, this paper represents the first systematic effort to identify conditions associated with petitioning in rural China.

Different institutional logics give value to different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986; Friedland and Alford 1991). Social resources include all the resources mobilized purposively through direct and indirect ties, or social networks. Social resources thus include human capital, political capital, cultural capital, economic capital, symbolic capital, and other forms of capital acquired through social connections (Lin 1999; Portes 1998; Coleman 1988). Because they are gatekeepers to the state bureaucracy, ties to government leaders are of value in the disputing process and are thus strategically mobilized in the search for redress, especially in an institutional environment in which the legal system is embedded in and subordinated to the state bureaucracy. At the same time, in an institutional environment that demands politically nonthreatening forms of contention, ties to elderly women, symbolic paragons of pacifism, are also strategically mobilized in efforts to escalate claims to higher levels of authority.

While qualitative research has established that social networks are important in legal processes (e.g., Black 1976:45; Black 1989:16-17; Galanter 1974:99; Sarat and Felstiner 1995:101-2; Lomnitz 1988; Lomnitz and Salazar 2002), survey research has been slow to corroborate these findings. As Sandefur (2006) argues, sociologists, who as a whole have been standing on the sidelines, have much to offer, both theoretically and methodologically, to survey research on access to justice. The findings that I present in this paper, namely that family ties to

government leaders and to elderly women both enhance the probability of petitioning parts of the state bureaucracy including the legal system, underscore the need to bring social resources into survey research on disputing, the mobilization of law, and access to justice.

What (Little) We Know about China's Rural Petitioners

Whereas most portraits of China's "floating population" of over 100 million villagers residing, for varying amounts of time, in urban areas depict a population exclusively composed of migrant workers, in recent years this population has been supplemented by rural petitioners traveling to urban areas in pursuit of justice. In any given city on any given day in front of any given government office—but particularly in front of police stations, court houses, and city halls—one might find petitioners waiting to present their grievances. Many travel enormous distances at enormous personal cost. A sample of 184 petitioners who appealed in 1998 and 1999 to *The Farmers Daily*, a national newspaper in Beijing,¹ includes villagers from 25 provinces and cities under central government jurisdiction (Zhao 1999).

WHO ARE THEY?

Evidence from the same study of 184 petitioners appealing to *The Farmers Daily* in Beijing points to an overwhelmingly male population. Among the 173 petitioners who provided gender information, 87% were male. Of all 184 petitioners who registered their petitions, 70% were between the ages of 35 and 60 (a range too wide to illuminate much of anything), the oldest being 73 and the youngest being 24 (Zhao 1999). Other evidence, however, points to a growing population of "elderly activists" (Hurst and O'Brien 2002; on middle-aged and retired protesters, see Weston [2004]). The population of protesters in China not only appears to be aging, but also appears to be feminizing. Indeed, photographs accompanying published articles on China's

petitioners typically depict the elderly in general and elderly women in particular (e.g., Zhao and Su 2004; Su 2004).² Shue (2004:26) characterizes China's Falun Gong protesters as "middle-aged ladies milling around in padded jackets." On the basis of fieldwork in Beijing's "petitioners' village," Fu (2004:20) writes, "According to our interviewees and the information we received from the people congregated here, the numbers of female petitioners are gradually rising and the participation of the elderly in this group is also continually increasing."

To be sure, in China female participation in contentious behavior is not limited to the elderly, nor is the contentious behavior of women limited to nonthreatening forms. Alarmed by a sudden increase in the volume of female petitioners from the countryside, authorities in Beijing's rural Fangshan District (which had been a "county" until 1986) recently commissioned the local Women's Federation to study the "problem." After first documenting a sudden rise in female participation in petitioning between 2003 and 2004, bringing the proportion of women among all petitioners to 47%, the report then describes distinctly threatening forms of contention on the part of distinctly younger women, most of whom were between the ages of 30 and 45. In the report, several instances are noted of collective petitions advanced from the countryside by a few men leading several dozen women. But more space is devoted to women "ringleaders" (*lingtou*) "besieging" (*weigong*) reception clerks of government offices, using "uncivilized words and actions" (*bu wenming yan xing*) to threaten the government to meet their demands (Liu and Zhang 2005).

The grievances of younger women are produced in large measure by objective conditions. Physical and emotional abuse from family members, often for failing to produce a son, can lead to abandonment (Honig and Hershatter 1988:232-4; Pang 1993:97; Platte 1988) and to dispossession of housing and land, and thus to the loss of livelihood (Alford and Shen 2004:241).

A well-documented revival of arranged and forced marriage (Zhao 2003:90; MacLeod 2001) has also fueled the objective grievances of rural women. These and other problems help account for China's astonishing female suicide rate in the countryside (Lee and Kleinman 2004) and, by extension, of China's growing ranks of female complainants from the countryside.³

Here the pattern among younger women seems to be aggressive self-representation in response to problems stemming from abusive family members. As we will see, in contrast to this pattern of advancing complaints *about* family members, elderly women who petition the state appear to be advancing complaints *on behalf of* their family members.

WHAT ARE THEY COMPLAINING ABOUT?

Much of the research literature on rural social conflict points toward taxes, the so-called "peasants' burdens," as a major source of complaints that escalate to higher levels (Chen and Chun 2004; Li and O'Brien 1996; Unger 2002; Bernstein and Lü 2003; O'Brien and Li 2005; Tang 2005; Zhao 1999). In the sample of 184 petitions made to the *The Farmers Daily*, 63 concerned irregular fees, excessive agricultural taxes, suppressed agricultural prices, coercive collection of grain, and other related "burdens" (Zhao 1999). Among 632 petitioners in Beijing's "petitioners' village" interviewed in 2004, 72% reported a grievance over such "peasants' burdens" (Zhang L. 2005).

Other evidence suggests that villagers make direct appeals to higher authorities over land. In the sample of 184 petitions made to *The Farmers Daily*, 51 concerned unlawful land requisition by local governments, unfair land compensation, unfair land use, environmental pollution from industrial land use, soil erosion, and land contracting issues (Zhao 1999). According to published estimates, one-third to 40% of all petitioners (urban and rural combined) complain about land (CCCCP 2005:68; Zhong 2001:17) and over 60% of rural petitioners

complain about land (Wang 2005:68) In a mere ten years over 70 million peasants—a number that continues to rise—have reportedly been dispossessed of land (Kahn 2004; Yardley 2004; also see Guo 2001).⁴ Recent village riots over unfair land compensation and outright land seizures have been well publicized (French 2006; Kuhn 2006). In first half of 2004, there were almost 50,000 recorded instances of popular efforts to protect rural land rights. Of more than 130 mass conflicts in 2004 studied by a research team, 87 were about land. Land expropriation and land compensation account for 55% of 837 letters randomly sampled from a collection of complaint letters sent to central authorities (Zhao 2004). In the same sample cited earlier of 632 petitioners in Beijing, 73% reported a grievance over land requisition (Zhang L. 2005).

Rural land scams and rural taxation disputes generated so much resistance and conflict that the central administration has recently responded with major concessions. In 2005 rural taxation was completely abolished (Kahn 2005a). The historical significance of this policy is captured in the following popular saying that has emerged in its wake: “Since the creator of the universe made heaven and earth, this is the first time the state hasn’t collected imperial grain” (e.g., Ge 2005:14). Even more recently, the central government unveiled reforms aimed at resolving rural land issues (Buckley 2006; Yardley 2006).

Violence and retribution exacted by local leaders, including physical injury and illegal detention, is another common complaint advanced by petitioners (Zhao 1999), often suffered in the very process of petitioning for other reasons (Yu 2005:28; Johnson 2004). O’Brien and Li (2006:Chapters 2 and 4), Bernstein and Lü (2003:78), and Zweig (2003:119) document local leaders’ routine use of violence against local residents.

WHERE DO THEY GO?

The legal system occupies a relatively small place in the overall landscape of disputing. One of the most important targets of direct appeals is the official complaints system known as the “letters and visits” system. Formalized in the early 1950s (Wang and Chen 1987:129; Zhang H. 2005:11), letters and visits offices have multiplied and strengthened in recent years as part of an official effort to contain the growing volume of conflict and to preserve social stability (Wang and Huang 2003; Luehrmann 2003; Cai 2004; Minzner 2006). The letters and visits system includes a large network of complaints offices vertically spanning many levels of government and horizontally spanning many administrative jurisdictions. Besides the official Letters and Visits Administration, there are letters and visits departments in the State Council, in the public security system, in the courts, in the procuracy, and in the Women’s Federation, just to name a few examples.

Estimates of the annual volume of petitions made to the letters and visits system are in the range of 10 to 13 million.⁵ Meanwhile, nationwide, the courts heard about 4.4 million civil cases and 88,000 administrative law suits in the year 2003 (SSB 2004:Table 23-19). But the importance of petitioning outside the legal system becomes even more apparent when we consider the many other targets of direct appeals in China besides the letters and visits system. According to one estimate, only two of every thousand direct appeals to state authorities are made through the official letters and visits system (Zhang H. 2005:12).⁶ Indeed, virtually any government office can serve as a site for citizen complaints, for direct appeals and petitions (see Cai 2004).

Zhang Yimou’s classic 1992 film, *The Story of Qiuju*, poignantly reveals the tiered character of disputing through the story of a peasant woman’s pursuit of justice after informal

conciliation efforts failed. Working her way up through township and county police channels, she eventually, after much time and enormous personal expense, found her way into the court system with the help of a lawyer. Consistent with the “Qiuju model” of contention, in the study of 184 peasant appeals to the *The Farmers Daily*, the majority of the complainants had worked their way up through each successive level of government—the village, township, county, city, and provincial governments—and were in Beijing appealing to central government authorities because all earlier attempts had failed. While in Beijing, most complainants approached three or more central government offices and media outlets (Zhao 1999). A 2004 study of 632 rural petitioners in Beijing found that the number of government agencies to which the average petitioner appealed was more than six, the maximum being 18. The most common agencies approached were the State Letters and Visits Administration, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, the Supreme People’s Court, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) Central Committee for Discipline Inspection, the Public Security Administration, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, the State Land Resources Administration, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Zhao and Su 2004).

Theory and Hypotheses for Connected Contention in Rural China

THE NONTHREATENING CONTENTION HYPOTHESIS

One reason why the elderly may be disproportionately represented among Chinese petitioners is that they are disproportionately available (Hurst and O’Brien 2002, borrowing McAdam’s [1986] concept of “biographical availability”). Insofar as their contributions to household income are smaller than younger members, the opportunity costs of petitioning are relatively small among the elderly. From E.P. Thompson’s (1993:233-4, 325-9) classic work on female participation in the English food riots of the eighteenth century I derive two additional explanations for why

women might be disproportionately represented among Chinese petitioners. First, owing to prevailing cultural norms (as well as stereotypes) about women as providers and caregivers, grievances—especially over bread-and-butter material matters—are more credible and legitimate when advanced by women. Second, women (and the elderly) are less likely than men (and the young) to be prosecuted and punished by the state for participating in protest activity. A perception that elderly women are the least likely targets of state repression may account for their strategic deployment in the recent and well-publicized riots in Guangdong Province’s Taishi Village. In order to prevent village leaders from making away with the accounting ledgers containing evidence of the alleged malfeasances at the root of the conflict, “A group of elderly women moved into the three-story administration building and refused to budge.” Two weeks later, “a number of villagers, including elderly women, started a hunger strike outside the district headquarters building.” In the end, however, riot police violently extracted the elderly women from the building (Cody 2005).

Repertoires of contention developed strategically to appear politically nonthreatening are particularly prominent in the socialist institutional context. Invoking the language of the state to assert claims against the state and using officially sanctioned methods of lodging complaints and articulating interests is what O’Brien and Li (2006) call “rightful resistance” and what Straughn (2005) calls “consentful contention.” Indeed, in the Taishi conflict, village protesters explicitly framed their demands in terms of official election laws (Cody 2005; for additional examples, see O’Brien and Li [1995:765-6, 768] and O’Brien [2003:56]). In other words, challenging the state in a politically legitimate and lawful manner intended to appear non-challenging to the regime as a whole is a prominent strategy of contention in the socialist and post-socialist context. Especially in the wake of the new official discourse of protecting the rights and interests of

“disadvantaged groups” (*ruoshi qunti*) (Kahn 2005b), who could be less threatening—and who could more safely and legitimately advance demands to higher levels of the state—than “little old ladies”? The strategic deployment of the elderly in general and of elderly women in particular follows both a general economic logic and a contextually-specific institutional and cultural logic.

But contention among the elderly may also have something to do with a particular sense of anger rooted in a widespread perception of unfulfilled state obligations. In a study of lawyer-client interactions in a Beijing law firm, this sort of moral outrage about the failure of the state to meet its socialist obligations was disproportionately expressed by the elderly (Michelson 2006:15, 23n27). Insofar as people socialized prior to the 1980s to expect to receive from the state paternalistic cradle-to-grave security, protections, and benefits are at greater risk of perceiving the reform-era (1979-present) emphasis on self-reliance and market principles as a violation of the “Maoist moral economy” (Perry 1999:317-25; Lee 1999:62; Solinger 2004:53; Hurst 2004:103), as a breach of the “socialist social contract” (Tang and Parish 2000:3), and as abandonment and betrayal by the CCP, the contentiousness of China’s elderly may, at least to some measure, be a transitional cohort effect that will fade with cohort replacement.

The elderly in China tend to challenge the state by embracing the founding principles for which it stands (Weston 2004:74). To be sure, nonthreatening contention is limited neither to the socialist context nor to the contemporary period. Historical role models condition the actions and reactions of contemporary actors everywhere. Popular perceptions of deprivation and repertoires of contention—i.e., both the forms and methods of resistance—are shaped by historically inherited cultural material (Tilly 1986; Wasserstrom and Perry 1994; Shue 2004). In China, popular protest against the state in response to economic suffering has for centuries been—and

today remains—both common and culturally legitimate (Perry 1999, 2001; Bernhardt 1997; Wong 1997, 2001), and petitioning higher levels of the state bureaucracy when local solutions fail has been a popular strategy of redress for centuries (e.g., Ocko 1988; Macauley 1998). More often than not, popular demands are limited to concrete material and physical needs and do not escalate to regime change (but see Hung [2004] for an analysis of historical variation). Indeed, the contemporary pattern of “rightful resistance” and “consentful contention” must be understood as an historical extension of durable repertoires of contention that include symbolic displays of political loyalty. I thus call my “little old lady hypothesis” the *nonthreatening contention hypothesis*. Elderly women are perceived as exemplars of political timidity and meekness, and are perceived to be more credible bearers of material demands.

Hypothesis 1: Ceteris paribus, families with elderly women are more likely than those without elderly women to mobilize the state bureaucracy including the legal system in the event of a grievance.

THE BUREAUCRATIC KNOW-WHO HYPOTHESIS

It is the general case that direct and indirect connections to government bureaucrats, *ipso facto*, facilitate access to government bureaucracy. To paraphrase Herbert Jacob (1995:118), state cadres are gatekeepers to justice: they hold the keys that open and close the gates to the state bureaucracy. In addition to this general case, there is also a special case of gatekeeping in the socialist and post-socialist context. The special case of China’s institutionally undifferentiated character of law, the legal system’s fusion to the state and to the CCP’s political apparatus (Cohen 1997; Potter 1999; Lubman 1999; Liu 2006), enhances their gatekeeping capacity and gives special advantages to bureaucratic insiders above and beyond the general case. Given the location and status of the Chinese legal system, namely its fusion to the state bureaucracy (i.e.,

the absence of meaningful separation of powers or judicial autonomy), there are enormous legal advantages to political connections; the mobilization of law is facilitated by political connections.

Such insider advantage within the legal system is profoundly ironic for three reasons. First, “the declining significance of *guanxi* [informal social connections]” thesis (Guthrie 1998, 1999) states that the development of a rational-legal system in China is obviating the need to pull strings to get things done. I make the paradoxical argument that, rather than obviating the need for insider connections, China’s legal institutions reward political connections. Second, while the existing literature on strategies of contention in rural China focuses on official complaints lodged against local leaders (O’Brien and Li 1995; O’Brien 1996; O’Brien and Li 2006), I argue that local leaders and their families are more likely than anyone else to escalate their grievances to higher levels of authority. Third, in contrast to a well-known argument that the social power of local state cadres is diminishing in the wake of China’s institutional reforms (Nee 1989, 1996), I argue that their social power has extended to privileged access to a rapidly reforming and increasingly important legal system.

However, the mechanisms by which political connections enhance access to justice are not limited to the nefarious manipulation and circumvention of official rules and procedures. Rather, political connections also facilitate the understanding of and adherence to legal rules and procedures; they enhance awareness of legal rights, information about legal processes, and knowledge about how to navigate bureaucracy. Direct and indirect ties to government leaders are a mechanism of knowledge and skill acquisition. The story of political connections is more than a story of influence-peddling and shady backdoor dealings. It is also a story about particular social resources that give particular advantages in particular institutional settings. It is a story about advantages in learning how to navigate new and complex institutions (Lareau 2003).⁷

Hypothesis 2: Ceteris paribus, direct and indirect political connections enhance access to law and other parts of the state bureaucracy.

Data and Methods

In late January and early February of 2002, members of the Department of Sociology at Renmin University of China administered a survey of rural households in six provinces. They trained local schoolteachers living and working in the survey sites to conduct the survey interviews. The 2,902 households included in the analyses performed for this paper are distributed across 37 villages: 10 villages in Shandong, 6 villages each in Henan and Hunan, and 5 villages each in Shaanxi, Jiangsu, and Chongqing. All villages within a province are clustered within a single township, meaning all 37 villages are clustered within six townships (and therefore within six counties). The survey sites were not selected randomly, but purposively. Because the six survey sites were selected with the goal of maximizing regional and economic variation, the households interviewed are not intended to be representative of rural China as a whole, but only of the six counties from which they were sampled. All indications, however, suggest this is a representative sample. Age, educational, income, and occupational distributions in the sample closely match official statistics and published findings from nationally representative samples. A goal was set of 100 interviews per village; information on refusals was not recorded. Because respondents, for the most part, reported family-level information on grievances, social resources, and socioeconomic status, individual respondents were not selected randomly within families. While families and their members are representative of rural China, the individual respondents who provided information about them are often “family heads” most knowledgeable about family affairs: they are older than average and more likely than average to be male.

Each respondent was presented with a list of 16 problem types plus an open-ended “other dispute” category, totaling 17 problems or potential disputes, allowing a respondent to report a maximum of 17 and a minimum of zero grievances. With the exception of divorce, labor problems, dealings with government agencies, personal injury, and property theft/damage, the questions about the remaining ten grievances were worded in terms of the entire household, not just the respondent. I recoded these grievances into six categories: (1) business-related, (2) farming-related, (3) personal injury, (4) housing land, (5) neighbor, or (6) other. My coding decisions are contained in Table 1.

[TABLE 1: Definitions of Variables Used to Measure Grievances]

If the respondent indicated seeking the help of a third party, she was asked, through an open-ended question, to describe the third party (“To whom or to which agency or unit did you or a family member seek help?”). The interviewers were instructed to record the respondent’s description of the third party (or third parties) on the questionnaire form verbatim. For each of the 4,757 grievances reported by the survey respondents, one of the following courses of action (or nonaction) was taken: (1) lumped it (did nothing), (2) negotiated bilaterally, (3) mobilized an informal relation, (4) mobilized a village leader, (5) approached a higher-level administrative or government office, including the police, or (6) approached the legal system. The respondent was also asked to provide a reason for approaching each third party he or she reported. Like the question on the third party approached for help, the reason for approaching this third party was also asked in an open-ended manner and recorded verbatim. I use this information to identify third parties initially identified as official, higher-level offices or officeholders that were actually

informal relations, such as a close relative who happens to work in the state bureaucracy. When respondents indicated seeking the help of a higher-level third party because of an informal connection (only 12% of all 685 instances of seeking village leaders or higher-level third parties), I recoded the response third party as an “informal relation” in order to be more confident that the reported action was really petitioning and not merely getting on the phone or getting together with a friend or relative who happens to work in a government office. However, as with all other measures, my results are entirely robust to a variety of operational definitions.

Using detailed demographic and occupational information on each member of the family, I identify elderly members and members who are village leaders. Because the survey questionnaire recorded all “members with whom the respondent shares common life,” including members living in other households, it captured a large number of social ties. To test my nonthreatening contention hypothesis, I measure the effects of ties to family members over the age of 64. The choice of this age cutoff was not entirely arbitrary. Of all the sampled families, 40% and 42% possess ties to men over age 64 and to women over age 64 respectively. Lowering the age cutoff to 60 years of age or older or to 55 years of age or older, by increasing the proportion of families with ties to almost 60% and to almost 70% respectively, would have diluted their effects.

To test my bureaucratic know-who hypothesis, I measure the effects of ties to political leaders. Village leaders are defined as “village cadres” (*cun ganbu*), “village party committee members” (*cun zhibu weiyuan*), “village heads” (*cunzhang*), or “village party secretaries” (*cun zhishu*). Village leaders wield real power. They control the allocation of land and access to jobs in local enterprises, for example (Oi and Rozelle 2000:525-7). Even when village leaders are selected through nominally competitive elections, many if not most elected village leaders are

nominated by the local CCP branch office or the township government. Their political success and their success as local enterprise managers are predicated on their political connections to—and alliances with—more powerful actors at higher levels of government (Kennedy 2002:461; Oi 1999; O’Brien and Li 2006). In addition to ties to family members, the questionnaire also contains a separate schedule for recording “relatives living outside the village with whom your family has close relations and frequent contact.” I use this additional information to identify additional outside relatives in political office: “township/village cadres” and “higher-level cadres.” Township/village cadres are defined as relatives living outside the village working as a township party secretary or a township head with whom the respondent’s family has close relations and frequent contact. Higher-level cadres are defined as relatives living outside the village working as a section head or higher (*keji yishang ganbu*) at the county level or higher with whom the respondent’s family has close relations and frequent contact. Thus, political connections are measured as family ties to village leaders, ties to outside relatives working as township/village cadres, and ties to outside relatives working as higher-level cadres.

Findings

What configurations of family members are associated with petitioning when grievances are experienced? What are China’s villagers complaining about? After first presenting findings about the complainants, I will turn to findings about their complaints.

COMPLAINANTS

In support of Hypothesis 1, my nonthreatening contention hypothesis, the survey data show that the presence of elderly women in a family is associated with the Qiuju model of disputing.

Although Qiuju was young (pregnant with her first child), her escalation of the grievance from

one government office to another captures an important pattern more closely associated with elderly women. Here escalation refers to movement from one third party type to another; it refers to encounters with multiple forum types in the course of a single dispute.⁸ Reporting that a relative and a friend or acquaintance were approached for help does not count as escalation because such third parties are all in the “informal” category. One example of escalation is approaching the villagers’ committee and the township government for help. Another example is approaching an acquaintance and a judicial office for help.

As we can see in Figure 1, both the presence of elderly women and political connections dramatically increase the probability of escalating grievances. Among the 1,608 families in the survey that reported grievances, the probability of reporting multiple third party types increases steadily as the number of women over age 64 in the family increases. When two elderly women are reported in the family, they are almost invariably the respondent’s mother and the respondent’s mother-in-law. Likewise, in support of Hypothesis 2, my bureaucratic know-who hypothesis, the probability of reporting an escalation from one type of dispute forum to another increases with the number of political connections, measured either as total ties or as the number of types of ties.

[FIGURE 1: Social Resources and Grievance Escalation, Rural China, 2002]

In order to get a sense of the real lives behind—and to put human faces on—the statistics, I illustrate these patterns with concrete examples. First, like Qiuju, who trudged from office to office in response to her husband’s personal injury (inflicted by the village head), a family in the Hunan sample with two elderly female members reported first approaching the traffic police

before approaching the “administration of politics and law” (*zhengfa ju*, ambiguous shorthand for a judicial office) in response to a personal injury. The respondent in this family—a 47 year-old male farmer—reported seven additional family members: his wife (a farmer), his daughter (a farmer), his son-in-law (ill and unable to work, presumably owing to the personal injury in question), his father, his mother, his father-in-law, and his mother-in-law. His in-laws were reported as family members who “shared a common life” but who lived in a separate household. His mother and mother-in-law were reportedly 79 and 74 years of age respectively. Second, also in response to a personal injury, a family in the Henan sample reported approaching the township government and the county government before approaching “judicial organs” (*sifa jiguan*). The 38 year-old male respondent (a technical/professional worker whose father, a high-ranking cadre, had died, perhaps in the personal injury in question) reported that his family contained his mother (a farmer), his wife, his daughter (age 14), his son (age 12), and his wife’s parents. His mother and his in-laws continued to “share common life” but lived in separate households. His mother and his mother-in-law were both reported to be 68 years of age. Finally, a family in the Chongqing sample with two elderly female members, in response to a grievance over “agricultural burdens” (i.e., rural taxes), reported approaching the villagers’ committee before approaching the township government and, ultimately, a court of law. The 58 year-old male respondent in this family (a farmer) reported his spouse (also a farmer), his two parents, and his two parents-in-law as family members with whom he “shared a common life.” His parents and his parents-in-law lived in separate households. He reported that his mother and mother-in-law were 81 and 78 years old respectively. These are merely a few of many similar examples of the association between ties to elderly women and efforts to mobilize higher-level authorities.

I also illustrate the effect of political connections with three concrete examples from the data. First, a family in the Hunan sample that experienced a grievance over farmland contracting or enterprise contracting (a single item on the questionnaire) responded by approaching the county-level party committee and officials in the judicial system for help. In separate questions this family indicated seeking the help of a lawyer and appearing in court as a plaintiff. This family is well-endowed with political capital. The respondent, a 65 year-old male, is a village leader. As it turns out, his dead father was also a village leader. His 29 year-old son is disabled and unable to work. This family also has political connections outside the village: a 51 year-old male relative working as an “ordinary cadre” in a county or higher-level government office and a 49 year-old male relative working as a “high-ranking cadre” in a county or higher-level government office. Second, a family in the Henan sample reporting the same grievance type also reported seeking the help of the township government and a judicial office (*sifa bumen*). In answers to separate questions, the respondent, a 48 year-old male village leader, indicated seeking the help of a lawyer and appearing in court as a plaintiff. This family is also endowed with outside political connections: a 57 year-old male relative working as an “ordinary cadre” in a county or higher-level government office as well as two relatives working as “ordinary” township cadres, one a 28 year-old male and one a 25 year-old female. Third, in response to a personal injury, a family in the Henan sample indicated approaching the police and the courts. In a separate consumer dispute, this family indicated approaching friends and relatives before approaching quality inspection authorities. The husband of the respondent in this family is a 40 year-old village leader. As it turns out, the respondent’s father is a 67 year-old section/small group head, which, for the analyses in this paper, is not included in the definition of political leadership. In answers to separate questions, the respondent indicated seeking the help of a

lawyer and appearing in court as a plaintiff. This family also reported an outside political connection: a 44 year-old relative working as an “ordinary cadre” in a county or higher-level government office.

Because of my decision to recode as “informal relations” higher-level state agencies that were approached because of informal connections to actors in these higher-level state agencies, we can be reasonably confident that these people actually traveled to the state agencies they reportedly approached for help and did not simply get on the phone to—or casually discuss their problems at informal get-togethers with—their friends or relatives connected to these state agencies.

[FIGURE 2: Baseline Dispute Pagoda, Rural China, 2002]

Elderly women and political connections not only increase the probability of escalating grievances in general, but also increase the probability of mobilizing the legal system. In Figure 2 I present, in the form of a dispute pyramid, the overall probabilities of approaching different third party types. Because they are constructed using data from China and because they more closely resemble stupa than Egyptian pyramids, I call them *dispute pagodas*.⁹ The dispute pagoda shows that 20% of all reported grievances escalated to trilateral action, meaning 80% of all grievances were either lumped or processed through bilateral negotiation. At the same time, 7% of all grievances escalated above and beyond the village, and only 2% were brought to the legal system. Of greater interest than the shape of the baseline dispute pagoda in Figure 2, however, is variation in pagoda shapes by different kinds and amounts of social resources. Figure 3 shows that, compared to families with no elderly women, families with two elderly women are

almost twice as likely to approach the legal system and two-thirds times more likely to make a direct appeal to a government office. Compared to families with no ties to political leaders, families with at least two political connections are over three times more likely to approach the legal system and more than twice as likely to make a direct appeal to a government office.

[FIGURE 3: Dispute Pagodas by Social Resources, Rural China, 2002]

All the foregoing descriptive and anecdotal patterns are robust to controls. Regression analysis shows that they persist net of geographical location, grievance type, household composition, household health, household economic status, and other control variables. In the regression results presented in Table 2, among otherwise seemingly identical families with seemingly identical grievances, a family tie to one elderly woman increases the relative probability of approaching the legal system by 66% and of trying to mobilize another part of the state bureaucracy by 56%. Family ties to two elderly women more than double the relative probabilities of both courses of action. Meanwhile, ties to elderly men have no effect on the relative probability of petitioning higher authorities. Among otherwise seemingly identical families with seemingly identical grievances, a family tie to a village leader more than triples the relative probability of approaching the legal system and increases the relative probability of making a direct appeal to a government office by almost 40% (although the latter effect is not statistically significant). A tie to outside relatives working as higher-level cadres increases the relative probability of approaching the legal system by a factor of 2½ and almost doubles the relative probability of making a direct appeal to a government office. Finally, a tie to an outside

relative in a lower position of authority (township/village cadres) has no appreciable or statistically significant effect on the relative probability of petitioning the state.¹⁰

[TABLE 2: Correlates of Responses to Grievances, Selected Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Logistic Regression, Rural China, 2002]

To ensure the robustness of my findings, I replicate the above analyses using responses to additional information on legal mobilization. First, I analyze the effects of political connections on the probability of answering “yes” to the question, “Have you ever appeared in court as a plaintiff?” Second, I analyze the effects of political connections on the probability of answering “yes” to either of the following two questions: (1) “Have you ever sought the advice of a lawyer over a matter of your own?” (2) “Have you ever consulted with a lawyer for some other reason, such as on behalf of a friend or a relative?” Both sets of questions were asked without reference to specific grievances.

In Figure 4 we can see that family ties to elderly women have no effect on the probability of ever appearing in court as a plaintiff. However, the effect of political ties on suing in court is dramatic. Although ties to elderly women are not associated with litigation, Figure 5 shows that they are strongly associated with seeking the help of lawyers. Just as they increase the probability of mobilizing the courts, political ties also increase the probability of mobilizing lawyers. That ties to elderly women are associated with approaching lawyers but not with approaching the courts is consistent with research showing that Chinese lawyers tend to screen out the legal problems of the elderly and of rural residents, and thus act to deflect the grievances

of these populations away from the law by refusing legal representation (Michelson 2006:18-21, 23-4).

[FIGURE 4: Social Resources and Suing in Court, Rural China, 2002]

[FIGURE 5: Social Resources and Seeking the Help of a Lawyer, Rural China, 2002]

Descriptive patterns on legal mobilization are robust to controls; they persist net of geographical location, grievance type, household composition, household health, household economic status, and other control variables. In the regression results presented in Table 3, among otherwise seemingly identical families with seemingly identical grievances, each family tie to an elderly woman increases the odds of mobilizing a lawyer by almost 60% but has no effect on the odds of mobilizing the courts. Thus, compared to a family with no elderly women, a family with two elderly women is more than twice as likely to mobilize a lawyer. Ties to elderly men, however, have no effect on legal mobilization. The effects of political ties are even stronger. Compared to families with no nonfarm laborers, families with ties to village leaders are more than five times more likely to mobilize the courts as litigants and almost two-and-a-half times more likely to mobilize a lawyer. Ties to outside relatives in political office are also associated with legal mobilization. Compared to families with no nonfarm laborers, families with ties to village leaders are more than twice as likely to mobilize the courts as litigants and almost twice as likely to mobilize a lawyer.

[TABLE 3: Correlates of Legal Mobilization, Selected Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Analysis, Rural China, 2002]

COMPLAINTS

My survey data support the limited evidence reviewed earlier suggesting that land disputes figure prominently among petitions to higher authorities.¹¹ Farming-related grievances are relatively likely to remain local affairs and housing land disputes are relatively likely to escalate to higher levels. As we can see in Table 4, farming-related grievances (e.g., taxes and water-use) are far more prevalent than grievances about housing land. Whereas housing land grievances were reported by 12% of all families and account for only 7% of all grievances, farming-related grievances were reported by 30% of all families and account for 26% of all grievances. Table 4 also shows that it is more common for housing land grievances than for farming-related grievances to be brought to higher levels of the state bureaucracy. In other words, while farming-related grievances are exceedingly common (accounting for about one in four grievances), they are relatively rarely advanced to higher levels of the state (such grievances account for only about one in seven grievances brought to higher authorities, and only about one out of every 27 such grievances is brought to higher authorities). At the other extreme, housing land grievances are relatively rare (accounting for less than one in fifteen grievances) but are relatively more likely to be advanced to higher authorities (such grievances account for almost one in five grievances brought to higher-level authorities, and almost one out of every seven such grievances is brought to higher authorities). Like housing land grievances, personal injury grievances are also relatively likely to percolate to higher authorities. Although personal injuries account for

only one in 25 grievances, they account for almost one in six grievances brought to higher authorities, and more than one out of every four such grievances is advanced to higher authorities.

[TABLE 4: Distribution of Grievance Types, Rural China, 2002]

These descriptive patterns are robust to controls. Referring back to Table 2, among otherwise seemingly identical families, farming-related grievances are the least likely to be escalated to the legal system and are the second-least likely to be escalated to government offices outside the legal system (surpassed in its infrequency of escalation only by grievances with neighbors). At the other extreme, and consistent with the limited evidence reviewed earlier pointing to rural violence as an important cause of petitioning, personal injuries are by far the most likely grievance type to be brought to the legal system and to government offices outside the legal system. Although they are not associated with legal mobilization, housing land grievances are almost as likely as personal injuries to lead to direct appeals to government authorities outside the legal system.

The same patterns persist in regression analyses of legal mobilization (Table 3). Compared to other types of grievances, personal injuries are strongly associated with the mobilization of courts and lawyers, and housing land grievances are strongly associated with the mobilization of state agencies outside the legal system.

Implications and Conclusions

China's growing population of rural petitioners is being fueled by land disputes and personal injuries. Of greater sociological significance is the finding that rural petitioners traveling to government offices in pursuit of justice are also fueled by elderly women and by ties to political

leaders. I have demonstrated in this paper that family ties to political leaders and family ties to elderly women are strongly associated with appealing to higher-level state authorities including the legal system in the event of a family grievance. Consistent with my hypotheses, social connections to political officeholders and to elderly women are resources of particular value—instrumental value, cultural value, and symbolic value—to aggrieved villagers in China's institutional environment.

By supporting my *bureaucratic know-who* and *nonthreatening contention* hypotheses, the findings I have presented in this paper sustain my call for bringing social resources into survey research on disputing, access to justice, and legal mobilization. Although connections to legal insiders have been included as variables in some survey research on access to justice and legal mobilization, their effects have not been clearly interpreted (e.g., Miller and Sarat 1980/81). Worse yet, such variables appear to be missing altogether in other highly influential surveys on legal needs and access to justice, findings from which instead focus narrowly on class and economic resources as determinants of legal mobilization (Mayhew and Reiss 1969; Curran 1977; ABA 1994; Cantril 1996; Genn 1999; Genn and Paterson 2001).

My survey data have produced three ironic findings. First, in contrast to the prevailing story of petitioners as bearers of complaints about local village leaders (O'Brien and Li 1995; Li and O'Brien 1996), my findings show that the families of village leaders are among the most likely to petition the state. Second, in contrast to the prevailing story of village leaders as losing power under the forces of marketization (Nee 1989, 1996), my findings show that access to China's revamped and increasingly important state legal system is a new source of power local state cadres have come to exercise. Third, in contrast to the prevailing story of legal reform functioning to erode the importance of informal social connections (Guthrie 1998, 1999), my

findings show that access to the very legal institutions purportedly obviating the need for social connections paradoxically demands social connections. These paradoxical findings make sense, however, in an institutional context in which the legal system remains fused to the rest of the state bureaucracy.

But there is no necessary reason why the institutional conditions I have identified that are associated with connected contention in China will remain stable. At least two changes could erode the institutional bases for connected contention documented in this paper. First, the institutionalization of judicial autonomy and the separation of powers would likely erode some of the political advantages I have documented in this paper. Second, cohort replacement, by deflating vehemently defended expectations of socialist paternalism, may weaken contentiousness among China's elderly.

Furthermore, future research must also overcome five limitations with the data I analyze in this paper. First, future research must disentangle the *influence effects* of social connections from the *cultural effects* of social connections. Is the effect of ties to political leaders one of manipulating and perverting official rules and procedures in order to gain entrée to the legal system and to other parts of the state bureaucracy? Or are political connections a vehicle by which cultural capital is delivered? Most likely, both processes are at work. Connections are used purposively and instrumentally to circumvent, bend, and break legal rules and procedures. But connections also facilitate understanding and adhering to legal rules and procedures; they enhance awareness of legal rights, information about legal processes, and knowledge about how to navigate bureaucracy. In other words, enhanced access to the judiciary probably reflects more than nepotism, the abuse of power, and other forms of rule-bending and rule-breaking. In short, political connections may be just as much about the culturally acquired knowledge about how

lawfully to access and navigate the legal system (see Lareau 2003) as they are about unauthorized, nepotistic access to the legal system. Know-how may be just as important as know-who, and know-how may, to some measure, be produced by know-who.

Second, although the findings clearly show that ties to elderly women and to government leaders increase the probability of trying to mobilize the law and other parts of the state bureaucracy, the data do not tell us whether such ties increase the probability of successfully gaining access. In other words, while we know who is trying access justice, we do not know who successfully gains access to justice.

Third, future research must go beyond an assessment of approaching the legal system to an assessment of winning and losing in the legal system. Do the advantages politically-connected individual enjoy with respect to opening the courtroom doors persist after they enter the courtroom doors?

Fourth, while my survey research design has identified ties to elderly women as an important social resource that helps predict a family's relative likelihood of petitioning the state in response to a grievance, future research must better identify the particular family members who perform the work of petitioning. While they clearly reveal an association between elderly women and the "Qiuju model" of disputing, the survey data do not tell us who does the trudging to higher levels of authority. While family ties to elderly women dramatically increase the likelihood of making direct appeals to the state, the elderly women in question may do the petitioning themselves or they may hold the fort while younger or male family members do the petitioning. The data suggest that elderly women are most effective in pairs: ties to two elderly women exert a much greater effect than ties to one elderly woman. One possibility is that, owing to their low levels of education (over 70% are illiterate, compared to less than 40% of men in the

same age group) and their greater difficulty speaking the standard dialect, elderly women do not travel alone but rather with other family members. When families containing two elderly women make direct appeals to the state, we do not know if they petition together, if one stays home to free the other to petition (alone or together with other family members), or if both stay home to free other family members to do the petitioning.

Finally, it is possible that elderly female petitioners may also be complaining about—rather than merely representing—their family members. The neglect and abuse of elderly family members is associated with a reported trend of elderly suicide (Yan 2003:162-3; Zhang 2004:77-80; Bossen 2002:264-5; Lee and Kleinman 2004:301; Ikels 1993:332-3), and could also be contributing to growing numbers of elderly rural petitioners.

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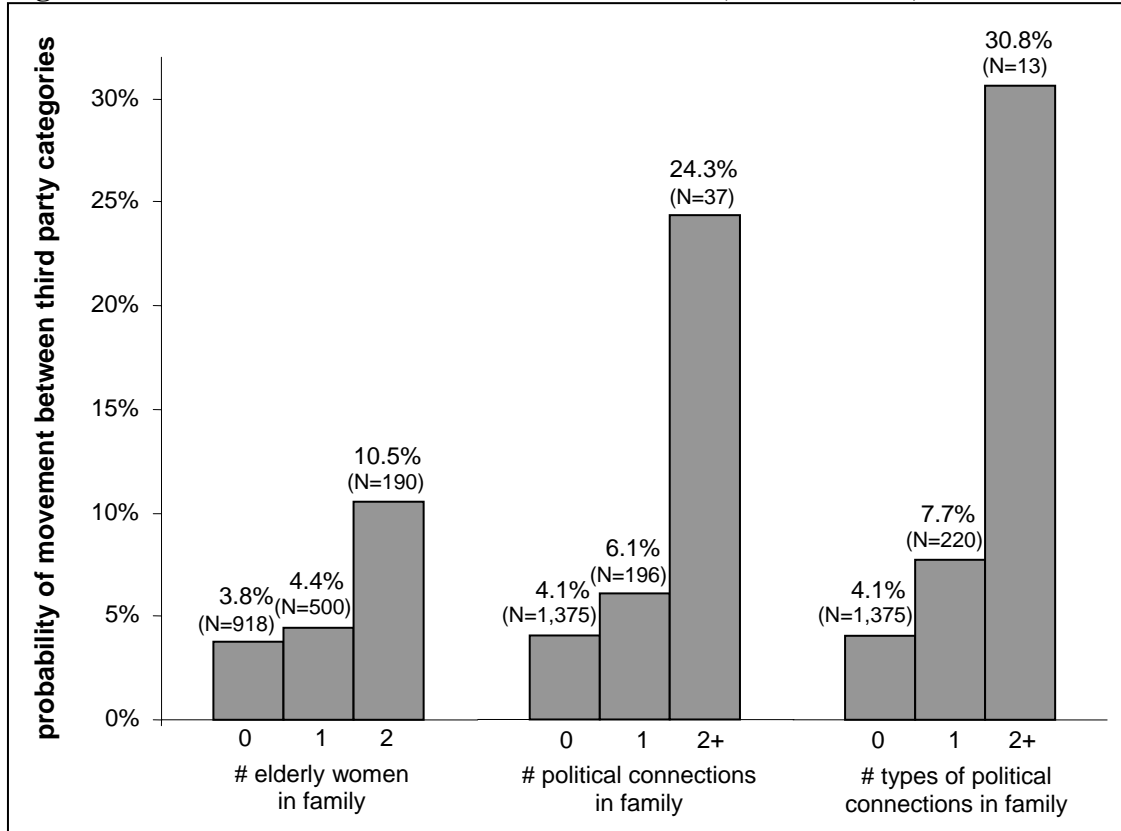
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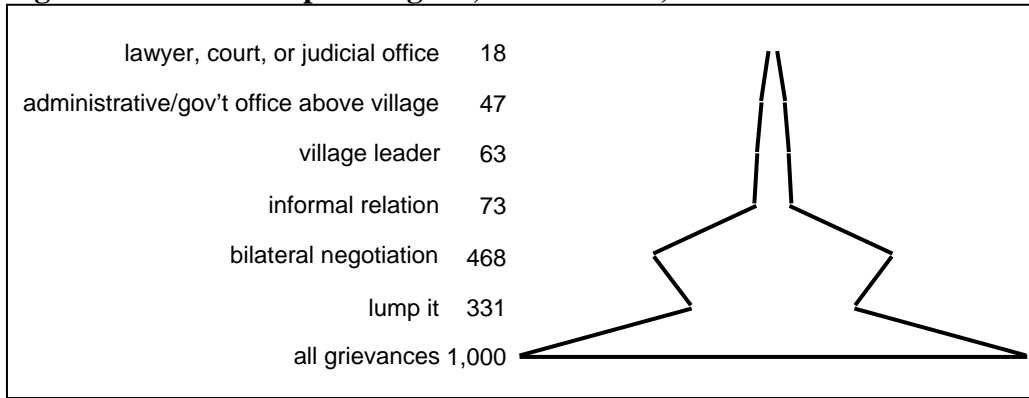
Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Social Resources and Grievance Escalation, Rural China, 2002



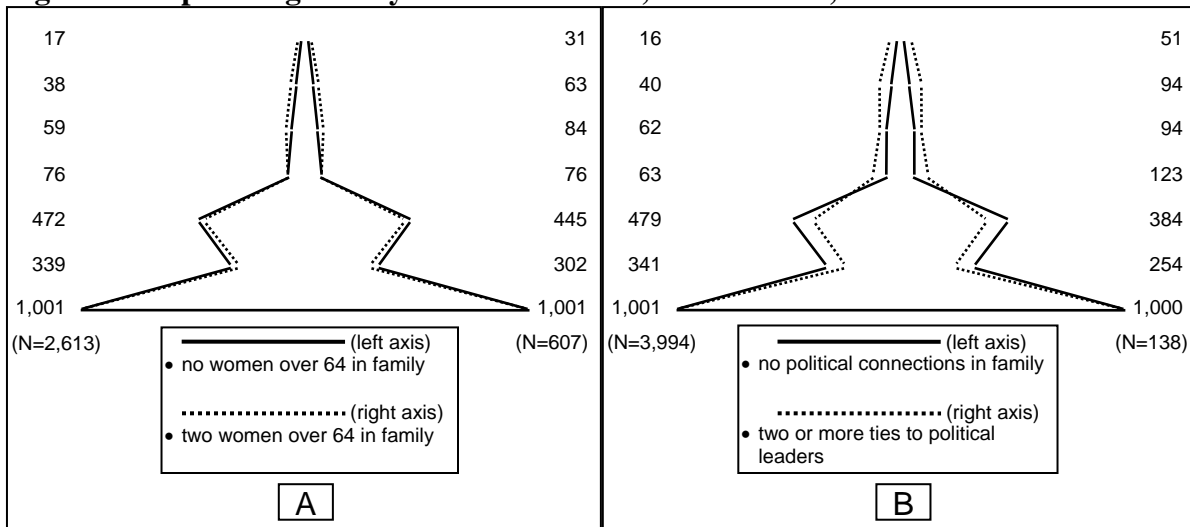
NOTE: N=1,608 families reporting at least one grievance. The overall average probability is 4.8%. For elderly women: $\chi^2=15.8$, $p<.001$; for number of political connections: $\chi^2=33.3$, $p<.001$; and for types of political connections: $\chi^2=25.0$, $p<.001$. No families reported more than two ties to women over the age of 64. A family could have a maximum of five political ties and a maximum of three types of political ties: a tie to a village leader within the family, a tie to an outside relative working as a township/village cadre, and a tie to an outside relative working as a higher-level cadre. At the dispute level (as opposed to the family level) the above pattern is replicated: Among the 956 grievances for which the mobilization of third parties was reported, the probability of reporting multiple third parties increases along with the number of women over age 64 in the family: 7.7% for no women over 64 (N=495), 8.5% for one woman over age 64 (N=307), and 14.3% for two women over age 64 (N=154) ($\chi^2=6.4$, $p<.04$). Among the 956 grievances for which the mobilization of third parties was reported, the probability of reporting multiple third parties also increases along with the number of political connections: 8.7% for no political connections (N=722), 7.1% for one political connection (N=184), and 20.0% for two or more political connections (N=50) ($\chi^2=8.3$, $p<.02$). Likewise, the probability of reporting multiple third parties increases along with the number of different types of political connections: 8.7% for no political connections (N=722), 8.3% for one type of political connection (N=216), and 27.8% for two or more types of political connections (N=18) ($\chi^2=7.9$, $p<.02$). Recall that because the survey questionnaire did not explicitly ask for information about *all* third parties approached (in only 86 of all 956 grievances for which third parties were reported were multiple third party types reported), the survey data undoubtedly underestimate the extent of grievance escalation.

Figure 2. Baseline Dispute Pagoda, Rural China, 2002



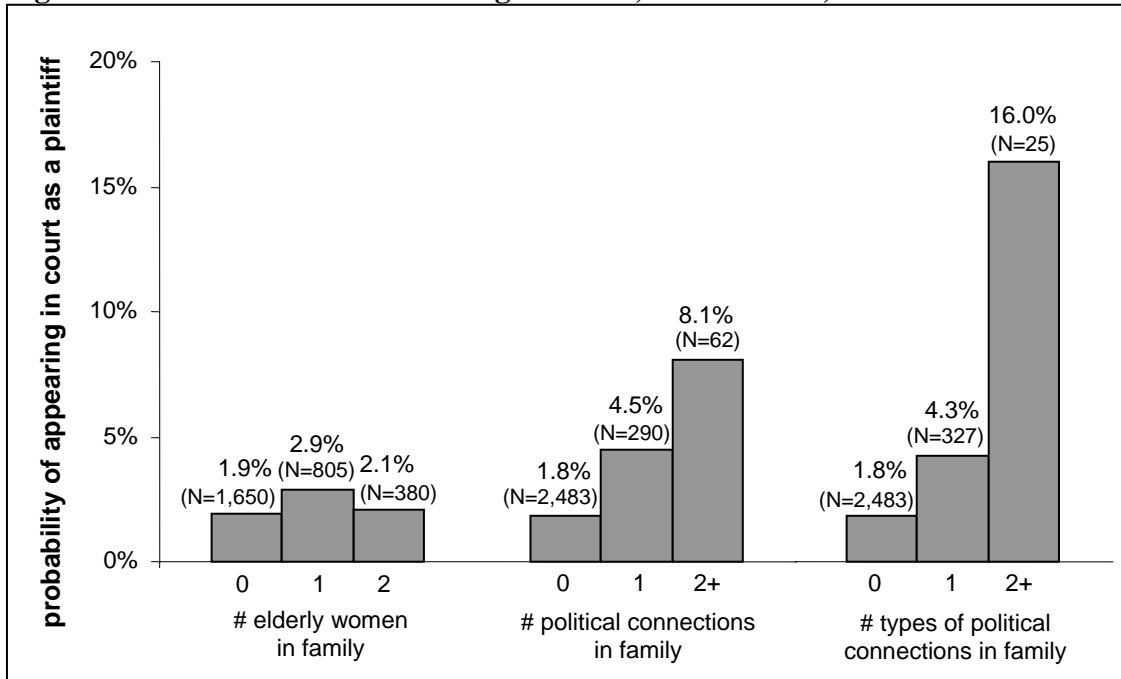
NOTE: N=4,757 grievances reported by 1,589 households in 37 villages in 6 provinces.

Figure 3. Dispute Pagodas by Social Resources, Rural China, 2002



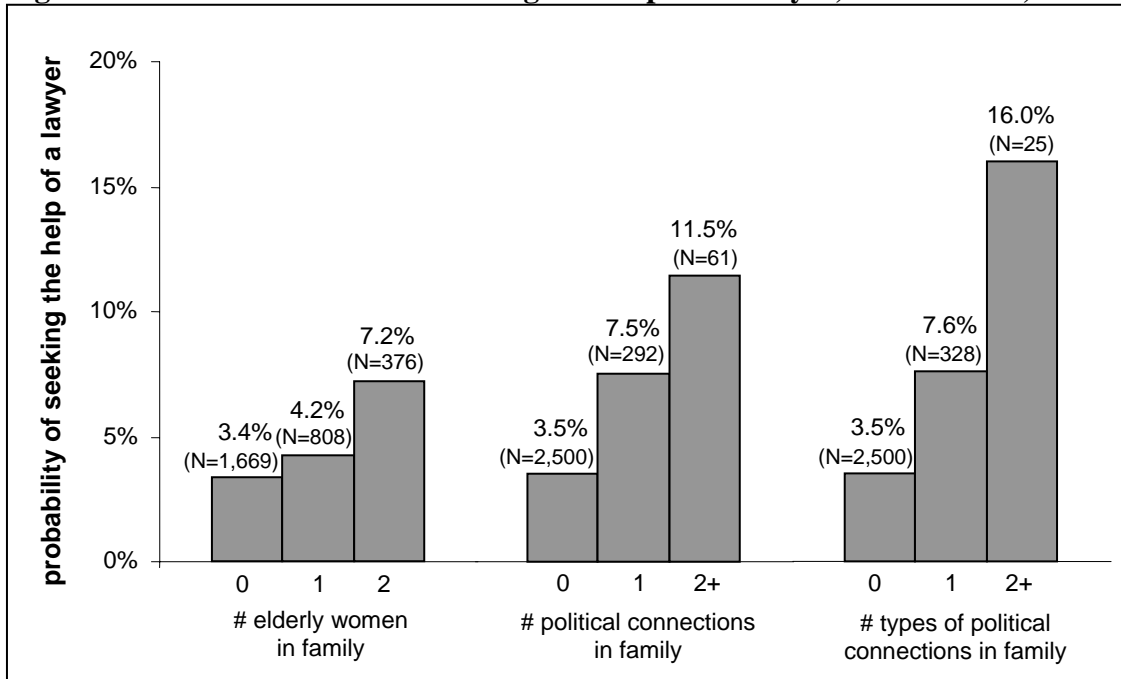
NOTE: Dispute pagodas do not always total 1,000 owing to rounding error. For axis labels, see Figure 2. Figure 3A, N=3,220, $\chi^2=20.2$, $p<.001$; Figure 3B, N=4,132, $\chi^2=42.5$, $p<.001$. For axis labels, see Figure 2.

Figure 4. Social Resources and Suing in Court, Rural China, 2002



NOTE: N=2,835 families reporting at least one grievance. The overall average probability is 2.2%. For elderly women: $\chi^2=2.1$, $p<.346$; for number of political connections: $\chi^2=18.5$, $p<.001$; and for types of political connections: $\chi^2=30.1$, $p<.001$. No families reported more than two ties to women over the age of 64. A family could have a maximum of five political ties and a maximum of three types of political ties: a tie to a village leader within the family, a tie to an outside relative working as a township/village cadre, and a tie to an outside relative working as a higher-level cadre.

Figure 5. Social Resources and Seeking the Help of a Lawyer, Rural China, 2002



NOTE: N=2,853 families reporting at least one grievance. The overall average probability is 4.1%. For elderly women: $\chi^2=11.5$, $p<.003$; for number of political connections: $\chi^2=19.3$, $p<.001$; and for types of political connections: $\chi^2=21.5$, $p<.001$. No families reported more than two ties to women over the age of 64. A family could have a maximum of five political ties and a maximum of three types of political ties: a tie to a village leader within the family, a tie to an outside relative working as a township/village cadre, and a tie to an outside relative working as a higher-level cadre.

Table 1. Definitions of Variables Used to Measure Grievances

Grievance Category	Operational Definition
personal injury	a personal injury or an accusation of personal injury or theft
housing land	problem with the acquisition of housing land or over housing construction rights
business-related	debt collection; property damage or loss; or a problem produced in dealings with a government office (if the dealings concern commercial or tax issues)
farming-related	problem with water use; problem with responsibility land or contracting with a township or village enterprise; grievance over agricultural taxes; or a problem produced in dealings with a government office (if the dealings concern farmland, agriculture, rural taxation, or the supply and marketing cooperative system).
neighbor	a dispute with a neighbor
other	a family planning conflict with village cadres or someone else; a consumer dispute; a divorce; a problem collecting work pay; a family dispute; another kind of problem produced in dealings with a government office (not listed above); a school-related problem with a child's teacher or school; or another kind of problem not listed above ("other")

Table 2. Correlates of Responses to Grievances, Selected Relative Risk Ratios from Multinomial Logistic Regression, Rural China, 2002

	bilateral negotiation vs. lump it	informal relation vs. lump it	village leader vs. lump it	admin./gov't office above village vs. lump it	lawyer, court, or judicial office vs. lump it
SOCIAL RESOURCES					
# male family members over age 64	.886*	1.187	1.209#	.982	.820
# female family members over age 64	1.205**	.969	1.160	1.553***	1.655*
any family members village leader (yes=1)	.920	.934	1.348	1.385	3.312**
any outside relatives township/village cadre (yes=1)	1.294	2.167***	1.131	1.616	.728
any outside relatives higher-level cadre (yes=1)	.828	1.255	1.097	1.757*	2.560*
GRIEVANCES					
personal injury	.925	2.230*	.675	10.098***	19.213***
housing land	.869	1.554	.830	9.074***	.850
business-related	1.253#	.714	.375***	3.141***	2.283#
farming-related	.926	.392***	.564***	1.349	.366#
other	1.030	1.533*	.326***	2.065*	1.249
with neighbor (reference category)					
Pseudo R ²	.085				
Wald χ^2	950.27***				

NOTE: # p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001, two-tailed. N=4,714 grievances reported by 1,571 households in 37 villages in 6 provinces. A relative risk ratio of 1.000 means one's chances of responding to a grievance in a particular way neither increase nor decrease. A relative risk ratio of 2.000 means one's chances double. A relative risk ratio of .500 means one's chances halve. The models were calculated with sampling weights and robust standard errors. Omitted control variables include county sample, household size, health of household members, age of household members, education of household members, household economic status, entrepreneurship, urban household registration, and other nonfarm work categories. For complete results, see Technical Appendix, Table A2. For descriptive statistics on all variables, see Technical Appendix, Table A1.

Table 3. Correlates of Legal Mobilization, Selected Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Analysis, Rural China, 2002

	ever appear in court as a plaintiff	ever seek help of a lawyer
SOCIAL RESOURCES		
# male family members over age 64	.938	.763
# female family members over age 64	1.021	1.569*
any family members village leader (yes=1)	5.178***	2.440*
any outside relatives township/village cadre (yes=1)	1.028	1.543
any outside relatives higher-level cadre (yes=1)	2.272#	1.984*
GRIEVANCES		
any personal injury grievances (yes=1)	8.824***	4.174***
any housing land grievances (yes=1)	1.013	1.680#
any business-related grievances (yes=1)	1.562	1.299
any farming-related grievances (yes=1)	1.829#	1.015
any neighbor grievances (yes=1)	.718	.910
any other grievances (yes=1)	1.452	2.019*
Pseudo R ²	.233	.110
Wald χ^2	186.8***	108.0***
N	2,798	2,815

NOTE: # p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001, two-tailed. The models were calculated with sampling weights and robust standard errors. An odds ratio of 1.000 means one's chances of reporting the applicable measure of legal mobilization neither increase nor decrease. An odds ratio of 2.000 means one's chances double. An odds ratio of .500 means one's chances halve. Omitted control variables include county sample, household size, health of household members, age of household members, education of household members, household economic status, entrepreneurship, urban household registration, and other nonfarm work categories. The constant is also omitted. For complete results, see Technical Appendix, Table A4. For descriptive statistics on all variables, see Technical Appendix, Table A3.

Table 4. Distribution of Grievance Types, Rural China, 2002

	percentage of all households reporting grievance	proportion of all grievances		
		all grievances	grievances brought to any third party	grievances brought to third party outside village
personal injury grievance	6%	4%	8%	16%
housing land grievance	12%	7%	12%	17%
business-related grievance	16%	11%	9%	15%
other type of grievance	37%	35%	35%	31%
farming-related grievance	30%	26%	19%	14%
<u>grievance with neighbor</u>	30%	<u>18%</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>8%</u>
TOTAL	—	101%	101%	101%
(n)	(2,902)	(4,757)	(956)	(309)

NOTE: Arranged in descending order according to the relative likelihood of escalating (i.e., in descending order of the ratio of “brought to third party outside village”/“all grievances”). In calculating the percentages of households reporting types of grievances, not every percentage figure category was calculated after excluding households not exposed to or not at risk of experiencing a given grievance type. For example, insofar as not every household surveyed had children in school over the five years prior to the time of the survey, the estimate of 4.9% is highly conservative. Appropriate skip patterns were implemented for debt collection, divorce, and labor grievances to exclude households to which these grievances did not apply. The totals do not equal 100% owing to rounding error.

ENDNOTES

1. Aggrieved villagers often appeal to newspaper publishing houses (O'Brien and Li 2004:86-8; Zweig 2003:119; Bernstein and Lü 2003:177-8, 185).
2. For video footage of Beijing's "petitioners' village" televised by the BBC in which middle-aged and elderly female petitioners are prominently featured, see <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3926759.stm>> (accessed February 12, 2006, video on file with author). For a small sample of photos prominently featuring middle-aged and elderly female petitioners, see Li (2005), RFA (2005), and Wang L. (2006). According to Wang L. (2006), Beijing's "petitioners' village" was bulldozed (again) starting on January 30, 2005, perhaps as part of the annual official effort to prevent petitioners from disrupting the March meetings of the National People's Congress (e.g., I. Wang 2006).
3. Although, only at very the bottom of the section analyzing reasons for female participation in contentious action, the report does make mention of these objective conditions, which the authors call "social causes," they are not as prominent as the primary reasons cited by the authors: "causes intrinsic to women." Here, the reader is told, women's participation in petitioning is a function of their "backwards mentality," of their "limited capacity to differentiate reality and imagination," of their "inability objectively to analyze and recognize new things and new changes," of their myopic tendency "to consider immediate self-interest," of their "low cultural quality," of their "low consciousness of civilized etiquette," of their "weak self-control and emotionally excitable nature," of their "lacking ability to articulate and express themselves clearly through language," and of their "flimsy understanding of law" (particularly of the Regulations on Letters and Visits). The report concludes by recommending a new program called "Smart Aunt, Pretty Sister-in-Law" (*Qiao Gu Liang Sao*) aimed at cultivating "civilized culture," elevating "quality," and promoting "stability" among rural women (Liu and Zhang 2005).
4. According to Zhao (2004), between 1990 and 2002, an estimated 66.3 million peasants lost their land. Another estimate puts the number of peasant who lost their land between 1996 and 2003 at over 34 million (CCCCP 2005:68).
5. In the first three quarters of 2002, 8.6 million complaints were made nationally in letters and visits offices at the county-level of government and higher (Wang and Huang 2003). Extrapolating this to the full year yields an estimate of $8.6 \times 1\frac{1}{3} = 11.5$ million. The volume of complaints made to the letters and visits system in 2003 increased

by 14% over the previous year (Zhang H. 2005:12; Yu 2005:27). According to Zhao and Su (2004), the number of petitions made to the letters and visits system in 2003 was in excess of 10 million.

6. Because it implies an obviously implausible 5 billion complaints made annually to government offices, this figure may have been hyperbolically constructed to make the simple point that the letters and visits system processes only a tiny minority of all petitions.

7. On the complementarity of know-how and know-who, see Dezalay and Garth (2002:49, 202). Although the know-how benefits of know-who have not been the central focus of empirical research in the sociology of China and other post-socialist societies, they have certainly not been lost altogether on sociologists. As Róna-Tas (1994:46) writes, “Having connections in the state apparatus or local administration can provide early knowledge of new laws and regulations and of the unwritten rules of their interpretation. Since the personnel of ministries and local governments changes only at the top levels and many of the low- and middle-level administrators stay in place, cadres still have privileged access to individuals in the political bureaucracy.”

8. The many dimensions of dispute escalation include, but are not limited to, intensity, duration, tactics, and social network bridging and expansion (see Parnell 1988). In this paper escalation is conceptualized as a move from a less official to a more official forum—e.g., from a less formal to a more formal forum, from a local forum to a more distant forum, or from a lower-level forum to a higher-level forum.

9. They more closely resemble *stupa* because, in contrast to the classical dispute pyramids in Miller and Sarat (1980/81), my dispute pagodas are constructed from percentage distributions that treat responses to grievances as mutually exclusive (summing to 100%) rather than from cumulative distributions that treat responses to grievances as cumulative, as following a fixed sequence of responses. For example, the classical dispute pyramid assumes that the mobilization of a third party can only occur via failed bilateral negotiation and that the only way to get to court is via a lawyer. Thus, in the classical dispute pyramid, the mobilization of a third party presumes a prior attempt to negotiate bilaterally, and appearance in court presumes the prior mobilization of a lawyer. My dispute pagodas, in contrast, assume no such fixed sequence.

10. In addition to the dummy variables for political connections presented in the tables, the regression models also contain seven additional nonfarm work categories (omitted in the table to conserve space). The ten nonfarm work categories are not mutually exclusive because families often contain multiple types of nonfarm work. In the multivariate models, therefore, the reference group is families without any nonfarm workers: families with farm

labor only. Not a single family reported no laborers, but 46% of all families reported farm labor only (i.e., no nonfarm laborers).

11. In the findings presented in this paper, land grievances are limited to *housing-related* land grievances. “Problem with responsibility land [i.e., farmland contracted from the village] or contracting with a township or village enterprise” is a single item on the survey questionnaire containing two discrete types of grievances. Hence its classification is problematic. Because this grievance type, like agricultural tax grievances, is empirically associated with agricultural production, tends to be contained within villages, and is rarely escalated to higher levels outside the village, I include it in the “farming-related grievance” category along with “agricultural burdens.” Housing land grievances may be more contentiously disputed than responsibility land grievances for the following reason: housing land claims are often rooted in village lineage systems that predate socialism, while responsibility land is more commonly understood as collectively owned socialist property.