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The Human Flesh Search Engine in China: a case-oriented approach to understanding online collective action

By

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I dedicate this to my parents

Thank you for being an unfailing source of support, guidance and endless love

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Abstract

There has been a growing interest in online politics in China. The research mostly focuses on the role of the Internet in two areas, one is its creation of a public sphere and the challenges it poses to the existing communication and political system, and the other one is online censorship undertaken by Chinese authorities to reduce the scope of political discussion online and keep the domestic cyberspace from being merged with foreign cyberspace. However, some political uses of the Internet in China have tended to be overlooked. This thesis seeks to redress this lacuna in research by examining the political focus of a recent Internet phenomenon the Human Flesh Search Engine (HFSE). This term might be more at home in pages of a horror novel but was originally applied by the Chinese media to refer to the practice of online searching for people or ‘human hunting’.

While existing examinations have focused on breaches of individual privacy by these so called online ‘vigilantes’ this study mainly focuses on the ability of HFSE to reveal norms transgressions by public officials and lead to their removal. As the politically-focused HFSE is part of the tendency of Chinese popular protest, it is necessary to explore how the HFSE differs from and is similar to those offline protests in China. A case-oriented approach is applied to the research on HFSE. More specifically, the first part of this research puts the understanding of HFSE in Chinese historical context, with the aim of exploring the common dynamics between HFSE and those historical examples of Chinese bottom-up collective action. Then in the second part, a comparison between HFSE and recent Chinese offline popular protests is conducted in order to establish the pattern of politically-focused HFSE. In the third part, based on the empirical cases, the research on HFSE continues with an exploration of HFSE’s underlying causal mechanisms to answer a key question of this research: why did HFSE occur?

The study implies that there are continuities with respect to the Chinese bottom-up collective action as HFSE and Chinese rural resistances as well as urban labour strikes in the twentieth century of China tend to show similar dynamics, which are determined by the power structure they are exposed to. Moreover, the internal process of politically-focused HFSE differs largely from that of recent Chinese offline popular protests, which indicates that HFSE does not have an offline equivalent, although some of its stages can be witnessed offline. Furthermore, HFSE’s occurrence is brought about by a combination of online and offline factors, which are relevant to not only the Internet and Chinese cyberspace, but also the

political system that has contributed to the growth of official corruption and low government credibility in China.

Key words: China, online politics, Internet, corruption, power, media.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: why Human Flesh Search Engines

Background

In May 2008 I was surfing on the Internet when I came across the Chinese term ‘铜虚门’ (Tongxu Gate). I had never heard of Tongxu, and my first thought was that this might be another political scandal in China. Curiosity pushed me to investigate further. What I found was unexpected: the online content about Tongxu Gate invariably referred to ‘人肉搜索’ (Human Flesh Search Engine). Perhaps because this term is so open to sinister interpretation, most of the news coverage of Tongxu Gate available in Chinese cyberspace contained a short explanation of the Human Flesh Search Engine: the term referred not to a horror movie or literary fiction, but to an emerging Internet phenomenon. More surprisingly, I found that Tongxu Gate was only one of many online events involving Human Flesh Search Engine (HFSE henceforth).

Through these searches, I learned that Tongxu Gate was nothing to do with political scandal. Tongxu is the nickname of the leader of a World of Warcraft (WoW henceforth) community based in Chinese cyberspace. In 2006, a WoW player used the Chinese online forum Mop (popular among teenagers and university students) to reveal that his wife, known as Youyueer, had had an affair with Tongxu. He expressed his indignation toward Tongxu and his own suffering brought about by his wife’s disloyalty. Within 24 hours, the posting had received more than a hundred thousand hits (Baidu Baike 2012). Public criticism against Tongxu was overwhelming. The posting was then reproduced on the Tianya forum, which attracts mainly young, educated and middle-aged users. An online group was formed in order to track down Tongxu and the disloyal wife. It did not take long before Tongxu’s personal details were discovered and made public, followed by another round of condemnation of his behaviour. While Tongxu was receiving harassing calls and text messages, in the virtual world WoW players made their game characters commit suicide in protest against him. Tongxu responded to the criticism by uploading a video, in which he denied any knowledge of the alleged extramarital affair, or of Youyueer herself. His denials stoked the controversy and intensified the online discussion. As the uproar extended beyond the online world, and it appeared that the situation could spiral out of control, Tongxu’s accuser made a statement online,

confessing that he had made up the story in order to gain revenge over his failure in playing Wow with Tongxu.

In fact, it is still not clear whether the original story was true, but the ‘Tongxu Gate’ incident illustrates how the HFSE emerges and develops. I started looking for more HFSE incidents, which I supposed could differ from Tongxu Gate in terms of issues, motivations and patterns. Having collected data on other cases, I was able to summarize similarities among them. First, the main actors in HFSE were Internet users; second, HFSE was conducted mainly in cyberspace, e.g. online forums; and, finally, the trigger for HFSE was usually someone’s misbehaviour exposed online via picture(s) or video(s). However, the cases also differed in some aspects: sometimes the target was an immoral member of the public; in some incidents the target was a government official; and in others the HFSE was launched to track down missing persons. At that point, I was reassured that HFSE was nothing to do with human flesh. Rather, it refers to the human interaction used to track down people, a practice that is normal in China, alongside the use of traditional Internet search engines such as Baidu.

Reflecting upon what I had learned about HFSE, I was struck by its political dimension in the targeting of Chinese local governments and officials. There have been numerous reports in the media of confrontation between local governments and ordinary people, with peasant riots, rebellions, labour strikes and street demonstrations taking place all over China, in both urban and rural areas. Indeed, I witnessed such a demonstration in my own hometown. At that time, I never imagined that such collective action might someday emerge in a different way. Now, however, I began to wonder whether HFSE could become another means of protest, of striving for justice and bringing about political change.

One of the most well-known HFSE incidents involves Zhou Jiugeng, whose name has already become the synonym for Internet anti-corruption activism in Chinese cyberspace. Zhou Jiugeng was the chief of a local government department in charge of monitoring and regulating real estate market. Because of his comments in a media interview that the government would punish real estate developers who sold houses at lower than cost price, some of the Chinese public were irritated and queried via posting online whether government had the right to intervene in how the house price was determined. The first posting targeting Zhou Jiugeng emerged on 11 December 2008, one day after the interview with Zhou was broadcast by local television. As this posting was being reproduced on other online forums by Chinese Internet users, Zhou’s inappropriate remark, first known only by local residents,

prompted a national discussion that was intensified in Chinese cyberspace; not only Zhou but also the Chinese local governments that Zhou-alike officials represented were blamed for not having regulated properly the real estate market, leading to a number of Chinese not being able to afford to buy their own houses.

This incident might have ended here if Chinese Internet users were not trying to uncover other examples of misconduct by Zhou. Shortly, a picture taken of Zhou attending a government meeting was exposed online, in which a package of cigarettes put on the table beside Zhou was highlighted by a red circle and was marked by blue Chinese characters: ‘What is this? This is Jiuwuzhizun, produced by the Nanjing Cigarette Factory, the top-level cigarette worth 1,500 Yuan (roughly USD 239) each pack.’ This reminded the audience that Zhou, as a government official, could not afford such expensive cigarette on just his normal salary. Then a picture showing Zhou wearing a luxury watch also appeared and more information went online of Zhou driving Cadillac to the office, about his brother being a real-estate developer, etc., with the focus of criticism of Zhou moving from his inappropriate remark to suspicion of corruption as evidenced by those pictures, and Zhou was named and shamed online as the ‘sky-high-priced-cigarette bureau chief’. The online uproar surrounding Zhou Jiugeng produced by Chinese Internet users provoked a response from Zhou’s supervisors who publicly announced that a special investigation team had been established to look into Zhou’ corruption. It was finally found that Zhou had not only spent public funds on buying luxury goods for personal use but had also received more than 1 million Yuan (roughly USD 159,315) in bribes from others. Zhou was thus sentenced to 11 years jail on the charge of corruption.

The two HFSE incidents introduced above reflect the process of HFSE, involving stages such as exposing, searching, naming and shaming, and punishment. It would be unlikely that incidents similar to the event of Tongxu Gate would happen in the physical world, as WoW players made their game characters commit suicide as a way to protest against the alleged affair, and it would also be rare offline to see people protest against an extramarital affair. But the issue involved in the incident of Zhou Jiugeng is not confined within the virtual world. In fact, in the physical world, corruption has always been a big concern for the Chinese public. Even the former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao has stressed many times that corruption is a deep-rooted problem within China’s political system (No author 2008). Many offline protest events in China have illustrated that official corruption is among the most frequent triggers of grassroots protests and is a significant part of popular grievance in Chinese society (Hao

2011). The incident with Zhou Jiugeng suggests that it was because there was such anti-corruption sentiment shared by the Chinese public that evidence of Zhou's corruption may have surfaced, which probably prevented him just receiving a light punishment (e.g. disciplinary warning) due to his inappropriate remark and led, rather, to a serious jail sentence.

Main questions, perspectives, and significances

After learning basic information about HFSE and relevant incidents, it was the time for me to think about concrete questions. How to define the HFSE phenomenon? Were these incidents of HFSE isolated from each other? Was there something in HFSE that was uniquely online or something that happened offline too? What was the online-offline relationship underlying the HFSE phenomenon, illustrated by the incident of Zhou Jiugeng? Since collective action, particularly protest, had been frequently seen offline and had, nowadays, found its way to the virtual world, what factors led to the transition from offline to online? In the light of corruption being a general problem of governments all over the world, what were the characteristics of the Chinese context that contributed to the occurrence of HFSE? Thus, in order to answer these questions, the first thing to be done was to collect more incidents of HFSE in order to learn in depth and breadth the characteristics of the HFSE phenomenon before a classification and comparison could be conducted. The media coverage was initially the only channel of collecting incidents of HFSE, which means that the data in this research is mainly based on the HFSEs made visible by media. Examining available media coverage on HFSE provided this research with an illuminating start, indicating not only some of the main questions, including those presented above, but also possible perspectives, significances, and expected conclusions of this research.

However the media is not unproblematic as a source for several reasons. First, most media coverage of HFSE tends not to give comprehensive, detailed analysis of HFSE but rather a narrative of an incident or incidents of it in order to inform the audience what has happened. Only in pulling together all the available HFSE incidents could one find its general characteristics not revealed in a single report, such as the differences of its issues, targets, and triggers. These media materials together also present a multi-dimensional image of HFSE, implying that it is necessary to identify a general pattern of HFSE, transforming its multi-dimensional image into a compact, clear, and systematic one that is easily understood, even by people who are unfamiliar with it. The reported HFSE incidents show different targets,

which indicate that they are isolated from each other in terms of their occurrence, but it would still be possible to generalize from them models of HFSE: those incidents targeting government officials could be defined as an individual model of HFSE – government/official focused HFSE, while those incidents in which HFSE was used to look for missing person or to track down immoral members of the public – non-government/official focused HFSE. The most significant gain from the process of collecting incidents is that it tells us something about why they start. HFSEs are usually triggered by offline events often linked a certain kind of injustice. This may suggest that HFSE should be better understood from the perspective of an online-offline relationship, which, however, has rarely been examined by journalists. Certainly, the technology is a part of HFSE but, when thinking of those offline protests witnessed by my own eyes, I firmly believe that HFSE, particularly its politically-focused incidents show similar motivation as offline protests, and may imply some online-offline relationship that has not been clearly comprehended.

Second, the perspectives of media coverage of HFSE show some degree of similarity: for example, some view HFSE as Chinese online human hunting (Branigan 2008a); while some categorize it as a form of online vigilantism that hunts victims on the web (Liu 2008; Downey 2010). With regard to the Chinese media, HFSE is categorized as an Internet lynching and has incurred discussion about whether or not HFSE should be banned due to its negative impacts (e.g. invasion of individual privacy) (Bai and Ji 2008; Wang, C. C. 2008). Most media reports on HFSE while titling HFSE in different and eye-catching ways convey the same message: HFSE is a type of vigilantism, used by numerous Chinese Internet users to track down and punish transgressors. Under these reports, HFSE is covered by a black veil, demonstrating some sort of evil power. It seems that the multi-dimensional look of HFSE is transposed into a unified one, impressing the audience with its controversial impact. However, academic research aims to explore the underlying aspects that cannot be observed at first glance, and provide a detailed insight into HFSE. When looking through these news reports, my attitude toward them, and particularly the journalists' own remarks, was critical. However, my research is designed to look into the HFSE phenomenon in a more systematic manner, focusing not on discussing whether HFSE is good or bad, to which it is impossible to give a clear-cut conclusion, but exploring the causes of the occurrence of HFSE and its relation to the contexts from which it emerged.

In sum, examining media materials around the HFSE phenomenon is the starting point of this research and is helpful in terms of illuminating the main questions, perspectives,

significances and expected conclusions of this research. Based on the hypothesis of online-offline link, this research is set to not only identify the possible examples of HFSE (while there is no offline example exactly like HFSE, it is still possible that, even when there is no technological infrastructure, there might be offline examples that share similarities with HFSE) but also to explore HFSE's underlying triggers both online and offline. Moreover, it is hoped that the 'black veil' over the HFSE phenomenon will be removed by the end of this research, as its true face will be displayed.

Structure of the Chapters

In this thesis I shall regard the prominence of HFSE in the Chinese context as an issue of some significance – a puzzling issue which demands more analysis and exploration than one might at first think, and a revealing issue in terms of what it tells us about the link between online and offline. I shall try to show that, if we want to understand the rise and prevalence of this Internet phenomenon today, we must view it in relation to some of the offline social, cultural, political conditions that have shaped the physical environment of Internet application. We can understand the rise of HFSE only if we see that this phenomenon, which might seem so ephemeral and superficial to the impatient observer, is rooted in series of developments and continuities which have a long history and which have had a deep and enduring impact on social and political life of people in China. Among these developments is the emergence of the Internet, which has transformed the way in which people communicate and interact. Even though there is a division in the academic area between the perspectives of technology-determining and technology-determined (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999), with regard to the potential impact of Internet on human society, this thesis is not going to discuss which perspective is superior to the other; instead, based on the admission that technology is essential in HFSE's occurrence, this thesis views HFSE as co-product of both online and offline factors. Based on the standpoints above, this thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews literature about collective action and the Internet: the two key terms in the HFSE phenomenon. This chapter begins with a more comprehensive review of both media coverage and current studies on HFSE and develops critiques to identify more gaps of existing knowledge about the HFSE. Then, the focus is on literature about collective action and the Internet, in order to evaluate how the literature fits the HFSE phenomenon and helps understand it better. Moreover, literature about other forms of technology-assisted collective action is reviewed to see how they differ from the HFSE.

Chapter 3 reviews historically collective action in China in order to put the understanding of HFSE in the historical context. China, like other countries, has never lacked the chance of witnessing collective action, particularly those influential, large-scale peasant uprisings, social movements and revolutions, political demonstrations, campaigns, etc., which have been frequently taken as main topics of studying contemporary Chinese history. However, comparing them with HFSE does not necessarily make sense in understanding HFSE due to their different scale, duration and ambition. Comparing small-scale revolts and rebellions within HFSE may be more helpful for understanding its spontaneous and grassroots nature. Therefore the Chinese rural resistances and labour strikes are focused on in order to identify any similarities between them and HFSE. The general aim of this chapter is to establish a pattern of common dynamics of Chinese bottom-up, collective action. These common dynamics highlight historical continuities underlying Chinese bottom-up collective actions and the relation between the HFSE phenomenon and its broader contexts.

Chapter 4 talks about the methodology applied to this research. The basic issue in this chapter is that the research on HFSE is defined as being case-oriented, mainly because there is available rich information (in terms of media coverage) about several incidents of HFSE, which enables the researcher to conduct systematic and explorative investigation on HFSE. The case-oriented approach involves specific methods including, concerning this research, single-case process tracing and cross-case comparison. Since the data for this research comes from a range of secondary sources, efforts are also given to making sure of the data quality.

Chapter 5 focuses on first looking for possible offline examples of HFSE to verify if HFSE happens uniquely in cyberspace and, second, exploring patterns of HFSE via cross-case comparison of HFSE and Chinese offline protests. Protest is the theme of this chapter (the government/official-focused HFSE is viewed as a subtype of protest). The motivation for government/official-focused HFSE – seeking justice – is not confined to cyberspace. Thus it is reasonable to suppose that there might be offline examples of protest that resemble the HFSE. The comparison can help detect if the government/official focused HFSE has offline example(s) and also find out the differences between online and offline protests. A matching strategy is used in the comparison to see how the processes of offline protests match the process of government/official-focused HFSE.

Chapter 6 explores the causal mechanisms of HFSE to explain why it occurs. Instead of comparing HFSE with offline protests, this chapter uses process-tracing to look for HFSE's

causal conditions and the causal link between these conditions and its outcome. While the government/official-focused HFSE is the theme of this research as well as of this chapter, the non-government/official-focused HFSE is also examined to see how it can contribute to the understanding of government/official-focused HFSE. The causal mechanism of government/official-focused HFSE is established as conclusion of the chapter.

In the final chapter, I stand back from the detail and offer a more reflective view on the HFSE and its implication for Chinese society. By reviewing the whole process of this research, I put together all the findings in this short chapter and give an account of what this research has added to the understanding of HFSE phenomenon. These findings include different types of HFSE, structure of HFSE, the relation between the HFSE and its contexts, the patterns and causal mechanisms of government/official-focused HFSE as well as findings about the non-government/official focused HFSE.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: re-conceptualizing the HFSE

Introduction and chapter outline

Current practices on the web are bearing witness to the growth of online collective action. The emergence of the Human Flesh Search Engine has shown that collective actions, particularly the politically-focused ones, which have been frequently seen in the physical world, are able to thrive in the contemporary Internet environment. Facilitated by communicative technologies such as the computer, collective actions coordinated by or conducted on the Internet have been thriving (Postmes and Brunsting 2002). While forms of online collective action might be increasing, collective action is not in itself new. Prior to the popular usage of the Internet, collective action received attention from scholars in different disciplines, particularly in political science (Crozier and Friedberg 1980; Birnbaum 1988; Tarrow 1994). Nowadays, collective actors are extending their actions into not only politics but also social, cultural and commercial affairs (Melucci 1996; Hemetsberger 2002).

The Human Flesh Search Engine is a new search engine mechanism as well as a kind of online collective action, which exemplifies human-assisted searching, integrating the traditional search engines with human interactions. It also refers to the Internet as a platform and an information source that Internet users apply to tracking down, exposing and punishing particular individuals. Thus, collective action and Internet are two key terms of a literature review concerning the HFSE phenomenon. In this chapter, I review, first, existing academic and journalistic literature on HFSE; then I develop critiques of these academic studies as well as of relevant media coverage to detect the gaps in existing knowledge about HFSE. Further, the attention is given to non-China-focused literature to see if the HFSE is uniquely Chinese. Based on the argument that HFSE is a form of collective action, theories about collective action are also reviewed to see how they can help to understand the HFSE and shape approaches to it. Then, emerging forms of collective action, such as digital swarming, crowdsourcing and flash mob, are reviewed to show how technologies such as the Internet and mobile phone assist the occurrence of collective action in the information age, as well as to examine how HFSE differs from other technology-assisted collective actions. Finally, the

review focuses on literature about Chinese online collective action to show that HFSE is not the only example of the application of the Internet in collective action by the Chinese.

The existing literature on HFSE

A general review of current academic studies of HFSE

The phenomenon of HFSE has attracted attention from both domestic and foreign scholars in the research areas of sociology, psychology, law, communication, political science and computer science. Due to HFSE being a phenomenon originating from Chinese cyberspace, studies on it are mainly by Chinese scholars and research students; a few western scholars also have published relevant articles and book chapters, as HFSE has been widely reported by western media, informing and sourcing potential international scholars. Since there is not a well-established literature, journal articles, papers and book chapters and also master and undergraduate theses, in Chinese and English, are reviewed. The HFSE studies can be clustered into two major categories. The first category is highlighted by a behaviourist approach. The authors who focus on Internet users' behaviours in HFSE are mainly from areas of computer science, psychology and communication. For example, there are some scholars and students who provide explanations of how the HFSE events evolved on the Internet platform, and their search, interaction, knowledge aggregation processes (Ren and Chen 2012; Zhang et al. 2012; Wang et al. 2009; Wang et al. 2010); there are also discussions about Internet users' communicative behaviours that lead to collaboration, civic participation, cyber vigilantism, rumour transmission, and playing experience in HFSE (Zhang 2011; Pan 2010; Deng 2009; Cheong and Gong 2010; Ma, J. J. 2010; Li and Liu 2009; Liu, D. L. 2009; Zou and Li 2009). Since the HFSE is based on Internet users' collaborative information seeking and sharing, as well as the popularity of online communities, the high involvement of the online population in the process of HFSE, within the domain of psychology, can be explained by the theory of social participation (Chao 2011); factors such as the sense of virtual community, deindividuation, the bandwagon effect, group polarization and the media trial are included in this study (Zhang and Wang 2009; Liu, W. J. 2009; Lei 2009).

The second category reflects interest in HFSE's social, political, and historical contexts, and the related issues of privacy, norms and corruption. For example, there are discussions of invasion of personal privacy and cyber violence, evidenced by HFSE examples in which the personal details of the target were exposed online, incurring harassment and opprobrium by Internet users against the target whose misconduct was not acceptable. Cheung (2009) talks

about HFSE from the perspective of privacy protection by arguing that, in the face of growing resort to the HFSE for the purpose of social shaming, monitoring and revenge, leading to personal information of the targeted individuals being ruthlessly exposed and their lives mercilessly disrupted, it is essential to have legislative enactment at the national level to protect personal information in China. The majority of Chinese academic papers on HFSE have also been written from this perspective, advocating establishing standards and codes of conduct of Internet users and issuing legal provisions to restrain Internet users' online behaviour (Luo et al. 2008; Dai 2008; Yang 2008; Lai and Liu 2009; Zhou 2008; Cao 2009). The political dimension of HFSE is analysed in quite a few papers published mainly in English. Capone (2012) takes the example of HFSE to highlight the democratic implication, censorship, and political participation in the twenty-first century China. Jiang (2010) refers to politically-focused HFSE as one empirical illustration of public deliberation and action that reflects, and pushes China to be, a more stratified, pluralized, and liberalized society. Herold (2001, p.140) discusses HFSE in the political framework of China by arguing that HFSEs (particularly politically-focused ones) have (been given) the power and willingness to provide feedback on local government corruption, thus offering a bridge between the central government and the people. Unfortunately, no academic paper in Chinese discusses the political dimension of HFSE and the available English papers mention it but do not dig deeper. The authors from the discipline of sociology try to explore the causal conditions of HFSE's occurrence through looking at the relationship between conventional offline and Internet-based human interactions and communications, as well as how the existing social norms and codes influence the online discussions in HFSE (Zhang, X. Y. 2009; Xue 2009; Su 2009; Zeng 2010).

Media coverage on HFSE

It is mainly media coverage that gives audience and potential researchers background information on HFSE as mentioned in the previous chapter. Originally taken as a Chinese Internet phenomenon, the HFSE has been widely reported by home and abroad media, showing a unified 'Chinese characteristic'. There are some media that define the HFSE phenomenon as Chinese online human hunting, such as the article published on the website of the *Guardian* on 10 November 2008, titled 'Chinese online vigilantes hunt human flesh.' Its first sentence grabs the attention: 'Forget the FBI or Jack Bauer. No one tracks down a miscreant as fast as Chinese vigilantes', followed by 'The practice is not unique to China;

only the graphic name. But with the world's largest Internet population (250 million-plus, and growing each day), it has proved particularly effective here' (Branigan 2008a). Another article from *The Times Online* has as its title: 'Human Flesh Search Engine: Chinese vigilantes that hunt victims on the web' (Liu 2008). An article titled 'A Verdict in the case of Human Flesh Search Engine', released by the *Wall Street Journal*, 30 September 2008, focuses on a much-watched lawsuit 'brought by Wang Fei, a Beijing man who was vilified by online mobs after his wife committed suicide, allegedly due to her husband's infidelity' (Ye and Canaves 2008). The authors want to illustrate that the HFSE has become a tool used for hunting down people accused of bad behaviour by Internet users who search, filter and recombine all the fragments of relevant information, and then personal details of these targets, sometimes shown in online videos or pictures, are exposed to the public view, both on and off the Internet.

In an article titled 'China's Cyberposse' from the *New York Times*, the author Downey (2010) gives a more detailed and updated explanation of HFSE: a 'form of online vigilante justice where Internet users hunt down and punish people who have attracted their wrath. The goal is to get the targets of a search fired from their jobs, shamed in front of their neighbours, run out of town. It is crowd-sourced detective work, pursued online — with offline results.' Downey also cites the case of Wang Fei that had appeared in much media coverage but highlights its offline result by saying that '[t]his wasn't cooperative detective work; it was public harassment, mass intimidation and populist revenge.' He also argues that HFSE attracts many netizens to online forums and communities, but the real driving force behind is the 'desire for a community in which people can work out the problems they face in a country where life is changing more quickly than anyone could ever have imagined'.

Spencer (2006) reported on *The Telegraph* another example about a woman dubbed 'the kitten killer of Hangzhou', who posted a video of herself stomping a kitten to death with her stiletto heels. Chinese Internet users erupted with rage and hundreds of amateur sleuths traced the video to Hangzhou, a city south of Shanghai in China. They discovered the woman's name and that she had recently purchased a pair of high-heeled shoes on eBay. They harassed her until she apologized on a local government website and lost her job. Canaves (2008) from *The Wall Street Journal* gives an example, which presents the political dimension of HFSE that also sets its sights on misbehaviour by public officials. In December 2008, a Chinese

citizen anonymously posted the travel-expense claims by government officials accidentally found on a subway in Shanghai. The documents showed that a group of officials from two local governments had taken lavish 'study tours' to the United States and Canada where they spent public money on visiting major tourist attractions. After these documents surfaced, details of these officials were exposed by other Internet users who knew the officials whose names were shown in the documents. Chinese Internet users discussed the alleged corruption in online forums and organized an online petition asking the two local governments concerned to penalize their officials. Under public pressure, the two local governments dismissed the exposed officials and a series of inquiries were launched to ensure best practice in the relevant departments

While the western media marvel at the power of Chinese Internet users in tracking down people so quickly and effectively, the Chinese media care more about the negative aspects of the HFSE phenomenon and there is a general concern that it represents a new kind of online collective action that is disturbing. One article from the *Xinhua News Agency* regards HFSE as Internet lynching:

The 'human flesh search engine' is not the search engine familiar from Baidu and Google, but the idea of a search engine employing thousands of individuals all mobilized with one aim, to dig out facts and expose them to the baleful glare of publicity. To do this they use the Internet and conventional search engine...The model has some similarities with Wikipedia and Baidu Knowledge, which both attract 10 million clicks every day, and which pool answers from netizens to a question. By its narrow meaning, Renrou (Human Flesh) search started in 2001, when a netizen posted the photo on Mop of a girl, saying she was his girlfriend. Some others soon found out that the beauty turned out to be Microsoft's model Chen Ziyao and publicized her personal information as proof that he was lying (Bai and Ji 2008).

This article argues that the 'Internet gave people a disguise, enabling the power without responsibility'. It also cites the case of Wang Fei, who, after his personal details were exposed on the Internet, was harassed by people who wrote graffiti on the door of his parent's house accusing them of killing Wang's wife, and phoned his boss, asking him to sack Wang. This case within the Chinese context is framed in terms of vigilantism and invasion of personal privacy. Indeed, Wang sued the Tianya and Daqi (two major online communities in China) for initially allowing circulation of his personal details and infringing his privacy and damaging his reputation. An article from the *People's Daily* shows a similar concern that the HFSE should be controlled in order to ensure the safety of personal privacy on the Internet (Zhen and Chen 2012). However, concern only about personal privacy and harassment by

online mobs overlooks an important political dimension of HFSEs, which the Chinese media have rarely looked into in detail, while the western media's focus on the power of the Internet in facilitating Chinese communication and interaction overlooks the possible online-offline relationship underlying the HFSE phenomenon.

Critiques of existing literature on HFSE

The existing literature on the HFSE phenomenon shows its complexity, and also poses challenges to this research, the significance of which is primarily about the identification of the gaps of existing knowledge about HFSE. While the issues of invasion of privacy and cyber violence have been primarily and frequently analysed by Chinese scholars and reported by both national and foreign media, the political dimension of HFSE remains under-investigated. In some cases HFSE revealed a transgression of the rules and created pressure on government, which led to the removal of public officials for corrupt practices. There might well have been a breach of individual privacy by these so-called 'vigilantes' but the result was that corrupt public officials were held to account. A few western scholars mention HFSE's political dimension, but such questions as to what extent the HFSE has been used to hold political officials and local governments to account and to what degree the Chinese political framework has influenced the occurrence and dynamics of HFSE, unfortunately have not been answered.

Moreover, there has been no evidence of awareness of the online-offline relationship underlying the HFSE phenomenon, especially underlying politically-focused HFSE. Nearly all Chinese authors who have written journal papers and research theses concerning HFSE pay attention only to Chinese Internet users' online behaviours, such as online exposure, bullying and flaming, and discuss the causes from the perspective of different disciplines. But no author (academic or journalistic) has ever tried to collect all the incidences of HFSE, classify of the different types of practice, or investigate in much detail its internal process, which limits the knowledge about it as something extensive and intensive. The overwhelming attention to HFSE within Chinese academic areas may have been driven by the response of journalists, who prefer to use eye-catching words such as cyber violence and privacy violation to attract audience. As a result, both HFSE's political dimension and its online-offline relationship have been overshadowed. Herold (2011) states that HFSE should be understood alongside public protests in China, but he does not indicate how the HFSE is

similar to and differs from Chinese offline protests.

Furthermore, the existing literature on HFSE overlooks an important aspect, that in nature it is a form of collective action. Each single HFSE incident involves a process during which more than one Internet user make contributions, and the roles taken by HFSE participants may vary from person to person. For example, there are some Internet users who just make initial exposures; some take the role of detective; and some join the online discussion to name and shame the transgressor after the evidences of his/her misconduct are dug out and exposed online by others. In fact, without any of these roles, the HFSE would not be able to achieve its goal. Therefore, systematic research is needed to look into the internal process of HFSE as a form of collective action, a full treatment of which needs a study of the causes, the stages, and the factors that determine the outcome and, more importantly, its relation to the context where the HFSE occurred. A few Chinese authors talk about the 'collective' from the perspective of psychology and try to answer why people gather in online communities, but, due to lack of awareness of the HFSE's internal process, they fail to address some key aspects of HFSE, such as its trigger (e.g. official corruption) and its outcome (e.g. corrupt officials punished), which may imply important factors that drive Chinese citizens to go online and collaborate, as well as the relation between the HFSE and its context. Collective action is inherently political (Shirky 2008). The use of the HFSE as a form of online collective action corroborates this statement. Examining HFSEs' political dimension would help to improve the understanding of politically-focused collective action in the virtual world.

The existing literature on HFSE reflects not only gaps but also constructive suggestions. Wang et al. (2010) give a network analysis of HFSE communities in Chinese cyberspace by employing an automatic-Web-crawling method to extract information about participants and the connections between them; meanwhile, the authors also found that most HFSE episodes involved strong offline elements in terms of Internet users' information acquisition through offline channels and reporting their offline findings back to the online discussion. By empirical analysis, they detected that, in HFSE episodes, information about the context and underlying event appeared first on an online forum, which in most cases became the portal of ensuing HFSE-related activities; forum members started online discussions about the stories, which in turn initiated HFSE activities, in other words, the HFSE networks were naturally based on forum-discussion. Although the study by Wang et al. (2010) fails to answer the

questions mentioned above, it inspires this research in that the Chinese online forums could be an important channel to learn the process of HFSE and online discussion should be viewed as an essential part of the process. More importantly, this study empirically confirms that Internet users' activities in HFSE episodes are not confined to cyberspace: the crowd-sourced detective work is conducted both online and offline, which means that Internet users not only use search engines to look for relevant information, but also use their offline contacts to explore information about their targets.

In sum, reviews of existing literature are helpful for this research because, first, they call attention to the current gaps of knowledge about the HFSE. Its political dimension remains under-investigated, particularly among Chinese scholars, probably due to the fact that, in mainland China, scholars have always been cautious when talking about politically-focused collective actions, especially in papers and articles for publication. A few western scholars insightfully mentioned HFSE's political dimension, but maybe due to the issue of language, they are less able to conduct systematic research, which depends on collecting large amounts of data, both online and offline, in Chinese. Second, the almost-ignored online-offline relationship underlying the HFSE phenomenon also shows that this research should take the online-offline relationship seriously. It has been mentioned that the politically-focused HFSE should be looked at along with offline political protests in China; but how? An entry point might be comparing systematically the HFSE incidents with Chinese offline protests to explore their similarities and differences. Third, HFSE action should be treated as a form of collective action, a perspective that has also been ignored. Such a treatment highlights the internal process of the HFSE, participated in by several, or even hundreds or thousands of Internet users taking different roles; it also highlights the relation between the HFSE and its context above. Therefore, it is necessary to deconstruct the process of HFSE into different but interconnected stages to see how the HFSE action occurred, and explore how the Chinese context contributes to the occurrence of HFSE usage. Fourth, even though they are deficient in fully explaining the HFSE phenomenon, some papers give suggestions on the characteristics of the HFSE, researching which may need special methods such as automatic web crawling and time-consuming manual search. Referring to useful information provided by these papers could save some time for this research and more importantly enhance the capability of this research in explaining the HFSE phenomenon extensively and intensively. In light of the gaps identified above, between the two major approaches used by the current

studies on the HFSE phenomenon, this research places emphasis on the second approach, trying to explain comprehensively the political dimension of HFSEs and explore the relation between it and the context it is exposed to.

How the literature about collective action helps understand HFSE?

HFSE as a form of collective action

In this research, the HFSE is treated as a form of collective action. Tilly (1986) defines collective action as ‘people acting together on shared interests’ (p. 381). In simple terms an HFSE involves a group of Internet users working together (in a variety of ways), using their contacts (on and off the Internet) and conventional search engines to achieve a common goal (broadly defined). Often triggered in response to wrongdoing or transgression of generally-accepted norms (but not exclusively so) they aim to dig out information, expose it to the public, in order to solicit some form of redress. Empirical incidents show that HFSE is usually participated in by more than one actor. In other words, there are Internet users during the process of HFSE taking different roles to contribute to the outcome of HFSE. For example, in the case of Lin Jiexiang, an Internet user first exposed a video showing Lin’s misconduct in public but, at that moment, the initial exposor did not know Lin’s identity and he made the exposure online in the hope that other Internet users could help identify him; this video then incurred hot online discussion that made this video reach a wider audience; along with its increasing visibility, those who may know Lin in the real world exposed details about his name, government position, phone number, etc., and others who did not know him contributed in such terms as joining the online discussion to complain about Lin or acting as detectives to explore more about him. Another example is the event of ‘Tongxu Gate’ (tongxumen shijian), one of the most famous HFSE events, which started with a 5,000-word posting on a popular bulletin board (BBS) connected to the online game World of Warcraft (WoW). In this posting, one game player accused his wife of infidelity with another player she had met while playing WoW in April 2006 (French 2006), whose online nickname was Tongxu. The angry husband asked for help in identifying the player Tongxu. Internet users responded in great numbers and within days the real name of Tongxu was discovered and exposed online, together with his address, phone number, etc. (Herold 2011). Some enraged Internet users, depending on the exposed details, started to harass Tongxu and his family, while others contacted his university and his parents’ employers to ask for their immediate

dismissals (Song 2006). Within the WoW game, users began to congregate in the area where Tongxu could usually be found to protest about the alleged affair, slowing down the Internet servers of the company behind the WoW in China in the process; meanwhile, a large number of users had their game characters commit suicide together in order to push the protest even further (Herold 2011).

The two examples above show that the participants in a single HFSE event are much more than one Internet user and they share the same sentiment: the case of Lin Jiaxiang reflects Internet users' discontent with government official's misconduct, and the Tongxu event shows Internet users' indignation towards extramarital affairs. It would be wrong to suggest that HFSE is only about human searching and hunting, as its title apparently shows, even though the searching and tracking down are key parts of both the politically-focused and non-politically-focused HFSEs. The initial exposing is also important, as it usually initiated online discussion and searching but, without examining the trigger, it is difficult to explain why people search for and track down their targets; without considering the outcome, it is difficult to evaluate if the HFSE is goal-oriented or it is just random aggregation of Internet users' individual acts, given the fact that a high degree of mass involvement is quite common in cyberspace in terms of sharing, chatting or playing games. Whether or not the action is goal-oriented and what the goal is might be the main indicators for differentiating HFSE from other Internet phenomenon similarly involving mass participation.

The concept of collective action has triggered discussions and debates among researchers worldwide and enriched the theoretical analysis with a large quantity of empirical material, which is mainly based on studies of social movements and revolutions. The HFSE and social movement are different in scale and ambition, but in nature they are all collective action – the claim of which is made on behalf of more than one actor – in defence of a shared belief. According to Tilly (1986), the shared interest is usually political. Also, it is organized, in the limited sense at least that a category of people have routine access to each other and thus form a network. Melucci (1996) systematically examines the collective action and stresses that processes of mobilization, organizational forms, models of leadership, ideologies, and forms of communication are all the meaningful levels of analysis for the action system that constitutes the collective action in the information age. These arguments give insightful views on relevant conceptions and methodological definitions of collective action. Melucci's statement is also constructive, suggesting how the collective action should be studied. But the

analytical levels he mentioned may not be applicable to all the forms of collective action. No organization has been found that is dedicated to organizing HFSE action and to coordinating HFSE actors: HFSE is spontaneous and leaderless. However, some mobilization theories may help to understand the formation of a 'collective' before action in HFSE. Moreover, since the communication is also a meaningful level of analysis of collective action, literature about the application of Internet in collective action is also reviewed to see how the Internet facilitates the occurrence of HFSE.

Emotional Mobilization in collective action

Yang (2009a) argues that the mobilization of online campaigns depends on the expressive forms and contents that may produce among Internet users such emotional responses as joy, laughter, anger, sadness and sympathy. Jasper (1998) states that emotional factors, which were avoided by some cultural researchers who treated the identity, injustice frames, cognitive liberation, and other cultural concepts as highly-charged emotional dimensions, may possibly explain some irrational behaviour in collective action. Melucci (1996) also indicates that the emotional dynamics are important for understanding the formation of collective action. As Jasper (1998, p. 399) states: 'There are positive emotions and negative ones, admirable and despicable ones, public and hidden ones. Without them, there might be no social action at all.' Since emotion is important in mobilizing actors and, as some scholars point out, online communication tends to be self-expressive and emotional (Zhou, X. 2009; Papacharissi 2004; Bar-Lev 2008), the virtual world, where the HFSE emerged and where Internet users' communications are mainly text-based, may provide this research with extensive and easily-accessed materials to explore, through relevant online postings, the emotional factors that pushed Chinese Internet users to join the HFSE.

Emotion in mobilization refers to emotions that exist in individuals before they join the group (Jasper 1998, p. 397). Those emotions are usually formed by people's general impressions and feelings of the reality, and most of these are negative, the result of actual problems they face: frustration, alienation, resentment, and so on. These emotions are easily triggered by some particular events and then expanded during the process of the action if they meet other people who have similar feelings. These pre-existing emotions would be called mobilization potentials (Klandermans and Oegema 1987) which refer to 'the group of people who are prepared in a general way to engage in action campaigns of a given movement to attain the goals pursued by that movement' (Kriesi, cited in Eyerman and Diani 1992, p. 24). It could

be said that one ‘general way’ of emotional mobilization is in people gradually identifying the gap between the real world and their desire. The wider the gap, the more negative the emotions they have, and the more likely they are to join with others who have similar desires. It could be reasonably supposed that when the collective action is spontaneous, without organizational mobilization, the emotional mobilization would be more significant in encouraging people to form the ‘collective’. And the Internet just makes individuals’ emotional expressions more easily and rapidly reached by others with similar interests and desires. This is true for spontaneous HFSE. Looking at online postings in HFSE incidents, one can find rich emotional expressions by Chinese Internet users. The public’s general grievance against official corruption, and discontent with the low credibility of the government may be among the reasons why Chinese citizens exposed officials’ misdeeds online and participated in the politically-focused HFSEs. The event of ‘Tongxu Gate’, which is non-politically focused, similarly reflects an emotion among the Chinese public: the indignation about extramarital affairs.

But the mobilizing emotions do not appear in a vacuum. They may be caused by actual, long-existing problems in the real world. And they could not mobilize a collective action until the occurrence of some particular event triggered such emotions. Without a trigger, the emotion would not be expressed in an outward form. Thus, it is necessary to view the trigger as a part of the process of HFSE (maybe its first stage), as it signals what kind of emotions the actors are supposed to feel and it is also necessary to explore the causal conditions of the trigger, which may tell from where these emotions originate.

Sympathy

Sympathy is an emotion and could be taken as a precondition of collective action. Kriesi points out that ‘sympathy for a movement’s cause does not, of course, contribute directly to a movement and its possible impact. Yet indirectly, the amount of sympathy a movement gets is an asset, where public opinion has an important impact on authority’ (Kriesi, cited in Eyerman and Diani 1992, p.32). Sympathy should be a necessary condition for an individual’s engaging in a collective action because an actor cannot be expected to participate in an action that pursues a goal he/she does not approve of. The sympathy also determines the scale of collective action, which means that the greater the number of people sympathetic with the goal of a collective action is, the larger the population of participants could be. While some Internet users hold emotions that have the potential of preparing them for a

collective action in the future, others may feel sympathy with the goal of an action that has been launched and join it midway. Sympathy (for the weak) could explain the mobilization in the case of Guo Ziyin, whose elder brother posted on an online forum asking for Internet users' help to track down his little sister Ziyin, who had been sold by his father to pay off his debt. But according to the online discussions in this case, sympathy is not the only emotion felt by Internet users: there are also expressions of resentment toward the local police's incompetence and irresponsibility. Put another way, the Internet users who join a HFSE action may be mobilized by different emotions though, in general, the process of HFSE is full of emotional mobilization.

Moral shock

Wettergren (2005) focuses on the 'moral shock' that is used as a mobilizing strategy. The intention in this strategy is to expand consciousness and make bystanders reconnect with their true feelings about situations they once experienced. 'The moral shock may be the first step toward mobilization', Wettergren argues (2005, p. 115). Jasper also indicates that 'moral shocks, often the first step toward recruitment into social movements, occur when an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person' (Jasper 1998, p. 409). The triggers for a public sense of moral outrage may be highly-publicized events that may be sudden, like an accident or public announcement, or may unfold gradually over time. The moral shocks derive from the information or the event that pushes a person to think about the values and norms he complies with and how the world diverges from them in some important way. Shocks depend on pre-existing patterns of affect, which channel the interpretation of announcements and revelations. Positive and negative affect are related to moral sensibilities of individuals and social norms that are 'social attitudes approval and disapproval' (Solove 2007, p. 84). The values and norms on which moral shock is based exist not in a vacuum but are culturally and socially constructed. They are 'social attitude' and are framed by traditional cultures and the structure of social network which have influenced people's understanding and application of these norms and values. When objects of affections are threatened in some way, the moral indignation and outrage toward concrete targets emerge. When someone is affected and motivated by specific events, there should be others who are used as targets for naming, blaming and shaming.

Moral shock is not itself an emotion but it is based on emotion. Emotions alone may not

necessarily be felt toward a certain target but moral shock, practically, requires a target to blame. The moral shock can be viewed as an intermediate stage between the unexpected event and the actual formation of a 'collective'. Sympathy for the weak is a universal emotion; but moral sensibilities of individuals and social norms differ from country to country. The event of 'Tongxu Gate' is an illustration of moral shock among Chinese citizens who feel outrage at someone's infidelity in marriage. And Tongxu became the target and was blamed and harassed by Internet users. There are also examples in which Chinese Internet users targeted those who were exposed abusing a cat, abusing elder people, insulting victims of an earthquake, and cheating in online shopping. When explaining these non-politically focused HFSEs, it is necessary to explore Chinese social and cultural conditions underlying these moral issues involved.

Jasper (1998, p. 411) indicates that 'the more clearly defined the proximate source of the threat, the more likely there is to be outrage or indignation, and hence opposition'. Human-made waste products and technologies represent 'new species of trouble', not only in being especially deadly but in being made by someone, yielding a clear perpetrator to blame (Erikson, 1994; Walsh, 1988; Walsh et al., 1993). A clearly-defined target is important in mobilizing potential actors (Gusfield 1988, p. 125). The HFSE incidents have very specific targets. The Internet is the channel through which the target is exposed and through which the initial moral shock connects a much wider audience. But as, on the Internet, the majority of postings exposing injustice are quickly buried under new postings and may never spark the expression of strong public opinion, perhaps only those postings that resonate strongly with collective sentiments, and contain clear image of the target and hard evidence of his or her misdoing, have the chance to mobilize the public.

In sum, the literature about the mobilization in collective action is helpful for understanding the mobilization in HFSE. In traditional forms of collective action, such as social movements and revolutions, both organizations and emotions may be equally essential powers in mobilizing actors; for online collective action that is spontaneous, such as HFSE, emotional mobilization might be the key in encouraging Internet users to join the action. These emotions are not temporary and may work as mobilizing power throughout the whole process of HFSE because the unorganized and open structure of HFSE enables Internet users to join at any point during the process, whenever they are mobilized by certain kind of emotion.

The application of the Internet in HFSE

Although collective action is not a new human practice, it is the Internet that makes this traditional practice assume a new appearance and present new dimensions. HFSE is an illustration of the recent development in the history of collective action. This section aims to get answers from relevant literature to the question: How does the Internet facilitate the occurrence of HFSE as a form of collective action? There are many different descriptions of features of the Internet. Jonathan Bath and David Stark (2004) give emphasis to the Internet's capacity to 'link, search, and interact'. The Internet is also ideal 'for lowering transaction costs, increasing participation and impact, and streamlining operations' (2004, p. 105). Others examine this new technology both in its technical innovation and its broad social and political implications (Benedikt 1991; Gore 1991; Negroponte 1995). Rheingold anticipated in his book *The Virtual Community* the Internet's capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy's monopoly on communication and media, and perhaps thus revitalize citizen-based democracy (Rheingold 1993, p.14).

Ginsburg suggests that the media phenomenon be analysed by recognizing 'the complex way in which people are engaged in processes of making and interpreting media works in relation to their culture, social and historical circumstances' (1994, p.8). Miller and Slater (2000) demonstrate that the Internet 'is not a virtual realm apart from the everyday lives of ordinary people, but deeply imbricates in them'. Dodge and Kitchin (2001) argue that cyberspace reveals the real world. Hakken (1999) suggests that Internet studies take life offline as seriously as life online. Certainly, the advantages of the Internet over traditional communication channels are beneficial to and have facilitated Internet users' collaboration and interaction in HFSE; but the literature above reminds us that the research on HFSE should consider both online and offline factors. The general context where it occurs is also important as the application of Internet is related to the social, cultural, political and historical circumstances people are exposed to. Such an online-offline relationship is the major gap in the existing studies of HFSE. Moreover, instead of focusing exclusively on how the Internet can make changes to the current situation, the research on HFSE should also pay attention to how the historical and existing practices of Chinese collective action can help understand the dynamics and patterns of HFSE. This is an angle from which the online-offline relationship underlying the HFSE phenomenon can be looked at.

Even more influential than direct calls for action is the indirect mobilizing influence of the

Internet's powers of mass communication (Postmes and Brunsting 2002). Online interactions allow individuals to mobilize far more quickly, cheaply and efficiently because information can be posted publicly and forwarded to particular individuals or groups at little or no cost (Kollock and Smith 1999). Online communities and chat groups make it easy for individuals to find others with similar concerns and interests. The particular quality of the Internet has been said to considerably liberate and empower Internet users (Dickson, 2000; Kozinets, 1999). Whereas in the 'non-virtual world', people mainly create value for themselves, their family and peers, they now own the means to produce, provide and share their information with a huge proportion of the public. People's increasing willingness and being empowered to interact with others are essential conditions of online collective actions. But the technological conditions may have limitations when being considered as a mobilizing power of collective action. In general, the application of the Internet has been increasingly popular all over the world, but the distribution of online access has always been uneven, and depends upon availability of an Internet infrastructure that may be determined in part by the degree of economic development. This means that in poor areas lack of Internet infrastructure and with low distribution of online access, people may have a low degree of easy Internet access and thus weak awareness of its use. They may not consider in the first place basing their collective actions, e.g. a protest against local cadres' corruption, on the Internet. Kiesler and Sproull (1992) point out that the Internet can help to undermine status and power differentials found in face-to-face groups, leading to 'equalization'. However, the 'equalization' could be applied only to those who equally have the potential of using the Internet; but as long as there is uneven distribution of online access, there has been 'digital inequality' (DiMaggio et al. 2001), and the potential of the Internet to be used as a mobilizing power in collective action thus has restrictions. Accordingly, actors' high degree of the ease in using the Internet might be a causal condition of HFSE's occurrence.

Once connected, the distribution of individual information via the Internet costs little in terms of time and money (Kollock and Smith, 1998), which lowers the threshold for voluntary contributions, as well as the threshold between offline and online. The low threshold of and costless shifting between online and offline may give people incentives to go online. Meanwhile, social psychologists argue that the anonymity of the Internet has profound behavioural effects too. In the face-to-face interaction, attraction is highly determined by one's physical appearance and the social categories and roles with which they are associated

(McKenna and Bargh, 1998). Individuals in a virtual world are able to carve out different identities and roles they wish to express and to get accepted. 'The possibility to contrast or reconstruct one's identity constitutes one major motivational source for individuals to go public', says Hemetsberger (2002, p. 8). The Internet's great flexibility in identity construction might also encourage a great deal of online interactions and self-disclosures.

Another outstanding quality of the Internet is its egalitarianism, which dissolves the isolation of individuals from societal and economic processes and enables anyone (who has the potential of using the Internet) to be capable and willing to participate in online collective action (Hemetsberger 2002, p. 8). Furthermore, the huge information database developed online provides necessary resources for collective action in online communities. Additionally, the Internet ideology of sharing (Berners-Lee 2000) helps bundle these resources for the achievement of a common goal. Collective action also requires coordination of activities. One of the most important prerequisites for the coordination of online collective action is provided by the functionality of various communication and groupware tools. 'It is the Internet's extraordinary capability to transmit information, knowledge and digital products, which facilitates the coordination of activities' (Hemetsberger 2002, p.10). The functionalities provided range from archives and storage of digital data to asynchronous or synchronous bi- and multi-directional communication (Hoffman and Novak 1996). These communicative qualities of the Internet accommodate one of the most important preconditions for collaboration and enable mass participation in collective activities (Melucci 1996).

The free online communication and exchange of ideas encourages Internet users to go online and contribute voluntarily in the HFSE. The freedom of identity construction on the Internet may enable more self-expressions in online discussions, more self-disclosures of emotions and more Internet users emotionally mobilized to join a HFSE action. But within an environment with strict online censorship such as China, where the authorities have been closely monitoring Internet users' online discourses and actions in order to reduce the scope of political discussion in cyberspace (Zittrain and Edelman 2003; Xu et al. 2011; Wacker 2003), online anonymity may also be a factor encouraging Chinese Internet users in particular to get involved in online political discussions. While, for the HFSE, online anonymity on the one hand makes Internet users feel freer to conduct bullying and flaming toward others (or, as the Chinese media report about HFSE, cyber violence), on the other hand, it also makes Internet users feel safer to expose and condemn official misdoing. Moreover, as HFSE is a

form of spontaneous collective action, the organization's role in conventional collective actions of establishing and maintaining networks of actors and coordinating their activities is replaced by the Internet's function of linking, searching, interacting and communicating. Furthermore, HFSE is leaderless because of Internet users' equal access to the information resources available online, while, in conventional collective actions, leaders are the key, who are usually the best equipped and most cultivated actors who possess the necessary resources to act (Eyerman and Diani 1992, p. 6).

Is HFSE the only example of technology-assisted collective action?

Reviewing the literature makes it clear that HFSE is not the only form of technology-assisted collective action. In this section, other forms of technology-assisted collective action are introduced to see how HFSE differs from them and how they can help understand HFSE.

Swarming

Swarming was happening before technology. It was first observed as a natural reproductive behaviour of honey bee colonies. Honey bees are unable to reproduce via individual queens, as is the case with solitary bees, bumblebees and wasps. Instead, reproduction occurs on a colony basis where one half or more of the population leaves with the queen in search of a new nest site. Then the term 'swarming' has been used increasingly to refer to 'systems in which autonomy, emergence and distributed functioning replace control, preprogramming, and centralization' (Bonabeau et al. 1999).

Swarming intelligence is employed in the work on artificial intelligence. As Bonabeau et al. (1999) point out: 'The social insect metaphor for solving problems has become a hot topic in the last five years ... The number of its successful application is exponentially growing in combinatorial optimization, communications networks, and robotics.' Justin Long, senior editor of the *Network for Strategic Missions*, states: 'Swarms are networks. They tend to be highly focused, highly adaptable networks that exist for specific purposes. Swarms are not so much movements, although they can give rise to them, and they are different from wide-ranging partnerships, although swarms can spawn them' (Long 2009, p.1). He also gives seven key characteristics of swarms: mission-oriented, highly relational, self-organized, transformational agents, highly adaptive, open and fast expansion.

In the digital age, it may be said that technology has certainly made swarming easier. And more and more individuals and organizations are beginning to understand how collective awareness, mutual collaboration, and swarming intelligence have the potential to change the way people work, learn, contribute, and live. A paper released by Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group raises the concept of digital swarming, which means that the ‘input-form machines, people, video streams, newsfeeds, and more, are digitized and placed onto the network’ (Stanley 2008). This input is then incorporated into a common fabric that connects people, processes, and knowledge to enable faster, better decision making.

Digital swarming is influenced largely by mass social networking but is different from social networking. Stanley (2008) defines digital swarming as a business-model network encompassing an elite, selective community of experts who share knowledge, collaborate, and make decisions in a trusted, open systems framework. In this network, collaboration is not a linear process but a distributed process where information and decision making occur throughout the network, not just at specific aggregation points. Digital swarming connects all nodes of the network – data, machines, objects, and people – in an environment that harnesses the power of the collective to achieve the desired effects of the group or the organization. From this perspective, digital swarming is not an end state or an outcome. It is an interactive process pushing the ‘collective’ toward its goal.

Others see swarming as a bridge between mobile phones and Internet-based communication channels. Text messaging has enabled, in the recent past, swarming actions that have had very major social and cultural impacts. Howard Rheingold’s book, titled *Smart Mobs*, explains and describes in much detail how text messaging has enabled groups of several thousand people to move and act rapidly.

Swarming strategies rely on many small units like the affinity group. ... Individual members of each group remained dispersed until mobile communications drew them to converge on a specific location from all directions simultaneously, in coordination with other groups (Rheingold, 2002, p. 161).

In the book *Networks and Netwars* by Arquilla and Ronfeldt, swarming is explained as a tactic employed by civil-society activists and uncivil-society criminals and terrorists.

Little analytic attention has been given to swarming, which is quite different from traditional mass and maneuver-oriented approaches to conflict. Yet swarming may become the key mode of conflict in the information age. ... Swarming will work best – perhaps it will only work – if it is designed mainly around the deployment of myriad, small, dispersed, networked

maneuver units. Swarming occurs when the dispersed units of a network of small forces converge on a target from multiple directions (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001, p. 12).

The 'swarming' illustrates a specific model of how collective action is formed and developed. For both HFSE and swarming, a networked environment (based on communication tools), dispersed individuals and mission-orientation are essential elements. Swarming can be used to describe HFSE actors' moving model since Internet users within HFSE may come from different fields of society, they do not know each other but are able to connect with each other because of the Internet. It is worth noting that swarming in HFSE is different from problem solving in the business area, which is driven by material rewards, and is also different from swarming in military practice, as swarming soldiers act under a commander's order. For HFSE participants, they respond to an HFSE call spontaneously and make their contribution voluntarily. Swarming is able to present in a visual way how Internet users respond from different directions offline to a HFSE call online, but it is not the whole story of HFSE. They overlap in some aspects but are not identical.

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing was first used as a business idea: tapping into the collective intelligence of the public at large to complete business-related tasks. It enables managers to expand the size of their talent pool while also gaining deeper insight into what customers really want, often with at a lot less or no cost. Jeff Howe is considered as the author of the neologism 'crowdsourcing'. He wrote one of the first articles in the June 2006 *Wired Magazine*, documenting this trend. He defines crowdsourcing as the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call (Howe, 2006). This term is also utilized by some Internet crowdsourcing companies like Cambrian House (2009): 'Crowdsourcing harnesses the power of a community, using advanced social media technology and knowledge of crowd behaviour, to collect, evolve and rank ideas and contributions to reveal the strongest performers.' There is also overlap between HFSE and crowdsourcing, particularly when someone needed the help of HFSE to look for their lost personal belongings or missing families. They posted on an online forum a request for other people's assistance; Internet users of interest would contribute to this request by providing or exploring clues that could be helpful in getting the lost property or missing person back.

Actually, crowdsourcing is an age-old practice. Helms (2007) gave one of the oldest examples of crowdsourcing project, in 1714, when the British government was planning to create a device that could determine the longitude of a ship at sea in order to decrease the losses caused by inaccurate navigation. The project sponsors offered varying cash prize amounts, which were dependent on the accuracy of the device, to anyone who could develop or aid in the development of such a device. This type of an open call requesting innovative ideas and contents is at the heart of a crowdsourcing project (Helms 2007).

In the information age, traditional measures by which crowd intelligence is gathered and applied have been transformed. The Internet facilitates the process of crowdsourcing, which in turn enables the Internet to be an unlimited information database and intelligence pool. Wikipedia is a classic example of a crowdsourcing project. Everyone can upload contents onto Wikipedia and edit contents uploaded by others. It is the collective contribution that makes Wikipedia one of the most famous information sources on the Internet.

Citizen journalism, demonstrated in Dan Gillmor's (2004) landmark book, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, For the People*, was a popular buzzword in journalism circles several years ago. This buzzword was a specific illustration of crowdsourcing. Because of Web 2.0, audiences who previously played the role of news consumers now could assist reporters with stories. Citizens are empowered by the Internet to be news creators. They report to the public what is going on around them and suggest story sources or possible angles to professional reporters. Meanwhile, from the perspective of professional journalists, in the era of Web 2.0, crowdsourcing has become a more recognized tool for reporters who could use Internet users from various walks of life to work as 'informers' on a news project (Carr 2007). Others see crowdsourcing as a model for problem solving, employed by professional organizations to seek for assistance from external sources (Brabham 2008; Thorson 2008).

HFSE and crowdsourcing are both dependent on collective contribution. But, while crowdsourcing is more simply about intelligence aggregation by individuals who do not necessarily interact with each other, HFSE is not just about intelligence gathering but also about networking among actors. Internet users coordinate their action via online discussion about what is going on, who is the target to be tracked down, what evidence has been emerged and what else should be done to push the target to be punished. And differing from

crowdsourcing in the example of a navigation device as well in modern business projects driven by material reward, crowdsourcing in HFSE is based on Internet users' voluntary contributions. It seems that the digital swarming and crowdsourcing together can describe in a more comprehensive way how Internet users work to achieve a common goal, while 'spontaneous' and 'voluntary' should be two essential attributes affiliated to the process of HFSE in order to differentiate the swarming and crowdsourcing in other circumstances. Since the participants in HFSE are not driven by any material reward or organization, it is necessary to explore the underlying motivations that drive Internet users to get involved.

Flash Mob

'Flash mob' was among the newest phrases added to the 11th edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary published on 8 July 2004. It is defined as a group of people who gather in a public place and then dissipate within a matter of minutes. The first reported event of a flash mob happened in New York in 2003. This mob project was launched in May by a man known only as 'Bill' as an experiment in participatory street performance. People received an e-mail invitation to a mob event, where they interacted with others according to a loose script, and then dissipated just as suddenly as they appeared (Delio 2003).

Since then, new flash mobs have popped up all over the world. Unlike the technology-mobilized anti-globalization protests and other large-scale social movements, flash mobs are clearly apolitical. In San Francisco, hundreds of people spun around in circles like children. In Dortmund, a mob invaded a department store and everyone ate a banana. The first London flash mob was held in August 2003, organized by a man who said in an interview in the *Guardian*: 'I like the whole flocking concept. I am organizing it because I want to be one, to be the part of mob' (Kahney 2003).

'The flash mob is more like a field experiment conducted worldwide. Essentially an email call to action that mobilizes hundreds of people who "obey" someone's order and descend on a location for about ten minutes – hence the term "flash mob"' (Fernando 2010, p.1). This phrase is most likely inspired by two related phrases. The first is flash crowd, which means a sharp and overwhelming increase in the number of people attempting to access a target simultaneously, usually in response to some event or announcement; the second is smart mob (Rheingold 2002), which means a leaderless, unorganized gathering and moving of people who have same interests and coordinate their action through technologies such as email,

digital cameras, text messaging and ‘blogging’ that have become today’s smart tools. To ordinary people, particularly the participants of a flash mob who want to attract public attention, technology today equals ‘people power’ because, unlike printing presses and TV stations that could be owned by governments and corporations, these new tools have levelled the playing field.

The main goal of a flash mob is to get public attention and/or to ‘advertise’ the key issues involved. Sometimes participants just want to enjoy the feeling of being crowded or doing what the majority does. The duration of flash mobbing is brief and its effect outside of the group is transient as well. Communication tools such as the Internet and mobile phone play a decisive role in ‘mobbing’. Both the HFSE and flash mob are examples of collective action and they demonstrate the communication technologies’ power in mobilizing people. But there are still differences between them. For the flash mob, there is no interaction among participants, probably because such a short time does not allow them to interact and because the flash mob is not necessarily about problem solving. For HFSE, the meaning of action is achieved through the interaction among actors. They gather in an online forum to solve some problems that probably could not be solved individually. They have clear goals and would like to spend time and energy on looking for possible solutions. Therefore, whether the action is goal-oriented may be a major difference between HFSE and flash mob. Accordingly, a key question concerning the HFSE may be through what kind of process HFSE participants achieved their goal. A specific approach should be designated in examining the internal process of HFSE.

Digital swarming, crowdsourcing, flash mob and HFSE are technology-assisted collective action. They are different but also overlap in some aspects. Each of them may be assisted by one or more technologies as long as it is collective action and as long as there are always communication tools available. The HFSE is based on the Internet but not solely assisted by it. Sometimes, Internet users may use mobile phones to interact with others, especially nowadays when the mobile phone has become an important device for the Chinese to go online. In the following section, the Internet in China is focused on seeing its relationship with the occurrence of HFSE.

Is HFSE solely Chinese?

Although HFSE is reportedly being an Internet phenomenon originating from Chinese cyberspace, similar Internet applications have been taking place all over the world. It has different names in other countries. Solove starts his book *The Future of Reputation* with the example of a Korean girl who was subject to the opprobrium of Internet users after pictures of her refusing to clean-up her dog's faeces on a subway train emerged online.

Within hours, she was labeled as dog shit girl and her pictures and parodies were anywhere. Within days, her identity and her past were revealed. Requests for information about her parents and relatives started popping up and people started to recognize her by the dog and the bag she was carrying as well as her watch, clearly visible in the original picture. All mentions of privacy invasion were shouted down....The common excuse for their behaviour was that the girl doesn't deserve privacy (Solove 2007, p. 1).

As a result of embarrassment and pressure caused by the shaming and criticizing, the 'dog shit girl' dropped out of her university. In Solove's opinion, this case is not only about cooperative search but more about privacy, norms and life in the information age. In this case, the online hunting has evolved into cyber-violence, as it is going too far to transform the dog-poop girl into a villain notorious across the globe (Solove 2007). What might be learned from this case is not only how the Internet enables norm enforcement conducted in an ever more quick and effective way but also about the great potential of the Internet in exposing individuals to the risk of being hurt intentionally or unintentionally by gossip and rumour spreading in the virtual world.

In America, one of the best known examples similar to HFSE involves Patrick Pogan, a former New York City police officer, who was seen in a much-watched YouTube video body-slaming a cyclist in 2008. Pogan was accused of assault and filing a false police report, according to a story in the *New York Times* (Eligon 2010). The collision between the cop and a cyclist was made famous in a YouTube video, captured by a tourist and broadcast on the Internet, which got more than 23 million hits. Thousands left comments discussing and analysing how this collision happened and whether or not the cop purposefully shoved the cyclist to the ground. Someone even updated this video into slower motion, so one could distinguish more clearly who was responsible for the collision. Internet users' comments on this video lasted for 2 years since it happened in 2008. Barron wrote in an article published on the *New York Times* in 2008 that this cyclist belonged to an organization named 'Critical Mass' that had confronted the New York police for many years. The 'Critical Mass' was

founded for bike rides in early 1990 and was favoured by people who were interested in cycling and wanted to relax in this way after work. Since it first took on a political overtone in 2004, the police had kept a close eye on Critical Mass riders, who sometimes rode on their bikes for protests or demonstrations. 'Over the past four years, the cyclists say, the police have arrested about 600 riders and issued more than 1,000 summonses during the rides' (Barron 2008). According to the comments under the original video, the majority of Internet users expressed their concern about the long-existing conflict between citizens and police in America, where police brutality had happened all the time (Harris 2011).

The hot public discussion incurred formal investigation by New York Police, which, however, revealed another issue about the official's accountability. In one article in the *New York Times*, titled 'When Official Truth Collides with Cheap Digital Technology', Dwyer (2010) wrote: 'this episode was not just a powerful crash between one bicyclist and a police officer. It may turn out to be yet another head-on collision between false stories told by some police officers in criminal court cases and documentary evidence that directly contradicts them. And while in many instances the inaccurate stories have been tolerated by police superiors and prosecutors'. Although the policeman, Pogan, finally got the sanction of four years' imprisonment for his behaviour and for lying in court, the fact that the case had not been properly resolved until 2010 shows that officials' unaccountability is not only a source of injustice but also an obvious obstacle to justice being done quickly. Even with the assistance of technology, by which evidence of wrongdoing can be clearly presented, how quickly the injustice would be corrected in the offline world, however, still largely depends on non-technological factors. This is a reminder that even though Chinese citizens can have free (if not unlimited) use of the Internet to expose official misdeeds, it is still possible that the exposed officials would not be punished properly. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the outcome of HFSE incidents to see whether exposed officials were punished and there may be factors worth exploring about how the government views the online exposure of official misdoing. After all, the political system is the main (but not the only) channel via which the ordinary citizens can access justice (but it may also be the main source of injustice).

Shirky (2008) tells a story about how a woman got her cell phone back through Internet users' collaboration. A friend of the American woman opened a blog after her phone was lost in a pub. In the blog, her friend provided all the information about the lost cell phone, including its model, colour, the phone number, pictures and documents stored in it, the place where it

was lost and so on, which were helpful clues for Internet users who wanted to help her. The woman finally got her phone back, and the thief was identified as well. This example illustrates how web-based crowdsourcing works in the HFSE-alike online collective action. But an obvious difference between this case and HFSE is that, in China, it is rare to see blogs being the initial online spaces from which HFSE emerged (though they may be the spaces where online discussions in HFSE occurred). This is probably because in China individual blogs are not as influential and popular as online communities and forums, which are far more participatory, interactive and dynamic.

Now, we could reach the conclusion that HFSE is not just Chinese. Obviously, where there is the Internet there is the potential for it to be used by a group of people to achieve a collective goal. This potential gets greater as Internet access has become much easier and more prevalent. In the book 'Netwar and Networks', Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2002) describe well-known online collective actions that have happened all over the world. But these collective actions have gone far beyond the populism that is happening in everyday networking, as the authors examine the collective action in the global context of increasing political, economic, cultural and military conflicts among different regions, based on the question of how and why the information revolution is affecting the whole spectrum of conflict. The human perception of the potential of the Internet in collective action is universal; HFSE is no exception. But differing from the netwar and network introduced in this book, which are transnational, HFSE is more localized. More importantly, how this potential is transformed into actual practice would differ from country to country, region to region, time to time. As this research focuses on the HFSE not from a global but from a local perspective, the Chinese context should be a key point in discussing why the HFSE occurred.

Is HFSE the only example of Internet-based collective action in China?

The available literature also records other examples of Internet-based collective action in China. Before the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s in China, the communication and coordination of large-scale collective actions (e.g. the 1966 Cultural Revolution and 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement) depended on pre-existing organizations and networks. Technology was not a part of collective action. Since the Internet gradually became popular in China, Chinese collective actions have taken on novel dimensions. Accompanying the

technological innovation and development, as well as an increasing online population in the last 20 years, is the decline of the power of the state to move people to commitment, solidarity and sacrifice (Yang 2009b). After the bankruptcy of Maoism and the beginning of the reform launched by Deng Xiaoping at the end of 1970s, the drive for change came more from individuals and organizations independent of the party and which had their own voice on many issues. An example is Chinese Honker activism which emerged in the 1990s, marked by issues that raised momentary expressions of anti-American sentiment, incurred and intensified by a series of events such as US debates over China's 'most favoured nation' status that was allegedly linked to China human rights record; assertions that the USA was blocking China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO); the failure of China's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, and the 1993 'Yinhe Hao incident' with the United States, when the Chinese vessel Yinhe Hao was detained for three weeks and searched by US Naval Intelligence vessels for chemical weapons (Rawnsley and Rawnsley 2003).

Among events that triggered or intensified the anti-American sentiments of the Chinese, none was more significant than the NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. On 7 May 1999, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, five US JDAM bombs hit China's embassy in the Belgrade district of New Belgrade, killing three Chinese journalists. The then president, Bill Clinton, later apologized for the bombing, stating it was accidental (Rawnsley and Rawnsley 2003). Few Chinese believed the explanation and most insisted that the strike had been deliberate. The American military's provocative action and its authorities' negative response outraged the Chinese public. Anti-American sentiment soared among the Chinese from home and abroad. The 'Honker' came into the public eye through this circumstance. Honker was a group known for hacktivism, mainly present in mainland China. Literally, the name means 'Red Guest', as compared to the usual Chinese transliteration of hacker (Black Guest in Chinese translation). The word 'Honker' emerged immediately after NATO's bombing in May 1999, when some Chinese computer professionals formed the Honker Union of China (HUC) that was based on an online forum. Its members combined their hacking skills with sentiments of patriotism and nationalism, and launched a series of attacks on websites in the United States after the bombing event, mostly government-run web sites. Because of its first online attack, mainly against the US, the Honker Union became the synonym of online activism of anti-America and cyberspace began to be used by honkers as a virtual battlefield to fight against the mainly foreign web portals of countries that they believed had threatened their national dignity. During the May 7th event, the slogan 'down

with barbarians' was placed in Chinese on the home page of the US Embassy in Beijing, while the America's Department of Interior web site showed images of the three journalists killed during the bombing, crowds protesting in Beijing, and a fluttering Chinese flag (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2002, p. 274).

Certainly, there were other protests and demonstrations, but the foundation of HUC was undoubtedly a focus, if not the mainstream confrontational power against NATO and the US during this event (Chinese government also showed strong position against the US and NATO). Its hackers' attack on US government websites attracted media attention from all over the world. Inside China, it was the first online action-oriented civil organization formed during 1990s when the online forums and communities were on the rise in China, as well as when Internet application was becoming prevalent (Yang 2009b). The leaders of HUC provided their members with professional computer skills and the skills of the 'hacker', which attracted a lot of young people. The HUC was initially a professional community and then became the base and organization of Chinese Honker. While the event of bombing legitimated the launch of HUC, Chinese young people's enthusiasms for computer and Internet supported its existence. In fact, the first application of modern technology in social movement may even be traced to the 1989 student demonstration. At that time, Chinese students and scholars overseas were already actively using e-mail and newsgroups. Telephone, fax, and the mass media played the most important roles, but the Internet had a presence as well. Chinese students overseas used the Internet to raise funds for student protestors in China, to issue statements of support, and to organize demonstrations around the world (Yang 2009b).

In the first few years of Internet development in China, there were only scattered reports of Internet protest, reflecting the limited diffusion of the technology. BBS (Bulletin Board System) forums were to become the central space for online collective actions, yet the first BBS forum in China did not appear until 1995 (Yang 2009b). It is not surprising that it was in these BBS forums from which the earliest recorded cases of online collective action emerged: an online protest about the Diaoyu Islands, to which both China and Japan make territorial claims (Yang 2009a). There were other cases in the ensuing years, notably the worldwide protests against violence committed against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, in which Chinese honkers attacked the government websites of Indonesia and spread horrible pictures of murdered ethnic Chinese to numerous Chinese personal email boxes (Lu 1998). (I also

received such pictures just after my home computer first connected to the Internet and I registered a personal email address).

After the Chinese embassy bombing event, the national paper *Peoples' Daily* set up a BBS named 'Protest Forum' for Chinese Internet users to express and air their discontent (Zhou 2006). Tens of thousands of comments were posted on the forum within days. The launching of the 'Protest Forum' unintentionally popularized online protest activities at a time when the Internet was just beginning to catch on in China. BBS remained a hotbed for contention and online collective action. As blogging, online video, and text messaging became popular, they were also used for online protest actions. In 2005, an online petition campaign to oppose Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council collected 30 million signatures (No author 2005a); in 2007, in the so-called PX incident, residents in Xiamen (a city in southeast of China) successfully organized a demonstration using the Internet and text messaging to oppose the construction of a chemical factory because they believed that the chemical PX (short for para-xylene) would be harmful to their health (Zhao 2007; No author 2007a); and 2008 opened with another major online protest against Chinese local authorities, surrounding the death of an innocent citizen at the hands of ruthless city inspectors in Tianmen city, Hubei province (Yang 2009a), followed by the nationalistic, largely Internet-based anti-CNN campaign in April and early May because of insulting words toward China from a CNN broadcaster (Qiao, M. 2008; Qiao, Z. 2008).

HFSE is not the only example of Chinese online collective action; it seems that a certain number of online protests (especially those in the 1990s) that occurred in Chinese cyberspace were mainly against foreign targets and tended to be organized, probably because in 1990s the computer skills and access to the Internet were mastered by a small number of people, such as the founders of HUC, who had necessary resources to act and thus became the leaders of Honker activism. The emergence of HFSE as a form of spontaneous collective action may mark a more even distribution of computer skills and more equal access to the Internet. Moreover, unlike earlier Chinese online protests that concerned national and foreign issues, the HFSE concerned more local and specific issues, such as norm transgression by members of the public and local cadres' corruption. But, in general, the HFSE (politically focused) should be seen as a part of the macro-tendency of increasing Chinese popular protests and more specifically of rising online protests by Internet-powered Chinese citizens.

Summary

The gaps identified through an examination of existing studies of HFSE inspired this research in terms of research questions and approaches. In general, there is a lack of a systematic analysis of HFSE, such as the classification of different types of HFSE – its political dimension remains under-investigated and almost no scholars have ever tried to connect the HFSE with Chinese offline protests and explore the relation between the HFSE and its contexts. Therefore, for this research, in order to close these gaps, the approach that focuses on HFSE's political dimension and contexts is preferred over the behaviourist approach. The literature about collective action and the Internet enables a preliminary understanding of HFSE, such as its emotional mobilization, online anonymity and the Internet's several features and functions that facilitate the occurrence of collective action. The relevant literature also confirms that there must be offline factors leading to the occurrence of HFSE and the online-offline relationship underlying the HFSE phenomenon should be a key perspective of this research. Moreover, through a comparison of HFSE and other technology-assisted collective actions, it is recognized that the HFSE can be as inclusive as swarming and crowdsourcing. Furthermore, relevant literature shows that the HFSE is not just Chinese; a similar phenomenon has also occurred in other countries. But due to the different context, the way that the Internet is applied to the collective action and the issues involved may differ from country to country. This reminds us of the importance of context in analysing the HFSE phenomenon. Finally, HFSE is not the only example of Internet-based collective action in China but it is distinctive in terms of its being spontaneous and its target being local and specific. In the next chapter, the research on HFSE starts first with putting the understanding of it into the Chinese historical context, with the aim of exploring the common dynamics between HFSE and Chinese offline popular protests.

Chapter 3

A historical perspective on collective action in China

Introduction

This chapter offers a historically-grounded explanation of why HFSE emerged in China. It focuses on the micro dynamics of Chinese, so-called bottom-up collective action. Historically, the emergence of HFSE in China is not accidental, isolated, and not only the result of twenty-first-century technology; rather, it needs to be understood in the historical context. The history implies that the collective action, or more specifically the bottom-up collective action, is inherently political because it may be one of the most effective ways of the powerless to fight against the power holders; it also re-affirms that the intentionally asserted emphasis on the political dimension of HFSE is reasonable due to the rich experience of Chinese ordinary people prior to the Internet generation of the twenty-first century, is historically related and empirically comparable. The HFSE is probably the most recent illustration of how Chinese people fight against political corruption. The historical analysis may be ideal to detect the continuities from the past to the present with regard to the understanding of HFSE, whose political dimension is under investigation. It may be also ideal to explore the underlying dynamics of Chinese, bottom-up collective action in general, as Charles Tilly (1978, p. 231) states:

Historical analysis, taken seriously, will help us fashion more adequate models of power struggle. The historical record is rich and relevant. It permits us to follow multiple groups and their relations over substantial blocks of time. Collective action, contention, and struggles for political power are especially likely to leave their traces in the historian's raw materials.

As the theme of this research is HFSE's political dimension and its grassroots nature (initiated and participated in by Chinese 'netizens' – citizens utilizing the 'Net'), the historical focus of this chapter is on bottom-up collective actions by ordinary people against authority. Rural resistances and labour strikes in different periods of Chinese history are reviewed in this chapter in order to explore their continuities and dynamics. At the same time, there is also an examination of the HFSE, which aims to find out how it fits the pattern of the dynamics of bottom-up collective action in China. For sake of consistency the following events have not been examined: non-political collective actions (studies of political collective action, particularly social movements and revolutions, are much more frequently seen than

studies on non-political collective actions), top-down political collective action (government-led campaigns and social movements such as the Hundred Flowers Movement, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution in China), and grassroots movements concerning not domestic but foreign political affairs (such as the Chinese Boxing Movement at the end of nineteenth century, which is grassroots, political but naturally an anti-western missionary movement, and the May 4th movement in 1919 initiated by Chinese university students to protest against the Chinese government's diplomatic decision). In order to enhance the similarity of cases examined in this chapter, the basic characteristics of HFSE – being grassroots (bottom-up) and used for confronting Chinese authorities (political and internal) – are the basic criteria of case selection.

An overview of Chinese political culture

Contemporary Chinese history is full of rebellions and revolutions (Gray 2002). Often there is a deeper continuity leading to some uniqueness of the Chinese political system.

The Chinese Communists, embracing a world authoritarian doctrine in place of one local to China, have enlarged the arena in which old Chinese ideas can once more be put into practice, in more modern guise, expanded to the new scale, but fundamentally the same ideas which inspired the builders of the Han Empire and the restorers of the Tang. (Perry 1994, p. 1)

Pye argues that political culture is singularly important in shaping Chinese politics. He says:

Conformity and rebellion have indeed been the lifeblood of modern Chinese politics. The centrality of hierarchy, the elaborate concerns involved in managing superior-subordinate relations, and a pervasive use of moralistic rhetoric have combined to produce in China a form of Confucianist Leninism that seems destined to outlive the model of Leninism in its homeland. (Pye 1992, p.ix)

During older Chinese dynasties, centralization of authority was theoretically advocated by the school of the Confucianism and practically enforced by feudal empires, leading to an apparently stabilized political system but the imperative conformity brought about a Chinese political sphere which 'provides elbow room between the realms of conformity on the top and of spontaneity beneath the surface' (Pye 1992, p. x). 'The story of Chinese politics in modern times is partly the story of struggle, still unresolved, to shake off these burdens inherited from the past' (Gray 2002. p. 19). It seems that, while giving Chinese rulers a set of systemic law of national governance, Confucianism also made ordinary people live in a more rigidly stratified and restricted space (failure to maintain legitimacy of the control may lead to a crisis of state authority), which, when accompanied by other factors, such as crisis of popular welfare and the emergence of an ideology of opposition, may bring about resistance either from popular groups or elites (Goldstone 2007, p. 81-2). The top-down power and control did

not prevent bottom-up resistance from happening; when facing oppressive rule and other factors such as natural disaster and emergence of opposing elements (e.g. ideology, leader), the controlled population may more easily be mobilized for resistance than other populations without those factors (Goldstone 2007). Thus, whenever we talk about the power struggle in China, we should not ignore that the bottom, societal initiatives still ‘reflect the heavy hand of statist influence’ (Perry 2001, p. xi), and we should not ignore the influence from the top leadership and it is not only about control and repression but also about the opening up of political opportunities resulting from changes and developments within the political system.

In the view of some scholars, Confucianism, which had great influence on Chinese society, culture and politics, encouraged special kinds of corruption, such as political officials protecting their families benefits and appointing family members to top jobs – fundamentally the consanguineous affection advocated by Mencius, ‘second only to the sage of Confucianism’ (Liu 2007; Ma, G. R. 2010). In Liu’s view, corrupt activities such as obstructing justice in order to protect family interest and appointing family member were encouraged by Confucianist advocators who emphasized the primary importance of kinship bonds and demanded that one should abandon everything for the sake of consolidating kinship love in cases of conflict. These two types of corruption have been quite prevalent in Chinese society not only in the past but also in the present (Liu 2007, p. 2).

While not intentionally promoting any corrupt practices but merely advancing the basic spirit of Confucianism, these statements might be considered a plain manifesto for corruption in some sense, for they overtly maintain that an official should nourish his parents or relatives with the whole empire or the region administered by himself, if he hopes to become a ‘perfect filial son’ in terms of the Confucian standard. (Liu 2007, p. 6)

Ma, G. R. (2010) also points out that Confucianism stressing the importance of virtue and morality in guaranteeing a sound social order and smooth community governance has also encouraged corrupt activities in China due to government official’s morality being given priority over the judicial supervision meant to ensure official fairness and honesty. This tradition has led to not enough attention being paid to the establishment of a judicial system for supervising and disciplining government and its officials in China, further leading to the prevalence of corruption. There are still debates over whether Confucian ideas are the source of corrupt activities in China. But we might be alerted by the statements above that history is relevant: when looking into the corruption in China, not only political but also social and cultural factors need to be considered; similarly, when looking into Chinese bottom-up collective action, such as that against corruption, there might be an historical path to be

explored. Confucianism has influenced China for more than two thousand years in terms of politics, society and culture; it may not be difficult to infer that the phenomenon of corruption, and the phenomenon of bottom-up collective action against corruption might similarly have a long tradition in Chinese history. This does not suggest that the Chinese bottom-up collective action, historically, has targeted only official corruption; rather, its triggers and issues differed from time to time, and have shown the trend of diversifying along with the transformation of Chinese society.

Rural Resistance in China

The White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804) is ‘the first great peasants uprising in China in modern times’ (Gray 2002, p. 3), after which numerous examples of peasant resistance had emerged. However, comparing HFSE with the White Lotus Rebellion does not seem to make much sense because of their different scale and duration: the White Lotus organization was the largest-scale mass organization across Song, Yuan and Qing dynasties and the movement it led against Chinese authority lasted for several years; whereas comparing HFSE with those small-scale revolts makes much more sense of understanding the common dynamics underlying the Chinese bottom-up collective actions including the HFSE, which are unorganized, small-scale and of short duration. The peasants are at the centre of the study of Chinese rural development, they are also the centre of literature about social disturbances in China (Aziz 1978; Vermeer 1992; Sigurdson 1977; Christiansen and Zhang 1998). Chinese villages are not inherently peaceful, but sometimes faced even more intense turbulence than their urban counterparts. ‘The village ... is a conglomerate in which power plays a core role, including asymmetric power dispersal, abuse of power, and conflict. Injustice and abuse and resistance and violent protest can reflect village life in the same way as compromise and reconciliation can be facilitated by the village’ (Christiansen and Zhang 1998, p. 5). In the twentieth century when Chinese elites and intellectuals struggled in urban areas of China to advocate western democratic and liberal ideas and political reforms, the rural population was facing repression through taxes, surtaxes, conscription and the local administration’s corruption (Bianco and Hua 2009), which had frequently triggered peasants’ collective action against local authorities. The grassroots nature of peasant resistance, in terms of its participants, claims and targets, determines that it is useful to explore the possible common dynamics between rural resistance and HFSE.

Rural Resistance Pre-1949 Limited geographical mobility resulting from the civil war and Sino-Japanese War did not allow discontented peasants to form large-scale and collective resistance, thus, during 1910s and 1930s in China, rural resistance was continuous but necessarily trended toward localization (Zhou 1993). ‘It was these new taxes and surtaxes that provoked most uprisings. The taxpayers’ indignation and, less often, their uprisings were directed less at the growing burden of tax than at each particular new imposition – at the small charge, in sum, of this general tendency’ (Bianco and Hua 2009, p. 2). In China, right after the imperial era and still a typical agricultural country, the majority population of peasants were most affected by social fluctuations. The natural disasters, for instance flood and drought, brought about famines that intensified peasants’ grievance.

In China, it was taxation in most cases that supplied the incidental target of a revolt initially motivated by another grievance. Often, it was for more than just an incidental target added along the way; it was present from the start, jointly with the other causes, and it is difficult to tell which target was the more important. (Bianco and Hua 2009, p. 21)

It might be impossible to tell which target was more important than others in triggering a rural resistance, but as least we should note that rural resistance in this period was reactive, usually the response to the outside factors threatening peasants’ survivals.

Anti-tax action was the foremost motive of rural resistance throughout the first half of the twentieth century in China and, during the 1930s and 1940s, under the Nationality Government that put much effort and resource into building infrastructures and military facilities, ‘most of [which] harmed or threatened their (villagers) interests, beginning with expropriations, especially when the owners got very little in the way of compensation, which was often the case. ... After expropriations there followed a whole series of concrete grievances coming from government regulations, interventions, or project damaging to peasants’ interests’ (Bianco and Hua 2009, p. 26). The major characteristics of Chinese rural resistance in the first half of twentieth century are that they were often triggered by multiple grievances and produced spontaneous reaction, meaning that peasants spontaneously reacted to a triggering event, e.g. a natural disaster that gave rise to crisis of subsistence or enforcement of new tax that damaged or made worse the current living situation and often lodged their claims or took action without organizing. In the view of some scholars, formal organization to orchestrate popular action was not always necessary: popular groups could call on a wide array of existing social networks – villages, neighbourhoods, workplaces,

occupational groups and religious congregations – to mobilize for protest action (Skocpol 1979; Pfaff 1996; Parsa 2000). For rural resistance in China, the rural social network was mainly based on kinship, family and clan.

Rural Resistance After-1949 and before 1980s After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, the socialist imperative was spread throughout China. However, as Perry (1985) noticed, the new process did not actually transform the countryside:

Although the resistance was directed largely against the new socialist measures, in style and symbolism the protests often harked back to pre-liberation traditions. Sectarian religious beliefs and imperial pretensions were common characteristics. The Chinese press reported subversive secret-society activities in every province and provincial-level municipality during the 1950s, with the majority of rural cases recorded in the aftermath of major initiatives in agriculture policy. (Perry 1985, p. 416)

Evidence shows that without popular grievance in the countryside, the sect leaders alone could not easily mobilize villagers. In other words, the sects and secret societies just worked as an external networking power; the real underlying cause of rural resistance was, internally, the popular discontent brought about by the gap between government behaviour and villagers' expectations. An example of sect-led rural resistance in the summer of 1957 in Sichuan Province illustrates that the sect leader took advantage of popular dissatisfaction felt by local inhabitants with the local government's handling of a new reservoir project, which made those displaced by the construction project a receptive audience for the sect leader's slogans opposing the unified purchase and marketing plan (Perry 1985, p. 421-2). The implementation of collectivization in rural China in the 1950s brought out a different social relationship than that of urban residents. Generally, clan, family and kinship were the basic units of rural society and the collectivization created new units, e.g. the production team, brigade and the people's commune, which were often coterminous with old kinships and village boundaries. 'In the 1960s and 1970s, especially after the onset of the Cultural Revolution, there were increased incidents of rural collective action based upon team, brigade and commune membership. Reports of feuds between rival units appear with some frequency; competitive violence was once again in evidence in parts of the Chinese countryside (Perry 1985, p. 428).

Rural Resistance since 1980s The 1980s also witnessed a lot of competitive collective violence in rural China, due to the fact that the introduction of household responsibility systems in 1978 put the rural cadres' position to one side while emphasizing the peasants' autonomy in production, labouring and welfare, which led to a decline in cadre commitment

and increasing division between rich peasants, who had more family members, worked hard and mastered enough production resources, and poor peasants without those conditions (Perry 1985, p. 436). To best characterize the bottom-up collective action in the late-1980s and 1990s of China (obviously, competitive collective violence is not in the category of bottom-up collective action), I would borrow the term coined by Kevin J. O'Brien (1996): rightful resistance. Rightful resistance, which is also called policy-based resistance (O'Brien and Li, 1996), 'is a form of popular contention that (1) operates near the boundary of an authorized channel, (2) employs the rhetoric and commitments of the powerful to curb political or economic power, and (3) hinges on locating and exploiting divisions among the powerful' (O'Brien 1996, p. 32). Briefly, Chinese peasants in 1980s began to frame their claims in terms of state policies that they viewed beneficial to them and deploy the institutional and normative languages to resist local cadres.

The term rightful resistance is used here because, first, as O'Brien (1996) points out, the phenomenon of rightful resistance first arose in China; second, it is a clear watershed between the old style of rural resistance, characterized by obvious hostility toward state policies and the new style of rural resistance characterized by showing more dependences on the state and much less tolerance to grassroots cadres; third, the 1990s witnessed this new form of rural resistance emerging and spreading in the Chinese countryside, more and more villagers turned to this new form of resistance (Li and O'Brien 1996). There were still 'everyday forms of resistances' (Scott 1985) and collective violence (Perry 1985) in the 1980s and 1990s similar to those that happened before the 1980s, but this section focuses on the rightful resistance which could better illustrate the socioeconomic, cultural and political dynamics of bottom-up collective action that has happened since the 1980s.

There are some reasons to explain why rightful resistance occurred in China in the 1980s. First, 'in a nondemocratic country such as China, where direct impact on high-level politics is difficult, most popular resistance surrounds misimplementation of potentially beneficial measures that are already on the books but that local officials have chosen to ignore' (Bernstein and Lü 2003); citing central policies can help enhance their stand and take less risk of defying local cadres. Second, central leaders in Beijing often find themselves in the dark when they seek to assess how well their programmes have been executed because local power holders block the flow of any information that casts them in an unflattering light (O'Brien and Li 2005, p. 236); as a response, for many years, the central government has

allowed ordinary citizens to report improprieties through ‘letters and visits offices’ (*xin fang ban gong shi*) (Luehrmann, 2003; Thireau and Hua 2003; Chen 2008), which encouraged rural resisters to bypass local government and directly go to high-level authorities. Third, there emerged more educated and knowledgeable villagers who were well informed of government policies through mass communication, such as radio and newspapers (in the 1990s TV was rare in rural China), and who clearly knew and were able to analyse which policies were beneficial to them and what wrongdoings the local cadres had done; they were viewed by Li and O’Brien (2008) as protest leaders who initiated group petitions, mass demonstrations and other types of collective action that targeted political power holders. According to Li and O’Brien’s (2008) survey, the number of ‘collective incidents’ has jumped ten-fold in the last dozen years, from 8706 in 1993 to 87,000 in 2005, with about 40 per cent of them occurring in the countryside.

A massive riot in Sichuan Province in 1993 led the central committee and the state Council to issue an emergency notice that banned 42 fees that had been illegally levied by local governments (Bernstein and Lü, 2003); likewise, after a series of demonstration in 2000 in Jiangxi Province, the central government quickly sent in a team of investigators, which instructed county officials to slash unapproved fees by 24 million Yuan (roughly USD 385,344) (Ding 2001, p. 433-4), demonstrators grounded their action on the 1993 Agriculture Law that aimed to relieve peasants’ burden by defining which fees were legal and which were not; in a case from 1995, after a county government turned a deaf ear to their complaints, a group of angry farmers from Hebei Province travelled to the capital to protest against a fraudulent vote (O’Brien and Li 2005); in August 1999, 87 peasant leaders from more than a dozen townships in Hengyang gathered in the provincial capital to lodge a massive collective complaint – with persistent travelling to neighbouring villages to publicize central documents and speeches concerning unlawful fees, by 2002 they had coordinated their effort to overturn excessive school fees by adopting a uniform letter of complaint (Yu 2003; Yang 1999; O’Brien and Li 2005); in 1994, hundreds of Shanxi farmers besieged a county government, demanding that a village election be nullified after a cadre seeking re-election escorted a mobile ballot box on its rounds, and, in the same year, nearly a hundred Hebei villagers lodged complaints at the Central Discipline Inspection Commission in Beijing concerning a township party committee that insisted that a village party branch had the right to nominate villagers’ committee candidates. Villagers in these two cases based their claims on The Organic Law of Villagers’ Committee, which was implemented as a trial version in 1987 and

was fully adopted in 1998, empowering villagers to elect villagers' committees and defining villagers' committee as basic-level mass organization of self-governance; finally the elections in these two villages were rearranged (Li and O'Brien 1996).

Besides illegal taxes, excessive fees and rigged elections were the main issues of rural resistance in 1980s and the early 1990s (Lü 1997; Wederman 1997; Bernstein 1998), Guo notices (2001) that land expropriation has been one of the 'externalities of development' primarily responsible for the proliferation of rural conflicts in China in the past decades (1990s). Land development in China has been carried out at a phenomenal pace since the late 1980s, and this has brought about a continuing loss of farmland amounting to millions of *mu* (roughly 666.7 square meters) each year (Yang and Wu 1996). The central government's intention of developing industry, which led to an institutional structure that enabled township government to enforce land expropriation, and the financial pressure on government administration at local levels have prompted a fervent growth of 'development zones' (Wu and Zhu 1996). Losing land resulted in the deterioration of villagers' economic security, in both perception and practice. 'The continuous land expropriation, the lack of alternative employment opportunities and the meagre compensation all seemed to have encroached upon the economic security of the villagers' (Guo 2001, p. 430). The economic insecurity would often be accompanied by a moral claim when villagers compared their tiny compensation with the township officers' decent incomes. Thus, a feeling of moral injustice, economic insecurity, along with the local cadres' objectional behaviour, often drove the villagers to take action against land expropriation.

Like other 'rightful resisters', resisters against land expropriation usually lodged their petitions with high-level authorities in order to make their voice heard because they believed that 'the further up they went, the greater the likelihood the settlement would be in their favour' (Guo 2001, p. 435). In those cases in which resisters got their claims favourably solved, their action may only have taken the form of small-scale peaceful petition and demonstration. In other cases in which high-level authorities turned a deaf ear to peasants' appeals or used armed repression as a response to initial moderate action, peaceful petition and demonstration would easily evolve into violent confrontation.

Despite the widely felt resentment toward land expropriation, there was no concerted action among the villagers in their protest. The different demeanours of the activists who formed a minority and bystanders who constituted the majority reflected disparate economic conditions of individuals and their greater or

lesser social and economic dependence on the village cadres. (Guo 2001, p. 431-2)

The classification of Chinese peasants may explain why it was always the minority that took action while the majority were bystanders, and also display the limitation of rural resistance in terms of the high cost of mobilizing people with differing economic and social standing.

Rural resistance in the early 2000s As the process of urbanization has been speeded up since the open reform, it has displaced homes and farmland and created environmental degradation in the countryside. Problems such as land expropriation, cadre corruption, and rigged village elections have been always the main sources of rural conflict and have triggered more and more rural resistances in China. Heavy taxation which, in the past, was among the major causes of rural grievances, has started to lose its dominance in the structure of rural conflict. As a response to a raft of rural tax riots that had engulfed the inland provinces in the 1990s, the central government began to institute tax reforms in 2002 and abolished the 2600-year-old agricultural tax in January 2006 (Perry 2008, p. 214), which has significantly reduced the financial burdens of farmers and reportedly helped boost rural incomes by 15-40 per cent in some areas (Lum 2006).

However, such measures at the time failed to address other problems such as land expropriation, which was partially the result of local governments being given greater political and financial autonomy. Probably the most common rural resistance in the early 2000s was related to land expropriation. Faced with the task of increasing government revenue and also the competition between governments to attract investment, village governments had usually rushed to take land away from peasants who were entitled to compensation that, however, was only a tiny part of the gain from the land sale. Violent clashes between demonstrators and local cadres have erupted in not only poor regions in China's interior but also in rich coastal areas, where development pressures are heavy (Lum 2006). Similar to the central government's response to increasing tax riots, as a reaction to the recent surge in violent land disputes the central government enacted new property rights in 2007, aiming to protect and enhance villagers' rights to the ownership and benefits of collective landholdings (Perry 2008, p. 214).

It seems that in the early 2000s, having witnessed increasing rural resistance, the higher authorities started responding judiciously to these outpourings of popular discontents, directed for the most part against grassroots officials. Besides land expropriation being the

outcome of increasing predatory behaviours of local governments and corrupt practices of local cadres, the rigged village election is also an outcome of local cadres using the election as the first step to grasping political power in exchange for personal interests. As a result, the rural conflicts over rigged election, land expropriation, cadre corruption as well as taxation (not as frequent as in the twentieth century) have not declined but soared – according to official sources, ‘public order disturbances’ had grown by nearly 50 per cent in just two years, from 58,000 incidents in 2003 to 87,000 in 2005 (Lum 2006), of which 35 per cent was peasant-based, rights-defending collective action. In 2006, the number of peasants involving in protests reached more than 0.38 million and among all rural resistance, 65 per cent was triggered by land expropriation (Zhang 2008). It seems that although the rural reform has been deepening since 2002, marking central government’s emerging intention of reducing peasants’ burdens, and they actually have been reduced, the number of rural resistances has not decreased.

The basic problem giving rise to rural conflicts by no means lies only with the top leadership; it lies in the power structure as whole, in which different powers interplay with each other. Some may think to predict that the rapidly increasing rural resistance, along with labour strikes in urban China, would shake the foundations of the party and bring about some revolutionary outcomes, such as the Boxer Rebellion that speeded up the death of the Chinese imperial system. However, as political scientist Andrew Nathan acknowledges: ‘one of the puzzles of the post-Tiananmen period has been the regime’s apparent ability to rehabilitate its legitimacy There is much evidence from both quantitative and qualitative studies to suggest that expressions of dissatisfaction, including widely reported worker and peasant demonstrations, are usually directed at lower-level authorities, while the regime as a whole continues to enjoy high levels of acceptance’ (2003, p. 13).

The structural characteristics of rural resistance in China

At first glance, rural resistance might be largely different from the HFSE. They are different in many aspects, such as the type of participant, the period of occurrence and the goal pursued. But the existence of differences does not suggest there is no continuity among them; rather, in the unique context of China, we may detect the same structural characteristics of bottom-up collective actions that have occurred in different parts of its history. There are many similarities between contemporary protests and earlier rebellions: the Falun Gong movement that emerged in 1990s (Thornton 2008) would recall the practices of many past

rebellion sects in nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the use of cultural performances as a recruiting strategy for contemporary Christians (Vala and O'Brien 2008) is reminiscent of the catalytic role of local operas and temples fairs in the emergence of the White Lotus Rebellion and the Boxing Uprising; the taxi drivers protests against licensing regulations (Cai 2008) bear a resemblance to the rickshaw pullers in republican-period Beijing. One could go on at greater length to highlight numerous continuities in protest patterns from imperial times to the present, but what we should bear in mind is that today's scattered protests obviously do not begin to approach these imperial and Republican precedents in terms of either ambition or outcome (Perry 2008, p. 207-8). HFSE is different but, from on its political dimension that is a showcase of contention between citizens and authorities, we may better understand it after we have made sense of the structural characteristics of Chinese bottom-up collective action through an exploration of the continuities between the past and the present.

Spontaneity The protests by villagers originated in spontaneous 'contentious gatherings'. Charles Tilly (1978, p. 275) defines a contentious gathering as 'an occasion in which ten or more persons outside the government gather in the same place and make a visible claim which, if realized, would affect the interests of some specific person(s) or group(s) outside their own member'. There are numerous examples in the twentieth century when groups of villagers gathered in front of government to lodge such claims about heavy taxation and land expropriation. It is also usual to see in the early twenty-first century when villagers acted in the same way as their predecessors to protest against corruption of local cadres and rigged village elections. For the rural resistance, peasants were brought together not by any concrete organization, they acted on their own, out of a sudden welling up of grievances stemming from a crisis, such as a natural disaster, threatening their subsistence.

For most analyses of collective action, the organization is one of its five big components (the other four components are interests, mobilization, opportunity and collective action itself – see detailed elaboration of the five components in Tilly 1978). The organization concerns the aspect of a group's structure which most directly affects its capacity to act on its interests. Chinese rural resistances may appear to be without organization, and thus leaderless, but this does not mean that the Chinese rural resistance is not organized; in fact, villagers are self-organized without involvement or assistance of formal or informal organizations. There are always active individuals among the villagers who propose a gathering or petition to lodge their claims, which can drive an angry crowd from farms onto the streets. Yet apart from

provocative comments, they often play no leadership role, particularly in the period when the majority of peasants had economic and political dependence on local cadres (Li and O'Brien 1996) and few would like to participate except the active individuals who sometimes took action on their own.

The formation of an organization is conditional – in some periods it is easy and possible while in others it is largely restricted – but this has not stopped the occurrence of bottom-up collective action. In a sense, the availability of organization would determine whether or not the collective action is spontaneous. Action tends to be organized when there is an existing organization that initially makes the claim and dedicates itself to organize and coordinate actors. When there is no such existing organization to make the claim at the beginning, but there are active individuals who first make a claim or propose a protest, its actual occurrence is much more conditional, depending on such as the nature of the claim and the status of potential actors. But no matter if it is organized or spontaneous rural resistance, there are common dynamics, which, as James Scott defines, are rooted in the economic practices of peasant society: ‘the loss of subsistence security and a drop of livelihood below the “danger line” could provoke resentment and protests – not only because their “needs were unmet” but because their “rights were violated”’ (Scott 1976, p. 6). We may also see that the rural resistances would take the form of disruption, particularly when protestors’ contentious gathering to make a claim was not responded to.

Disruption itself is not necessarily spontaneous, but lower-class disruptions often are, in the sense that they are not planned and executed by formal organization. In part, this testifies to the paucity of stable organizational resources among the poor, as well as to the cautious and moderate character of such organizations as are able to survive. (Piven and Cloward 1977, p. 26)

In the case of Chinese rural resistances, in the system of centralized authority, the poor people have not been granted, and they do not ordinarily have, great disruptive power, and if the use of that kind of power is not planned, it is the only power they do have. ‘Their use of that power, the weighing of gains and risks, is not calculated in board rooms; it wells up out of the terrible travails that people experience at times of rupture and stress’ (Piven and Cloward 1977, p. 26-7).

Repertoires of contention Charles Tilly (1986, p. 2) defines a repertoire of contention as ‘the whole set of means a group has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals

or groups' and he notes that this entails 'routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice'. A traditional repertoire would involve food or price riots or land revolts, which had specific rather than general claims and were aimed directly at their targets (Tarrow 1994, p. 35-45). The protests in rural China have been conducted around food crises, land expropriation and heavy taxation that were threats to the survival of peasants in traditional times, just as the immediate claim today is the right to a 'rice bowl'. In western literatures on collective action, the food riot is frequently cited to illustrate the politics of subsistence: below the surface raged a long struggle by builders of states to secure the survival of the people most dependent on them and most inclined to serve their ends; a struggle by the peasants to protect their rights of subsistence from being damaged by authorities who they thought were responsible for controlling the distribution of the necessities of life (Tilly 1975).

Thus it is reasonable to imagine that at the end of eighteenth century, if the Qing government succeeded in responding to the flood by providing the peasants with basic living necessities such as food and a house, the White Lotus would have been just a religious, apolitical organization and the White Lotus Rebellion would not have happened if the peasants at the time had not faced a subsistence crisis. The rural resistances in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had not strayed far from the traditional cycle of rural resistance conducted around issues of food, land and tax. In the early twenty-first century, along with the increasing awareness of rights, the Chinese peasants started to act against local cadre corruption and rigged village elections, but there is a basic character among these different claims: they are specific, close to peasants' everyday lives, not as general and broad as the appeal for political reform or, more extremely, against the state. And basically, cadre corruption and rigged village elections are also threats to subsistence because corruption is usually the result of officials' pursuit of personal interests via the damaging of public interests (e.g. cadres' embezzlement of the gains from land sales leads to land owners compensated much less than they should get and thus causes difficulties for their survival) and a rigged election is usually the first step to such corrupt practices.

Another form is what Tilly calls 'retributive action' (1975, p. 386), in which a crowd attacks a person accused of causing their suffering. It is quite common to see that Chinese rural resistance targeted local government and/or individual cadres. There is a record of a rural

resistance that happened in 1932 in Yangzhong, Jiangsu province of China (China Labour Statistical Yearbook, vol.3, 1933, cited in Bianco and Hua 2009, p. 5):

Throughout the summer of 1932, these two (local) notables, Dai Shifu and Huang Zhisan, maintained their opposition to the increase of one of these surtaxes ... On 2nd October, Dai Shifu proposed that each family should send one representative to an anti-tax demonstration in front of the county *yamen* (local government). Each demonstrator was to bring a bale of straw, so that he could sleep on the spot until the county government granted the right of exemption from the new surtaxes, as demanded by the demonstrators. ... On 4th October, on Dai's call, peasants gathered – 30 to 40 at first, and eventually thousands – in front of the offices of Ward 4, where Liu trussed up the official in charge. Thence they moved on to the offices of Ward 5, but because they could not find its chief, who had fled, they set fire to his house, the first of seven such blazes. The peasants burned the homes, one by one, of a member of the Nationality county committee, the commander of the militia, the head of the Ward 3, the chief tax collector, a middle-ranking official, and, lastly, the island's biggest landowner. Along the way, the crowd had swollen to around ten thousand people, whom Dai led into an attack on the county government building. The police opened fire, killing one peasant, and arrested Dai.

It was also recorded in the historical archive of Songming village, Yunnan Province, where, in spring 1945:

[t]o make room for building an airport in Songming, more than 380 hectares of land, including fourteen villages, had to be expropriated and thousands of homes cleared. On 18 April, delegates from the fourteen villages petitioned the provincial government to abandon the project; nevertheless, work began on 1st May. Next, the peasants asked that the airport be built on uncultivated land. The next day, since the work went ahead, nearly 1,000 peasants took direct action. They wounded the magistrate, who died of his injuries, and killed one of his guards. The authorities responded with a hundred or so arrests, and the following year, executed a prisoner who had admitted killing the magistrate (Songming Historical Archive, vol.1, 1989, 66-70, cited in Bianco and Hua 2009, p.26).

The two cases above illustrate the typical repertoires of Chinese rural resistance: peasants' claims are specific, focusing on food, land or tax; their targets are also specific, usually pointing at local cadres. It was common to see that a resistance started with a peaceful gathering and then degenerated into face-off confrontation if the targeted cadres responded in terms of repression or refused to respond. And sometimes peasants took more violent actions to express their indignation, e.g. looting stores and rich households, burning down governmental buildings and attacking local cadres (Bianco and Hua 2009). The given examples of rural resistance that happened in the first half of twentieth century, in which local cadres were injured or killed and their properties damaged, are illustrations of such retributive action. This tradition did not change much in the following years, as heavy taxation was still the most concerning issue in rural China. Taxation and food supply as well as land expropriation are examples of government behaviour, thus it is not surprising that local authorities are the main target of rural resistance. The peasants' choice to target local cadres was sometimes due to the restriction of vast geographical distance between the

peasants and the high-level authorities. The population's daily routines matter here because they affect the ease with which one or another of the possible forms of action can actually be carried out (Tilly 1978, p. 156) and also the ease with which one or another of the possible targets can actually be focused on.

To specify the meaning of repertoire of actions, it helps to ask this question: To what degree does the group prefer one means over those which are theoretically available for the same purpose? The ease of a particular form of action and the type of target do not necessarily relate only to the geographical distance and other objective limitations but also to the deliberate choice of resisters. The emergence of rightful resistance in the 1990s illustrates that Chinese peasants started to not confine their resistance within their own villages but to travel to the provincial cities and even the capital Beijing to make their claims visible to higher-level authorities. Why did they choose a different way from previous resistances to protest? One possible reason might be the divided image of the central/local governments: the central government intended to benefit peasants while local cadres distorted and even countered state policy. Facing the policy-based support from the central government and possible high cost of face-off confrontation with local cadres, it is a rational choice as the constraints on 'bottom-up' rightful resistance largely existed because of lack of state policy favouring peasants, prohibitive geographical distance (with limited means of transportation) and few villagers well informed about possible beneficial policies and the outside world (because of limited means of communication).

The way that rural resistance is conducted has been changing all the time, but the characteristics of the repertoire of Chinese rural bottom-up collective action in general can be summarized. First, the claims of rural resistance are specific rather than general and have been frequently related to the everyday lives of peasants: heavy taxation and land expropriation as threats to peasants' subsistence if their minimum needs are not maintained by new government policies and actions. Second, rural resistance is *retributive action* targeting specific objects (e.g. individual cadres). It is rare to see rural resistance in the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries having targets as broad as that in the White Lotus Rebellion that aimed at the state as a whole. Even though the emerging rightful resistance in rural China takes the form of 'going up' to complain, the resisters' claim is directly based on the misbehaviour of particular local governments and/or individual cadres.

Reactive rather than proactive Charles Tilly identified three types of collective claims: competitive claims that aim at resources held by rivals in society; reactive claims that involve efforts to defend group rights and privileges, most often against agents of the state; proactive claims that involve efforts to defend group rights not previously enjoyed (O'Brien 2002, p.142). Tilly specified that reactive collective actions consisted of group efforts to reassert established claims when someone else challenged or violated them; the peasants' response to land invasion, imposition of tax and raised food price was reactive collective action, in which actors commonly assumed, more or less self-consciously, the role of the authorities who were being derelict in their duty (1978, p. 367). The difference between reactive and proactive forms of collective action lies in the claim of reactive collective action being based on the established rights and the proactive claim is based on rights that have not previously been exercised. Although there is evidence that all the three types of collective action have occurred in the Chinese countryside, those rural resistances directed at local officials are of a more reactive nature (O'Brien 2002, p. 143). Scholars have observed that a large proportion of Chinese rural agitation is conservative and defensive; villagers rise up to maintain the existing order when it is threatened; there is an effort to undo activities by cadres that violate popular notions of equity, fairness or justice; and their main aim is to eliminate an encroachment on established practices or principles (p.143).

In rural China, the proactive collective actions seem much less to be seen than reactive and competitive collective actions, as Perry points out:

Although what Tilly would term 'proactive' protest – the attempt to make new claims on a strong state – has made an appearance among urban factory workers and students, such persons constitute but a small proportion of the total Chinese population. This is certainly not to imply that strikes for higher wages and for better working conditions or demonstrations for greater democratic freedoms are insignificant. Yet in the society where some eighty per cent of the populace lives and works in the countryside, one would be hard pressed to characterize urban protest as the 'dominant' mode of collective action. By virtue of its sheer numerical preponderance, rural China is still 'where the action is' (Perry 1984, p. 431).

Examples of Chinese rural resistance show that the contentions based on reactive claims are rarely directed at the national government, nor do they typically involve demands for wider political change. Collective action by Chinese peasants is usually a response to a specific and local aggravation, such as the imposition of a new tax or fee. The demands of rural protesters tend to be limited and remedial; once relief is given, in such terms as a few officials punished, protest then subsides and the participants are usually mollified and return to their daily life.

Bianco (2001) states that Chinese peasants almost never rise up to gain new rights or to better their position; reactive movements remain predominant (2001, p. 250). Rural contention in China is fundamentally defensive, sometimes competitive and rarely proactive. It is also necessary to look into the context from which the claim emerges, as some scholars point out that the villagers in rich and prosperous areas tend to have proactive claims in demanding political, economic and social equalities with their urban counterparts (Gilley 2001, p. 52). However when the type of target of rural resistance is concerned, no matter whether it is a rich or a poor village, peasants, when targeting local officials, tend to be reactive rather than proactive.

Opportunities and ally with media Collective action is often associated with openings in the political opportunities structure: protest is more likely when institutional access improves, when rifts among members of the elite appear, when influential allies become available, or when the state's capacity or will to repress dissent declines (McAdam 1996, p. 27). In rural China, the resistance in the twentieth century, particularly the policy-based resistance emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, illustrates a period of political relaxation, officialdoms being divided and some members of the government being disposed to champion popular demands (O'Brien 2002). Bianco (2001) argues that the authorities play a bigger role than villagers in determining the amount of resistance: the key change of late is a regime that has become more tolerant of small-scale actions that do not target the central government. The single most important impetus for collective action has thus been a decline in the swiftness, certainty and harshness of repression (Bianco 2001; Bernstein and Lü 2003). Meanwhile, the surge of rural contention in the late twentieth century can also be linked to specific agriculture reforms and policies that have reduced the costs of certain kinds of protest and opened up a crack in the polity: a number of institutional departures (e.g. the end of collective farming) and a series of newly issued legal restrictions on cadre discretion have reduced villagers' dependence on authorities and given rural people more violations to protest against (Bernstein and Lü 2003).

It is necessary to pay attention to the role of mass media in rural resistance in the late twentieth century when the media marketization in China had just started. Although media censorship has always existed, 'increased editorial freedom and competitive pressures have given rise to a more market-oriented media, and exposing official misdoing can generate a huge audience (O'Brien 2002). The role of mass media in rural resistance does not have a

history as long as rural resistance itself, and it has been shown that journalists can be crucial allies. Gilley (2001) remarks that in the course of uncovering corruption and other misconduct, television stations and newspapers have become more willing to report the point of view of protesting Chinese peasants. Bernstein and Lü (2003) note that the *Farmer's Daily* has emerged as an advocate of rural interest and other scholars (Chan 2002; Li 2002) look at Focus (jiao dian fang tan), one of China's most popular television news programmes by CCTV (China Central Television) in the 1990s (and still exists), devoted to investigative journalism, which actively reported rural conflicts. Villagers started to resort to the media to voice their claims and leverage their struggle with local officials, for example, in the mid-1990s, several peasants travelled to Beijing to contact the producer of the Focus, and a group of complainants have been trying for years to lure (or hire) a reporter to come and expose several corrupt cadres (O'Brien 2002, p. 153). Chinese villagers have realized that bad publicity can affect the official evaluation of a local cadre's performance and his career prospects, and may even precipitate an immediate investigation (O'Brien 2002, p. 153).

In sum, the characteristics, including spontaneity (leaderless and unorganized), a specific claim (e.g. the right of subsistence) and reactive response (defending existing rights rather than advocating new rights), a specific target (local cadres) instead of being as general as broad political change, can be applied to Chinese rural resistance in general. They are the key elements of the pattern of dynamics underlying the Chinese rural resistance from the past to the present. But we should not overlook the new trend that the political opportunity based on such as the central-local bifurcation of the state and emerging journalistic attention to politically sensitive issues that, since the 1990s, have started to play a crucial part in encouraging and publicizing rural protest in China and thus pushing for injustices to be righted. The dynamics of Chinese rural resistance do not all necessarily appear at the same time in a particular incident of rural protest, and the degree to which these dynamics have been accommodated by rural resistance also differs from time to time. For example, the media may play a less important role in rural resistance in the 1930s and 1940s than in rural resistance in the 1980s and 1990s due to the degree to which the mass media has been incorporated by the whole society is different; the central-local bifurcation of the state may exert greater influence on rural resistance in the 1990s than in the past because in this period the central government showed more intention than before to benefit the peasants in terms of issuing policies and laws, while the local authorities' predatory behaviour did not stop and even proliferated. But in general, these dynamics together constitute the pattern of dynamics

of Chinese rural resistance, and the 1990s and the early 2000s may have witnessed all the dynamics working together in Chinese rural contention.

Is the pattern applicable to HFSE?

The key question here is: can the pattern of dynamics abstracted from Chinese rural resistance be applied to the HFSE? As McAdam et al. (2001) state that different forms of contention, such as social movements, revolutions, strike waves, nationalism, democratization, and more, result from a similar mechanism and process, I accordingly argue that the pattern of dynamics identified from the examination of Chinese rural resistance is applicable to HFSE. Because, *first*, HFSE is also spontaneous, with no organization staking a claim, and no plan made in advance by any of its participants: Chinese Internet users act on their own, out of a sudden welling up of grievances stemming from a similarly sudden event assuming certain kind of injustice, such as official corruption, government deception or cover-up.

Second, the claim of HFSE is also specific and reactive: the goal of HFSE participants is not broader political change but imposing punishment on the corrupt officials they have targeted, or pushing the government committing deception or cover-up to confess and make a correction; the HFSE is reactive because its participants rarely advocate new rights or appeal for new values and ideas; rather, it is remedial, responsive to something wrong identified by Internet users, and it also exercises the rights that have been established in the Constitution. The central government has entitled Chinese citizens with the legal rights of reporting the malfeasant behaviours of any government department or official; there are also existing channels of reporting, such as letters and visits office (*xin fang ban gong shi*) and phone complaint service. No matter to what extent these channels and legal provisions have been used to expose and punish corrupt officials (public trust in these official channels is actually very low, leading Chinese citizens to resort to other non-official channels such as the Internet to expose and punish corrupt officials), their existence signifies that citizens have the right and are encouraged to report official misconducts. The claims of government/official-focused HFSE are based on such established rights (both legally and institutionally), without which Chinese Internet users would not have dared to expose wrongdoing, and the outcome may not have resulted in the punishment of corrupt officials, which is what the HFSE participants pursued.

Third, the target of HFSE is also specific, which means that Internet users target not the national government but local governments and officials that directly bring them a sense of injustice. Although the HFSE participants did not act out of a crisis of subsistence that may be a trigger of rural resistance, the origin and nature of triggers in HFSE and rural resistance are same: they originate from a popular sense of injustice resulting from the power holders' pursuing personal interests by abusing political power, and the nature of either a subsistence crisis triggering a rural protest or a picture online exposing a misdeed of a particular public official is a showcase of something unjust, the response to which by either peasants or Internet users is out of a desire for justice. The online discussion in government/official-focused HFSE is pointing at not only their specific targets but also the whole political system, wherein they think the injustice is deeply rooted but, as Chinese peasants have done, the Internet users focus on a few public officials that directly cause their feeling of injustice and, because of their targets being individual cadres not the state, the government/official-focused HFSE is able to survive in Chinese cyberspace. After all, compared to defying the central, targeting specific, local governments and cadres is more likely to bring rural resisters or HFSE participants the modest victories they pursue.

Fourth, as rural resistance has been in part facilitated by the opening up of political opportunities, such as the central government' intention to benefit the rural population (providing the rural resistance with a legal basis) and encouraging peasants to report local cadres' misconduct (providing the rural resistance with formal channels), the central government's ambiguous attitude toward the Internet gives the HFSE a chance to survive. The huge commercial interests of the information industry may be tempting the central government to apply loose regulations to the social, entertainment and commercial aspects of Chinese cyberspace while, at the same time, maintaining strict censorship on the flow of information online about political issues, but overcoming this, however, is not as difficult as overcoming the censorship on traditional media. The loose-strict pattern of online censorship in Chinese cyberspace allows Chinese Internet users to adjust their strategy whenever necessary, innovatively covering their online political discussions with the appearance of social and entertainment uses. Meanwhile, seeing that Chinese citizens have been using the Internet to discuss and expose misconducts of local governments and officials, the central government is becoming aware of the potential of the Internet in monitoring its local agencies that, most of the time, are beyond the range of its sight, and thus has not been restricted on it.

Fifth, the traditional media has been involved not only in offline rural resistance but also in the government/official-focused HFSEs. For the former, Chinese journalists either assisted the peasants to expose local cadre corruption or cooperated with peasants to investigate. For the latter, the role of the traditional media is similar, either only reporting or both reporting and investigating. We should not misjudge the power relations between popular forces and the authorities by viewing them as only ‘controlling’ and ‘controlled’. Chinese citizens, either peasants or Internet users, have more room to express their grievances. Daring magazines such as the *Southern Weekend* can come under pressure and even be subject to editorial purges for reporting aspects of the real situations that the leadership wishes to keep quiet (Kynge 2001). Nowadays the Internet has become an alternative way for citizens to not only express grievance but also make a step forward in pushing for justice to be done quickly. We should not enlarge the power of the central government in media censorship by ignoring the availability of alternatives and the ability of citizens who are creative and skilful enough to turn their relationships with central leadership and local authorities to their advantage.

In the following section, I analyse labour protest in urban China in order to avoid the bias of paying attention to only the rural bottom-up collective action and, more importantly, to examine if the pattern of the dynamics of Chinese bottom-up collective action, which is applicable to rural resistance and HFSE, is also applicable to Chinese urban labour protest. It seems that as long as the power relations among central leadership, local authorities and citizens have not changed too much, the bottom-up collective actions in China, no matter whether by peasants, urban workers or Internet users, tend to fit the same pattern of dynamics. Because the pattern is not defined by the type of collective action (demonstration, strike or rebellion), or by the type of actors (peasants, workers or more mixed online population), but by what can characterize nearly all the Chinese bottom-up collective actions, which is a *power struggle* highlighted by a triangle of relationships linking the central leadership, local authorities and citizens. The elements of the pattern, including spontaneity, claim, target, political opportunity and media, are all influenced and even in a sense determined by the relation triangle, in which, the citizens are relatively powerless but by no means absolutely without power, while the central leadership is always on the top but is unable to frame the whole power structure on its own. In other words, although the power struggle usually takes the shape that the state gives it, it would never proceed under the influence of a single power.

Labour protest in urban China and its dynamics

It would not take as much work to examine the Chinese labour protests as examining the rural resistances mainly due to fact that the history of labour protest in China is much shorter than that of rural resistance. The real worker class emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century after China had totally opened up to western political, military and capital powers but, until 1949 and after a series of important junctures, such as the Hundred Flowers Movement, the Cultural Revolution and 1989 Tiananmen protests, Chinese workers gradually took to the streets and made their voices heard (Chen 2000).

Two decades of market reform have brought on their heels waves of labour insurgency. By the early 2000s, incidents of worker unrest by the massive unemployed population had become so routine that government and party leaders identified labour problems as one of the biggest threats to social stability, alongside tax revolts and land disputes by peasants. (Lee 2003, p. 73)

The labour protests illustrate more straightforwardly than rural resistance the reactive nature of Chinese bottom-up collective action: while the existing rights demanded by Chinese peasants have been implicitly entitled but the rural population have not fully enjoyed their given rights and thus have fought for them persistently, the workers in urban areas, after the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 and before the launch of open reform in 1978, had actually been enjoying explicitly-entitled rights, and been much better-off than their rural counterparts.

It was, by and large, a locus of relative privilege within the Maoist state socialism: a zone in which they (workers) could enjoy stable, secure income, socially provided housing, medical care, and education, guaranteed lifetime employment, a work environment that was far from draconian, and that often involved considerable workers' power, and social and political prestige. Starting in the 1950s Chinese workers benefited from a way of life and a standard of living to be envied by their fellow proletarians in other poor countries (Blecher 2006, p. 405).

Although strikes have erupted against exploitative practices in private and foreign enterprises, most large-scale protest actions were launched by workers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Chen 2000). The state-led economic reforms paradoxically undercut a major social base of regime support: as a result of large-scale planned layoffs of workers in the state industrial sector, many state workers have had to confront a drastic reversal of fortune within the past decade, from being 'masters' of their enterprises to becoming destitute and unemployed (Lee 2003, p. 73). The emerging and rapidly increasing labour protests in the 1980s, as scholars characterized, were aimed at regaining previous living standards eroded through economic

change and a response to violations of norms and standards to which the subaltern class had become accustomed and which it expected the dominant elites to maintain (Posusney 1993; Kopstein 1996), and thus did not reflect the emergence of new demands or a new consciousness among the working class.

Like the Chinese rural resistance and HFSE, the labour protest in China is also spontaneous, and originated in spontaneous 'contentious gathering'. Workers were brought together not by the trade union or any other organization; they acted on their own, out of a sudden outpouring of grievance. This unorganized and leaderless form of gathering can be attributed to the state's history of repressing the first sign of independent organizing (Chen 2000, p. 57). Drawing a lesson from the rise of Poland's Solidarity movement in the late 1970s, the Chinese state has never slackened in taking pre-emptive actions against the possible emergence of independent unions (Wilson 1990). Chinese workers have learned well a rule of the state that 'the bird that shows its head will be shot first' (*qingda chutouniao*). In China, organized and massive dissent, among all forms of popular resistance, has provoked the most severe repression by the Chinese state; the crackdown on the religious sect Falun Gong is the very example illustrating the regime's suspicion of an organizational capacity in society that rivals its own. For the labour protests, similarly harsh treatment has been carried out on activists who dare to pursue independent and cross-class mobilization of workers. Not surprisingly, in China both the national and local labour unions are all officially administrated and they have proved to be too weak to protect worker's rights, leading to more and more workers in SOEs turning not to official trade unions but to informal networks for support when their rights are invaded (Lee 2003, p. 87). The unattached and underprivileged workers have become a potent source of labour protests, and may not have formal organizations to coordinate their actions, but their shared grievances and the geographical concentration of unemployment and plant closures provide a social and ecological unity for mass rebellion.

The claim made by protesting workers, like that by rural resisters and HFSE participants, is specific not general. In a sense, the protests by Chinese workers are like the grain riots and grain seizures by crowds of people in traditional times who advocated the right to subsistence. Industrial restructuring has plunged a large number of workers into a subsistence crisis, as wages went unpaid for months, medical insurance was denied and jobs disappeared. Workers believed that they were being unjustly deprived of their basic needs. The protesting workers did not demand a share of the gains achieved by China's fast-growing economy but just tried

to maintain their subsistence security during the economic transformation. Workers took to the streets only when their minimal well-being was threatened, indicating that the protests by Chinese workers are reactive and their claim is not broad but specific, such as asking for payments of wage arrears, pensions and medical fees (Chen 2000). The targets of Chinese labour protests are also specific; they rarely occurred out of anti-state and anti-government sentiment but were protests against local authorities and enterprise managers. The feelings of injustice were considerably stronger among workers who realized that, while they were struggling to survive, their managers were spending lavishly and living extravagantly. Simultaneously confronted with a subsistence crisis and witnessing cadre corruption in their enterprises, workers naturally held the managers responsible for their economic plight (Chen 2000).

Similar to rural resistance, for which the beneficial political opportunity was not available until the emergence of rightful resistance in the 1980s, indicating the central government's intention to protect peasants' rights and improve their positions, the soaring of urban unrest of labour protests in the 1980s was unable to accommodate such a kind of political opportunity until the 1990s and the early 2000s, when the central leadership gave local authorities orders to protect workers' rights in order to prevent workers' grievance from becoming explosive (Chen 2002). However, along with the centre's good intention, more and more state-owned enterprises failed to provide workers with a minimum living allowance, evidenced by the data shown in the Chinese Trade Union Statistics Yearbook (1998) which showed that in 1996 about 3.5 million workers had received no pay for several consecutive months (p. 139). At the same time, official toleration of labour protests in terms of rarely arresting labour protestors, in a sense helped construct the image of a central-local division: the government concession resulted from the centre's intention of establishing 'safety values', whereby protesters could let off steam without targeting the top leadership, and led to frequent exchanges between workers and local authorities (Lee 2003, p. 86). And nowadays, as a series of policies favouring labourers have been gradually issued, Chinese workers are increasingly conscious of their legal rights and are savvy in using the arbitration and court systems to fight against employers' violation of the law. Yet, unless there is a responsive government and a law-based judiciary, workers would have no alternative but to resort to non-institutionalized channels, such as strikes and demonstrations.

Media is not absent in labour protests, evidenced by the literature on the topic in which the

media coverage has been taken as an essential source for learning of incidents of Chinese labour protest. For example, the *South China Morning Post*, one of the few examples of outspoken media in China and located in the Guangdong Province, reported on 18 March 1999 when about 500 laid-off coal miners demonstrated against delayed salary payment; on 24 October 1998, the paper reported that workers of a state-owned pharmaceuticals company in Zhejiang province demonstrated for four days against their boss's corruption; it also gave commentary (16 January 1999) on Chinese labour strikes by suggesting that if the government was able to deliver a basic living allowance for laid-off workers and pensions for retired workers 'on time each month', then labour protests could be expected to decline (Chen 2000). The official newspapers, such as the *Gongren Ribao* (Workers' Daily) also reported on labour strikes: for example it reported on 10 May 1996 and 30 June 1998 respectively that groups of workers in two cities of China protested through petitioning against their managers' corrupt practices; it also reported on 21 January 1989 that in Liaoning Province from January to July 1988 there were 276 incidents in which managers were beaten up, and reported on 11 March 1993 that, from January to November 1992 in one unnamed city, 87 physical assaults on managers, including a few killings, occurred (Chen 2000).

There is no evidence whether these newspapers probed deeply into these incidents, but their reporting undoubtedly reinforced the publicity of labour disputes, informed the public with the real situation of workers in China, incurred wider concern about this social group, and thus pushed for redress to be made. But we still see that the official newspaper *Gongren Ribao* did not feel totally free to report on politically sensitive issues during the 1990s when labour disputes were extraordinarily intense, as it hid in its report the name of the city where one protest had happened. The involvement of the media in Chinese labour protests is not only about news offices' decision about whether or not one incident can be reported, but also about citizens' perception of the potential of media in facilitating their pursuit of justice. Professional organizations in big cities, such as the Shanghai Municipal Union, solicited media coverage of cases of labour disputes and the process of the trials, with the self-declared purpose of advocating 'social justice' and carrying out 'legal education' (Chen 2003). The Chinese migrant workers have expressed their discontent and demanded changes by not only staging strikes, bargaining on wages, launching collective petition, but also resorting to media exposure for the redress of their problems (Ngai et al. 2010, p. 143).

Up to this point, we can see that the pattern of dynamics concluded from the analysis of rural

resistance could be applied to both the HFSE and labour protests. The elements, including spontaneity, reactive response and a specific claim, a specific target, utilization of political opportunity and involvement of media have been shown to characterize the labour protests. The peasant resistance, labour protest and HFSE cannot represent all the forms of contention in Chinese society but, together, they can illustrate convincingly that the bottom-up collective action in China, when involving the struggle between the powerful and the powerless, when exposed to the power structure with both limitations and opportunities, are likely to show the same dynamics. HFSE, even, unique in its being based on the Internet, cannot change this tradition of Chinese bottom-up collective action.

Summary

This chapter mainly reviews Chinese bottom-up collective actions in general to find their common dynamics. The conclusion of this chapter might be a strong challenge to the theory of technology determinism. Technology, or more specifically the Internet, is not decisive in the occurrence of HFSE; rather, like rural resistance and labour protests, the HFSE has originated from similar structural conditions that have brought about social inequality and injustice; it shares dynamics with rural resistances and labour strikes because they lie in the similar power structure highlighted by the relations among the top leadership, local authorities and citizens. It may also be reasonable to consider the mass media as the fourth power in order to make the power structure more applicable to the popular protests in 1990s and early 2000s. It is necessary to stress here that the fourth power in the updated power structure is the mass media as whole not just the Internet. For HFSE, the Internet is both a platform and a medium. There is evidence that street protests often spill into cyberspace; for protestors in the physical world, they may view the Internet and traditional media equally as mediums of publicizing their claims, even though there are differences of accessibility and availability; there is also evidence that HFSE participants, when surfing on the Internet, still sought offline media coverage in order to reach a wider audience. In fact, the interaction between the Internet and traditional media can make the fourth power even stronger as the latter frequently start to take the Internet as a source of news reporting and news making (Tang and Sampson 2012, p. 458). The mass media is not an independent power: its potential of producing justice is influenced by the power of the state and its capability of producing justice is dependent on how citizens take advantage of it. But, undoubtedly, in the era of mass media the power of the mass media in entitling the ordinary people to impose on the power

holders for justice should not be ignored.

Based on the conclusion of this chapter, which is that HFSE shares common dynamics with offline protests, the main task of Chapter 5 is to answer the question about whether there is an offline version of HFSE. It would be logical to think that if the Internet were not decisive in the occurrence of HFSE, there would be offline protests that resemble HFSE in terms of their internal process. It is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis of HFSE and offline protests, both of which have happened in the early twenty-first century in China, with a focus on the internal process of bottom-up collective action, to explore the degree to which the process of HFSE has been reflected in offline protests. And this comparative analysis also helps answer the question of why, with the existence of the Internet in the early twenty-first century, some protests go, and stay, offline and others go online, or in other words, what exactly are the differences between online and offline protests in China?

Chapter 4

Methodology: how to research HFSE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the main methods used in this research. Basically, this research on HFSE adopts a case-oriented approach. This is because, first, the main source of information for this research is the case study built upon multiple sources including media coverage, which provides details about the processes of several incidents of HFSE and these details, such as its trigger, issue, target and outcome, are hard to be measured extensively in terms of a standard millimetre, gram, second, or some other quantity. Second, according to the gaps identified in the literature review, the understanding of context is central to answer the main research questions, such as the relation between the HFSE phenomenon and society, which needs to be examined in the cases of HFSE; meanwhile, the under-investigated political dimension of HFSE also needs extensive enquiry in order to reveal to what extent the HFSE has been used to hold normally unaccountable officials to account. Such extensive knowledge about the characteristics of politically-focused HFSE would be helpful for establishing the pattern of politically-focused HFSE. Third, in light of this research being exploratory, the question why the HFSE occurred can be better answered through looking at the internal process of its specific cases.

What is a case of HFSE?

An instance of collective action cannot simply be regarded as analytical unit shaped for a research topic; while even though an instance could yield a lot of information about a potential case, not all cases are useful and necessary for a particular research purpose. So the question is: what forms a case? In the view boundaries around place and time periods define cases, thus, in comparative and historical social science, there is a long tradition of studying individual countries or sets of theoretically- or empirically-related countries conceived as comparable cases; in macro-social inquiry, not countries but, rather, parallel and contrasting event sequences are cases; or generic macro-social processes, historical outcomes, or macro-level narratives are cases (Ragin and Becker 1992, p. 5). There is no definitive answer to this question. In Douglas Harper's research on the social life of the homeless, he treats the empirical units of 'community' as cases; in Diane Vaughan's elaboration of the theory of

organizational misconduct, her empirical cases are conventional units such as organization (see Ragin and Becker 1992); in the study by Boh et al. (1989) on changing patterns of European family life, their cases are families. How do I define each instance of HFSE as a case of this research?

Basically, there are four points of consideration when defining a case of HFSE:

- I. An HFSE case should be surrounded by information that is useful for learning its internal process;
- II. An HFSE case embodies causal process operating as microcosm rather than macrocosm;
- III. As HFSE is a form of collective action, each HFSE case should imply a family of three basic aspects including reason, process and result:
 - a. Reason implies trigger, motivation, issue, and potential actors;
 - b. Process implies transition among stages, communication, and relations;
 - c. Result implies target and goal.

IV: From a cross-case standpoint, all the HFSE cases in the sample should be comparable. In other words, cases in this research are clustered based on ‘most similar’ rather than ‘most different’ criteria; the offline cases of collective action can be defined as HFSE only when they are found matching at least 4 stages of online HFSE.

The goal of action is particularly important for evaluating whether an online mass participation is HFSE or not. Although there is high degree of mass involvement in online forums, communities and chat rooms, what Internet users do (e.g. sharing photos or chatting with friends) can be viewed as online behaviour that has closely and primarily related to features and functions of the Internet. HFSE, with extensive involvement of Internet users, is called online collective action because it not only benefits from the Internet but also deploys the Internet as a medium and platform to achieve a common goal. It is more goal-oriented rather than simply Internet-assisted. In Shirky’s view, sharing is the least complicated online activity, while the online collective action is the most complicated, and could be better understood with a focus on the behaviour of the collective rather than on individual users (Shirky 2008, p. 128).

A good representation of a case study combines theories and practices rather than a simple description of an object or event (Walton 1992). Compared with the simple term ‘public agency’, the Dynamics of Bureaucracy looks more like a case study in research which not only implies the general features of the phenomenon from which the case comes (bureaucracy), but also reflects the analytical meaning of the case (better understanding the social world focused in a particular circumstance). Similarly, for the title HFSE, at first glance, it looks like a blood thing, but implies HFSE’s basic ingredients: search engine indicates the application of the Internet, human flesh indicates that not only actors but also targets are human beings; it also reflects the analytical meaning of HFSE: it is not only about technology, but also about the interaction of human beings as well as the interplay of technology and its users.

From aggregation to relationship, from individual to collective

Rather than treating the collective action as simply aggregation of actors and events and explaining the emergence and features of collective action mainly by referring to properties of the macro system, this research deploys a relational perspective to study HFSE and focuses on exploring micro aspects of HFSE while still referring to macro conditions to explain its occurrence. Many studies of social movements fall under the formal pattern in which collective action, in accounts of revolutionary movements, is viewed as having originated primarily from transformations in the structure of class relations (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989); macro versions of the political-process approach explain contention in the light of the properties of the polity as the opportunities it offered/denied, without looking at the mechanisms that transform the former into the latter (Kitschelt 1986). Other scholars emphasize micro aspects of collective action by stating that collective action originates from individual strategic choices in pursuit of individual or collective interests (Opp 1989) and stressing individual actors, orientations and belief systems, their skills and resources, their openness towards the adopting of unconventional forms of political behaviour (Norris, Walgrave, and Van Aelst 2005).

With respect to this research, it is not feasible and appropriate to apply the perspectives above. Individual-level analysis is more appropriate for those instances of collective action of long duration and formal/informal organization, through which actors and leaders could be easily accessed and fully investigated via interviews and/or on-going observation. HFSE is unorganized and each of its instances has a short duration, and online anonymity makes it

difficult to access individual actors. Structure-level analysis emphasizes the context and macro conditions, which, however, could not be much helpful in learning the exact dynamics of small-scale collective actions that are localized and have very specific claims. It is not to say the macro conditions do not matter in small-scale collective action; rather, when explaining the reasons of their occurrence, the most usual situation may be the micro- and macro conditions working together to bring about certain kind of collective action.

Few people would currently take issue with the statement that social movements – as well as instance of collective action in the larger sense – are best conceived as systems of interdependence between multiple actors and/or events (Diani 2011). A more intermediate approach may be deployed to look at these instances of short duration, being occasional and spontaneous, which in this research means a combination of both micro- and macro factors that can be used to explain the occurrence of HFSE. The relational perspective here concerns how the elements within a case of collective action combine in terms of specific pattern or mechanism. Concerning the research on HFSE, this relational perspective refers specifically to, within a single case of HFSE, what its causal conditions are and how these causal conditions lead to its outcome. On a broad level, the relational perspective concerns the relation between the HFSE phenomenon and its general context.

Shirky gives the example of Wikipedia, which, in his view, is not an end product but a process of collaboration by numerous people on the Internet, and the understanding of which could be harmed by looking at any one user or even a small group and assuming they are representative of the whole (Shirky 2008, p.127).

The most active few users account for a majority of the edits (in Wikipedia), even though they make up a minority, and often a tiny minority, of contributors. But even this small group does not account for the whole success of Wikipedia, because many of these active users are doing things like correcting typos or making small changes, while users making only one edit are sometimes adding much larger chunks of relevant information.

In online collaboration, no single Internet user is able to represent others in terms of their contribution to a collective task. Certainly, there is a difference among the most active users, less active ones, the least active ones, and even bystanders but, without any of them, the collective task would not be achieved. For example, in Wikipedia, the most active user adds a new article, then a less active user notices it and sometimes makes edits, the least active user just occasionally modifies a spelling mistake, a bystander does nothing to this article, but would still be able to talk about the novel article he encountered on Wikipedia with his friend, who might become the next active user (Shirky 2008).

Thus, the real process in Wikipedia is never as simple as just a collection of variable elements; rather, it is a system of interacting elements. HFSE is about online collective collaboration, like Wikipedia, but much more than that; it is online collective action, which is based on not only collective collaboration, as Wikipedia exemplifies, but also on more complicated factors beyond the Internet. What Wikipedia could reflect on HFSE is that in HFSE, there is also no representative actor: some more active ones expose and track down the transgressor, while less active ones just discuss or give comments, the least active ones mainly forward and reprint relevant information, and those bystanders do nothing significant but may inform others that there was an HFSE going on, which might mobilize potential actors. Even though the most active Internet users contributed a lot, their number may be too tiny to represent others occupying the majority (say 90 per cent) of the whole. Therefore, analysing HFSE as online collective action, it is better to start with the awareness that emphasis should be put on the behaviour of the collective rather than on individual users. Even if imagining there exist representative actors, it is also difficult to access them due to the online anonymity that makes locating and identifying any particular Internet user difficult. Moreover, the example of Wikipedia also illustrates that the elements in online collaboration do not aggregate but interact because ‘my use of Wikipedia is not independent of yours, however, as changes I make show up for you, and vice versa’ (Shirky 2008, p. 128). Similarly in HFSE, what actors achieved at one stage may influence what actors in the next stage would do. So, when looking at the process of HFSE, it is necessary to treat it as a combination of sequential stages and examine the relation between stages to find out how the elements of HFSE interact.

Case study: explaining causation

Case study is the method generally used in social science research to explain the complexity of social phenomenon, and it also examines the operation of causal mechanism in individual cases in detail (Ragin and Becker 1992). Case study can also develop typological theories on how different combinations of independent variables interact to produce different levels or types of dependent variables (George and Bennett 2005). Here, the dependent variables are the outcomes of the cases under investigation. And the independent variables are the possible causes or explanatory factors on which the outcomes are supposedly dependent (Gerring 2007, p. 21), as well as the conditions under which these causes and factors take effect. With regard to the research on HFSE, the independent variables are those micro- and macro conditions underlying the HFSE phenomenon, such as the capability of the Internet for bringing together Internet users with similar interests, and the traditional Chinese moral codes,

violation of which may encourage the use of HFSE to track down and punish norm transgressors. The dependent variables differ from case to case: in some cases of HFSE, individual members of the public were targeted and punished while, in others, it was government officials. The variation of dependent variables implies that there may accordingly be variation of combinations of independent variables leading to different outcomes. Thus, exploring different patterns of HFSE is a key task of this research, which could be fulfilled via intensive case study. Although the political dimension of HFSE is the theme of this research, it is still necessary to explore the causes of non-politically-focused HFSE and examine how it can help understand the causes of politically-focused HFSE.

There is no single 'case study research design'; rather, different case study research designs use varying combination of within-case analysis, cross-case comparisons, induction, and deduction for different theory-building purpose (George and Bennett 2005). The research on HFSE adopts the small-N case-oriented approach, namely the combination of within-case analysis and cross-case comparison, to explore the underlying causal path and mechanism behind the case. Case study findings can have implications for both theory development and theory testing. Due to HFSE being a novel research subject, this research endeavours to develop a theory about HFSE mainly via case study, which is primarily an inductive process that can identify new variables or causal mechanisms (George and Bennett 2005, p. 111) and thus establish the causation in HFSE. However, the causation concerned in this research is not about the causal relationship between a set of independent and dependent variables as most researches on causation usually pursue (the variation of the relationship between independent and dependent variables cross cases). Rather, this research is looking at no-variance design, the process is an illustration of a causal chain in which each stage of HFSE is viewed similar to a single event underpinned by its own causal factors; meanwhile, the causal mechanism would not be complete if no attention is paid to the transition between stages.

Case selection: triangulation, deliberate sampling and challenges

Case selection may be one of the most important issues for a case-oriented research. 'We cannot study every case of whatever we are interested in, nor should we want to. Every specific enterprise tries to find out something that will apply to everything of a certain kind of studying a few examples, the results of the study being, as we say, "generalizable"' (Becker 1998, p. 67). In this research, the main method used to look for relevant cases is searching

among second-hand sources, such as newspapers by both Chinese and foreign media. It is necessary to recognize the limitations of using Chinese media (some foreign media also take the Chinese media as information source) to identify instances of a practice (e.g. the HFSE) that are citizen-led, anonymous and for the most part a covert act on the part of individual Internet users within the context of China that is highlighted by a single-party, authoritarian state and a strictly-censored media environment. This implies that the instances of HFSE that have not been spotted (and thus have not been reported) may exist and be dissimilar to these identified, and also there may be instances of HFSE which have been prohibited to be reported as they have a more anti-state and party appeal than those which have been reported.

Here, it is also necessary to raise an important issue: triangulation, which refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings. An early reference to triangulation was in relation to the idea of method proposed by Webb et al. (1966, p. 3), who suggest that ‘once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced. The most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement processes.’ Denzin (1978, p. 294-307) extends the idea of triangulation beyond its conventional association with research methods and designs by distinguishing four forms of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation and methodological triangulation. In this research, data triangulation entails gathering information of each single case via multiple sources. The details of each case presented in the following chapters are based not on a single newspaper but integration of several news articles published in Chinese and English. Information from multiple sources may overlap, thus, using data triangulation, there is a process of condensing and packaging all the available information to make it fit the story-telling format of each case and better display its internal process.

There are so many instances of collective action in China that it is impossible to look at all of them, thus this research focuses on only a few instances that are representative and whose features and aspects are relevant to this research. In case-oriented research, relevance of cases to the research topic is important (Flick 1998, p. 41). So cases in this research have been selected based on their features being relevant to HFSE and the main research questions. A strategy of ‘deliberate sampling’ is used in this research. Having realized that HFSE is a form of collective action and its political dimension should be the theme of this research, I defined the general category to accommodate more cases of political collective action involving

confrontation between citizens and authorities. The primary criterion of deliberate sampling is that cases are selected according to specific pre-set definition. Under the general category, there are subtypes including riot, rebellion, demonstration, strike, petition and the government/official-focused HFSE. The classification of collective action in this research aims to cover as many as possible instances of political collective action in China. By doing so, the deliberate sampling here aims to not only capture a complete picture of political collective action in China and avoid omitting any potentially distinct instance but also to try to grasp as many features and aspects of each subtype of political collective action as possible in order to determine precisely to what extent a selected case could be representative of others in the same subtype.

It is worth noting that, due to the characteristic of media materials, the same instance of collective action could be titled differently in different reports with different perspectives (a protest may appear as riot in one report and demonstration in another, or a collective action may be titled as protest in a foreign report and as collective violence by Chinese media). The lack of a common standard of entitling collective action poses a challenge to the case selection in this research in that several reports titled differently may talk about the same instance and offer similar information, the reviewing of which one by one would be time-consuming; but it also offers this research an opportunity to get all-round information about each single instance through checking several reports to see if they look at it from different perspectives.

Database searching: second-hand sourcing, weakness and possible solution

The widely communicated instances of political collective action in China, such as protests against local authorities, are generally named by the Chinese media as a ‘Mass Incident’ (qun ti xing shi jian). So, when looking for relevant English material, I used the key words riot, rebellion, protest, demonstration, collective violence, strike, and petition; when searching for Chinese material, I mainly used ‘群体事件’ (‘Mass Incident’ in Chinese) as key words. The database Nexis is depended on mainly to look for news coverage of Chinese collective action by western media. In China, there is no database like Nexis that widely covers news reports all over the world and it has assisted me in finding thousands of items and reports about Chinese collective action. I used the key words riot, rebellion, violence, protest, strike, demonstration, sit-in and petition with each of them labelled ‘China’. They cover nearly all the forms of offline collective action (involving confrontation between citizens and

authorities) that could be identified in China. The following table shows the search results (after filtering repeated items).

As shown by the table 4.1, the collected cases of non-HFSE collective action are mainly grassroots protests, for instance local riots and demonstrations, not because I deliberately designed my sampling to focus on protest (I deliberately designed my sampling to focus on collective action in China; but after a general search on the Internet, nearly all the items matching Chinese collective action indicate protest-like instances), but because only these forms of collective action (protest) can be easily accessed via media coverage. Equally, those cases of government/official-focused HFSE are also more attractive to the media. Thus, compared to HFSE without a political focus, politically-focused HFSE is surrounded by richer materials that can be found on the Internet, in the newspapers, magazines and TV programmes. The result of my case selection implies that looking into online political collective action (e.g. HFSE) and offline political collective action (e.g. riot, rebellion, street demonstration, strike, etc.) that has happened in China may be a reasonable entry point to learning about the social reality of China and, in turn could reflect the general context from which the HFSE, particularly the politically-focused HFSE, emerged. It also implies that the best theme for this research on HFSE is its political dimension because the available, well-documented and comparable cases of offline collective action are political, also because the changes occasioned by new sources of freedom enabled by the Internet are particularly significant in China, which is a less free environment with restriction on citizens' political discourses and actions.

Table 4.1: Result of database Nexis searching

Forms of collective action	Number of reports	Issues
Protest	281	Official protests against Tibet-related and international issues; workers' protest over salaries; peasants' protest against land expropriation; residents protests against house demolition; civil anti-Japan protest; protests against polluting factory; protests against official corruption; etc.
Demonstration	15	Anti-western; anti-environmental pollution; against Tibet-independence; against 'biased' BBC coverage on China; etc.
Labour strike	3	Employees' strikes over low salaries; retirees' strike over low pensions; factory workers' strike over unpaid salaries; etc.
Petition	20	Urban residents' petition over nuclear power plant; women's petition over public humiliation; lesbians' petition over blood donation; petitions over poor construction of infrastructure; etc.

Rebellion	5	Peasants' rebel against rigged village election; peasants' rebel against local government and/or official's corruption; etc.
Riot	21	Farmers' riot against high taxes or one-child policy; villagers' riots against raised bus fares; urban riot against economic reform; etc.
Collective violence	16	Usually part of a riot or protest, illustrated by violent confrontations between villagers and police who tried to repress the protest.
Sit-in	2	Students' sit-in to demand money for education; school teachers' sit-in to demand increase in salaries.

It is clear to see from the table above that the number of cases under the key word protest is higher than those under other key words, probably because that the protest is a more general term that can cover other forms of grassroots political collective action (there are also forms of large-scale political collective action, such as social movement, which could be composed of small-scale protest activities, such as riot, demonstration and strike). The key word collective violence should not be viewed as an individual type of collective action; usually, it is just part of a protest (Tarrow 1994). It is used here simply as key word to capture relevant information about offline political collective action in China, which does not mean that it is theoretically and empirically an independent analytical category.

I first reviewed all these news items and selected two or three instances of each type, which can represent a general process operating across other instances within the same type. Then, I turned to Chinese content searching by looking for Chinese news coverage and journal articles that may provide more details of these selected instances, and then kept only one, supported by rich information in both English and Chinese, under each type as the case to be analysed (their details are shown in Chapter 5). These representative cases can be described explicitly in terms of their processes and stages, and they are taken as cases to compare with HFSE in order to detect if there is offline example of HFSE.

If all the data have been collected mainly through second-hand sources, how can we make sure that they are 'reliable'? Facing the shortage and limitation of first-hand resources (the events that have happened cannot be fully accessed, it is difficult to access the HFSE participants due to online anonymity, and the spontaneity and unpredictability of HFSE make it difficult to collect the first-hand information about it through the participant observation), I focused on second-hand sources, such as media coverage, and it is helpful to learn the detailed process of each selected case informed by both Chinese and English media. The basic questions 'what happened, where it happened, who was involved, and why it happened'

can be answered well by media coverage, particularly as more and more investigative journalists have been emerging who provide their audience with not only the basic information of an event but also its underlying facts, dug out by their field investigation. Collecting data is a process not just about what existing sources to use but also a subjective assessment that depends on a researcher's 'insight, awareness, suspicious, and questions' (Neuman 2005, p. 455). When a lot of second-hand information about a single instance is available, it is essential for the researcher to balance all the materials by focusing on those released by responsible, mainstream media and ignoring those whose authors express uncertainty about the source, or write ambiguously, or cite from other unverified sources.

Taxonomy: politically- and non-politically-focused HFSEs

As George and McKeown argue, typologies can play a valuable role in defining the universe of cases that can productively be compared (cited in Munck 2010). Before conducting within-case analysis, it is necessary to make a classification of selected cases. In doing so, the following data analysis will be more focused on a few cases that are relevant to the research questions. With regard to this research, the classification aims to redefine the original sample according to specific properties of HFSE. Within the newly defined sample(s), cases share the most similarities, and differ greatly from cases outside of the sample. For example, according to whether the target is political or not, HFSE can be classified into politically- and non-politically focused HFSE, and if looked into in detail, the politically-focused HFSE can further be classified into two patterns including target-punishing HFSE and fact-checking HFSE (see details of this classification in Chapter 5). Similarly, the non-politically-focused HFSE can also be classified into more specific types (see details of this classification in Chapter 5).

Classification is both a process and an end result; it involves the ordering of cases in terms of their similarity and can be broken down into two essential approaches: typology and taxonomy; the former is primarily conceptual and the latter empirical (Bailey 1994). Differing from the typology approach in which types are first constructed and then cases are sought to fit these types, in taxonomy, empirical cases are sought first, followed by classification. In this research, taxonomy and typology are used together, but emphasis is put on the former to answer research questions, while the latter is mainly used for case searching. At the beginning of this research, typology was applied: after having grasped a large amount of information about HFSE, I could conclude convincingly that HFSE was a form of

collective action, then the case searching focused on collecting instances of not only HFSE but also other collective actions that happened in China, in order to examine to what degree HFSE differs from offline collective action. Then taxonomy was used (in Chapters 5 and 6) to classify HFSE into different types according to specific characteristics of HFSE.

With regard to this research, there are benefits gained particularly from taxonomy. First, it enables the identification of multiple dimensions of HFSE. Second, through taxonomy, it is also confirmed that there is not a general model or pattern that could operate across all the cases of HFSE; rather, separate models or patterns should be figured out to represent different types of HFSE (e.g. political and non-political). Third, the taxonomy makes sure the cross-case comparison is productive in identifying key points of explaining differences among cases. For instance, in this research, in order to identify attributes of the pattern of politically-focused HFSE, cases of offline political collective action in China are selected, along with cases of politically-focused HFSE, to constitute the category Chinese grassroots collective action against local authorities (based on the logic of *the most similar system* in comparative research). Within this category, cases are similar to each other in terms of their target being political and their actors being ordinary people; but an obvious difference among them is that some cases happened on the street while others (e.g. HFSE) occurred in cyberspace. Through comparison, the elements varying among cases (e.g. for some online cases, the target is usually an individual official, while, for offline cases, the target is rarely individual but a group, say the local government) may explain the difference in their outcome (online and offline) and can be components of the pattern of politically-focused HFSE (see details of this comparative reasoning in Chapter 5).

Cross-case comparison

For this research, typology and taxonomy are the premises of cross-case comparison as the comparison is conducted only between cases that are similar to each other, as it is productive to compare cases in the same category (bottom-up collective action against authorities). The cross-case comparison may help classify HFSE into more specific types, such as online HFSE and offline HFSE (if after comparison, it is proved there are offline example(s) of HFSE). Collier et al. (2010) state that cross-case comparison may not only stimulate the creation of typologies but also help frame the analytic problem and suggest causal ideas that are also explored and evaluated through within-case analysis. In this research, the cross-case comparison could help answer the question of whether there is an offline example of HFSE,

the answer to which is essential for designing the following research, for instance the within-case analysis can be framed into either exploration of both online and offline HFSE accompanied by another round of comparison between them if there exists offline HFSE, or focusing solely on the online HFSE without further comparison if there is no offline HFSE.

In more detail, first, it is the comparison between HFSE and offline collective action, which aims to detect if HFSE has an offline equivalent. After comparison, the cases of offline collective action are clustered according to the degree to which they match the process of HFSE. There are five stages in the government/official-focused HFSE. These offline cases can be clustered into two groups: one includes cases that match HFSEs in at least four stages and another one includes cases that match in less than four stages of HFSE. So the matching degree or similarity level separating these two groups is 80 per cent, due to one outstanding difference between online and offline: the application of Internet, which means that a 100 per cent similarity is not reasonable. But it is still possible that in the physical world, without the assistance of technology, there might be instance of collective action that shares a lot of similarities with HFSE. 20 per cent difference is allowable because of the real situation but less-than-80 per cent similarity does not make any sense to give the argument that there exists offline HFSE.

Then after comparison, if there is no offline case that can match at least 80 per cent of HFSE's stages, I am able to argue that HFSE happens solely online, then I would focus on online HFSE only to explore its underlying causal mechanism(s) via process-tracing; if there is an offline case matching HFSE to the level of at least 80 per cent, I would go further to compare these 'lucky' cases with HFSE cases before making the argument that HFSE, although widely known as an online phenomenon, under some certain conditions it can also happen offline. Then I would use process-tracing to explore respectively the causal mechanisms of online and offline HFSEs, which may be further compared in order to find out the causal factor(s) that make HFSE happen online/offline instead of offline/online.

Within-case analysis: process tracing of HFSE

With regard to the within-case analysis, process-tracing is frequently employed to get close to the mechanisms or micro-foundations behind the observed phenomenon.

Process-tracing is a procedure for identifying steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context. ... The goal of process tracing is to connect the phases of the policy process and enable the investigator to identify the reasons

of the emergency of a particular decision through the dynamic of events. (George and Bennett 2005, p. 177)

Salmon (2006, p. 182-3) favours the mechanism-based approach that

makes explanatory knowledge into knowledge of the hidden mechanisms by which nature works. It goes beyond phenomenal descriptive knowledge into knowledge of things that are not open to immediate inspection. Explanatory knowledge opens up the block boxes of nature to reveal their inner workings. It exhibits the ways in which the things we want to explain come about.

George and Bennett (2005) believe that theories and explanations are hypothesized models of how underlying mechanisms work. Bhaskar (1998: p.13) states that ‘the construction of an explanation for ... identified phenomenon will involve the building of a model’. Based on these statements above, causal mechanism is seen in a single case of this research as a social process through which one actor operates to transfer matter to another actor, or one element of this instance transfers the matter or energy to another element; the HFSE case under investigation is treated as individual but correlated stages from the very beginning trigger emerged offline, to exposure online, tracking down, to naming, shaming, and finally punishment. For within-case analysis of HFSE, it is essential to look in detail into the causal factors of each stage and also the causal factors underlying the between-stage transitions. Only in this way, could the main research question ‘why HFSE occurred’ be answered convincingly.

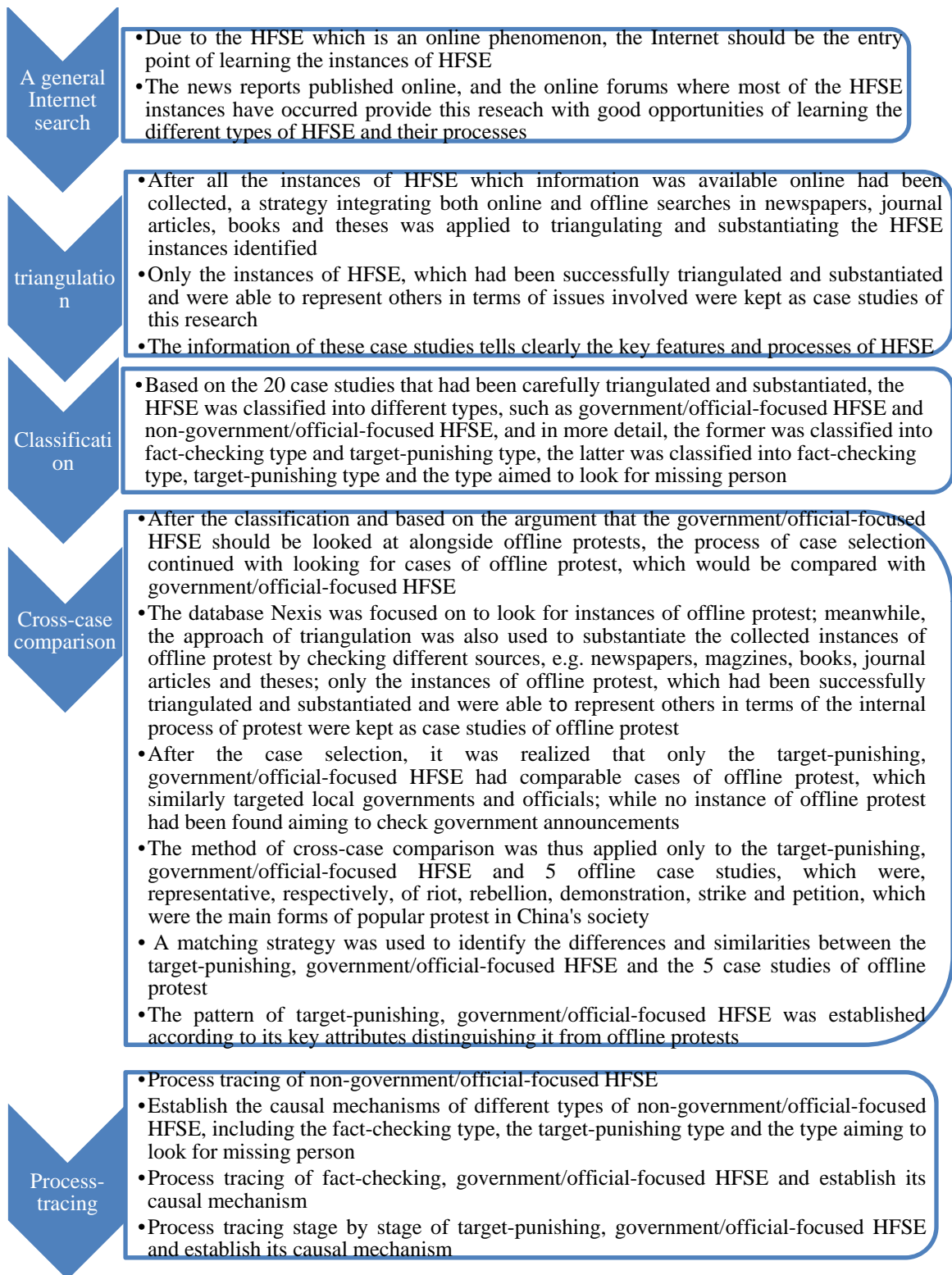
To explain an event is to identify its cause (George and Bennett 2005). A full treatment of any social movement may entail a study of the causes of collective behaviour, the stages of development, and its decline, involving many factors that determine each outcome along the way (Hao 1997, p. 79). The causal mechanism of an instance of collective action may be derived from a series of events that constitute the whole process of that instance. Obviously, the case of HFSE is different from any social movement on a broad level in terms of scale, duration, significance, ambition and outcome. But, in a narrow sense, any social movement may consist of small-scale collective actions, including for example street protests, strikes, demonstrations, etc. Similarly, the cases in this research are viewed as combinations of different stages (each stage may be highlighted by certain event(s)). The government/official-focused HFSE is broken down into five stages; likewise, cases of offline collective action are also deconstructed into different stages to compare with HFSE.

Causal mechanism is also contextually dependent. A causal mechanism within a single case or within a type of case does not necessarily apply to another case or another type of case. ‘It

is useful to develop models that incorporate both agent-centred and structure-centred mechanisms, so that theories can address how certain kind of agents operate in certain kinds of social structure' (George and Bennett 2005, p. 145). Concerning the government/official-focused HFSE, that its first trigger stage emerged offline implies the Chinese context's relevance to the occurrence of HFSE. Its second stage, in which Internet users posted online a picture or video showing misconduct of a government official, may be the result of not only people's adherence to the Internet's power of rapid communication (this factor may be applied to people all over the world who have access to the Internet), but also macro, structural conditions such as the imperfect system in China of supervising and disciplining government officials, leading to Chinese citizens resorting to the Internet for justice (this factor may have more limitations in its applicability, as in some countries, the system of supervising and disciplining government officials may be sound while in others such as China, this system is problematic).

The process-tracing method allows me to link together the disparate evidences of a single case collected through multiple sources and pushes me to make sense of these evidences before figuring out the causal chain underlying each case. And the information processed through process-tracing is comprehensible only when it can be ordered, categorized and 'narrativized' (Gerring 2007, p. 181). In this research, the data around the case under investigation is organized into stages that are based on a time sequence, which means that there is a focus on sequence of data over time, as Munck (2010) points out, for within-case analysis, the process of studying sequences of change (time-series data) may alert qualitative researchers to important missing variables. This is particularly true for process tracing, the object of which is aggregating data by no random manner.

After the methods used in this research have been detailed, the following diagram integrates the details and illustrates in a more systematic way how these methods were applied to studying the HFSE, including the process by which the cases of HFSE were identified and the process of analysis.



Summary

In sum, this research is case-oriented, deploying taxonomy, single-case process tracing and cross-case comparison as main methods to find out if there is an offline equivalent of HFSE and to answer the question of why HFSE occurs. Definitely these three methods are significant in answering the research questions but, as research continues, there would be more issues emerging, concerning for example how to analyse data more appropriately, or during the process of research, there may be new instances emerging that assume analytical significance (e.g. the emerging instance is proved to be offline HFSE or is still online HFSE but presents different dimensions from existing cases), the strategy of using methods may be adjusted accordingly or other methods might be added. However, as long as the research questions remain the same, the three main methods elaborated above will not be changed.

Chapter 5

HFSE and recent popular protest in China: a comparative perspective

Introduction and chapter outline

Chapter 3 reviewed bottom-up collective action in China, aiming to put the understanding of HFSE in the historical context, and concluded with the recognition of the pattern of dynamics shared by Chinese rural resistances, labour protests and HFSE. This chapter seeks to assess if HFSE is in effect just an online equivalent of other kinds of collective action such as a demonstration or strike. It aims to conduct in-depth examination of HFSE, comparing it with cases of offline protests that happened in recent years in China in order to see the similarities and differences between them. It is impossible to compare HFSE with all the other forms of collective action, a general term that covers nearly all forms of action involving more than one actor. In light of the basic characteristics of HFSE (having both political and non-political dimensions) and the social reality in China that has witnessed fast-growing grassroots local protests in the last twenty years, it is plausible to draw comparisons between them; both can be government/official focused. It is reasonable to speculate that there might be offline protests that resemble the HFSE. But whether or not these offline protests can be called HFSE needs investigation.

Eisinger gives the definition of protest that is instructive:

Protest refers to a host of types of collective manifestations, disruptive in nature, designed to provide 'relatively powerless people' with bargaining leverage in the political process. ... It is a collective act, carried out by those concerned with the issue and not by their representatives. ... Protest is a device by which actors making demands in the political system attempt to maximize the impact of their meagre resources while at the same time they strive to minimize the costs of such demand-making which they might incur. (Eisinger 1972. p. 5-6)

This definition applies to the government/official-focused HFSE, which is also a device used by the powerless people to make their claims heard by the powerful and thus secure redress. The government/official-focused HFSE can be viewed as a subtype of, but is not equal to, the protest, because not all the examples of protest necessarily aim to achieve such results as punishment of their target; sometimes protestors just want to make their demands heard by authorities through collective gathering, marching, demonstrating, or striking, in the hope that their targets would respond, in terms of, in the case of labour strike for instance, paying of

wage arrears. But the government/official-focused HFSE is more goal-oriented: its participants usually base their involvements on a particular goal – either punishment for the targeted public officer or the confession of its deception by a targeted government.

This chapter takes the protest as the theme because, first, it is a general term capable of covering both online and offline grassroots collective actions targeting local governments/officials, and, second, rather than the large-scale social movements or revolutions that assume claims of broad political change, the protest may better represent those grassroots, localized, and small-scale collective actions with very specific claims and targets. We may see, historically, a trend in Chinese bottom-up collective actions, which have been transforming from being organized to being spontaneous, from being national, large-scale, to being local and small-scale. In the early twenty-first century in China, local, spontaneous, reactive protests with specific claims and targets are the main form of Chinese bottom-up collective action.

A protest could be viewed as a process in which a trigger first emerges, then the actors respond to the trigger in terms of real actions, and finally protestors disband after success is achieved. Without a trigger and without the actors' response to the trigger, a protest would not happen. Other types of collective action, such as riot, rebellion, demonstration, petition, strike and HFSE, can be viewed as different collective responses in protests to the triggers that assume injustice: the strike is the response by workers to unpaid wages; the rebellion is sometimes the response by peasants against heavy taxation and land expropriation; and the government/official-focused HFSE is the response of Chinese Internet users to official corruption and government deception. Since the government/official-focused HFSE and other subtypes of protest (riot, rebellion, demonstration, petition and strike) are similarly triggered by injustice, it is necessary to examine if there is offline protest that would largely match the process of HFSE. This examination can help not only answer if HFSE has offline examples (there is definitely no offline protest exactly as same as the HFSE due to the online-offline difference but we could define the match to some degree that allows the existence of difference, say 80 per cent), and also establish the online-offline relationship between HFSE and other subtypes of protest and identify the major differences between online and offline protests.

This chapter is organized around the ideas above. The general category of collective action in this chapter is protest. First, 20 well-documented cases of HFSE are given, which can be

classified into politically-focused (government/official-focused) and non-politically-focused (non-government/official-focused) HFSEs; in light of their different aims, they can also be classified into three different types of HFSE. Then, the political dimension of HFSE is focused: the internal processes of the six cases, representative, respectively, of riot, rebellion, demonstration, strike, petition, and HFSE (as a subtype of protest), are examined, and their characteristics are summarized via diagrams in terms of the stages that are displayed. After this, a matching strategy is applied to finding out among the five representative cases of offline protest if there is an offline equivalent of HFSE. Finally, the pattern of the government/official-focused HFSE is built up according to the conclusions of the online-offline comparison.

Different types of HFSE

As previously identified, HFSE is more than merely online bullying of individuals by online vigilantes; it can also take on a political dimension. However, there is no readily available database classifying the different types of HFSE. How many are focused on office holders and how many on members of the public? This section examines 20 well-documented cases of HFSE (between 2001 and 2011) to establish for the first time how many cases have been focused on wrongdoings by public officials and how many on non-political subjects. While the issues addressed by HFSE vary widely, it can be defined as follows. In simple terms a HFSE involves a group of Internet users working together (in a variety of ways), using their contacts (on and off the Internet) and conventional search engines to achieve a common goal (broadly defined). Often triggered in response to wrongdoing or transgression of generally accepted norms (but not exclusively so) they aim to dig out information and expose it to the public in order to solicit some form of redress. HFSE involves the pattern of crowdsourcing, which means that separately designated tasks in any job are outsourced to an undefined, generally large group of people through an open call (Howe 2006a). The following table shows basic information of the 20 cases of HFSE, which have been identified through systematic searching. The search for possible cases started with an Internet search. Google was the most frequently used Internet search engine to look for foreign material about HFSE, and Baidu, a Chinese search engine was used to look for relevant Chinese material. The main keywords for using searching engine are ‘Human Flesh Search Engine’ in English and ‘人肉搜索’ in Chinese. The Nexis database is also used to look for English coverage on HFSE.

Table 5.1: The Twenty cases of HFSE

Types of HFSE	Number	Date	The Aim
Non-government/official-focused HFSE	12	2001	Fact checking of an announcement by an Internet user on the Mop online forum (Wang and Zhang 2008a)
		Feb.2006	Tracking down a kitten abuser (Chen 2006; Cai 2006)
		April 2006	Tracking down an online gamer with nickname <i>tong xu</i> who had allegedly committed infidelity (No author 2006)
		Aug. 2006	Tracking down pornographic photographer (Dong and Liu 2006)
		April 2007	Tracking down a man Qian Jun who had insulted an old man on street (Wang and Zhang 2008a)
		Aug. 2006	Tracking down a foreigner hurling insults at Chinese people (Xu 2008)
		2007	Fact checking the credibility of news by national TV station (Wang, H. Y. 2008; Zhong and Guo 2008)
		Jan.2008	Tracking down a man, Wang Fei, who had allegedly committed marital infidelity (Downey 2010)
		Mar. 2008	Tracking down an online-shopping cheater (Wang and Zhang 2008b)
		Mar. 2008	Tracking down a barbershop owner in Zhengzhou city of Henan province who asked unreasonable prices from his customers (Zhang et al. 2008)
		May 2008	Tracking down a girl Gao Qianhui (her online nickname is Zhang Ya) who had insulted earthquake victims (Fletcher 2008)
		Oct. 2008	Tracking down a girl Guo Ziyin sold by her father to pay off his debt (Guo Ziwang 2008)
Government/official-focused HFSE	8	Oct. 2007	Fact checking the credibility of Shaanxi government's announcement about existence of the South China tiger (Shan 2007)
		June 2008	Tracking down a woman, with an online nickname <i>ju hua xiang xiang</i> , allegedly having affair with a government officer (Wu 2008)
		Nov. 2008	Tracking down a corrupt government officer Zhou Jiugeng (Xi 2009)
		Nov. 2008	Tracking down a government officer Lin Jiexiang shown in online footage assaulting a little girl (Feng 2008)
		Dec. 2009	Tracking down government officers whose names were shown in a document recording details of their luxury trips to foreign attractions (Hartono 2009)
		Feb. 2009	Fact checking police announcement about the investigation result of the death of a prisoner Li Minqiao in Jinning county prison in Yunnan province (Zhang, Z. 2009)
		June 2009	Fact checking government's announcement about the appointment of a young man Zhou Senfeng as the mayor of a city in Hubei province (Wang, H. Z. 2009)
		June	Fact checking police's announcement about a young woman Deng Yujiao sentenced to jail

		2009	for her having stabbed a local official to death (Herold 2011)
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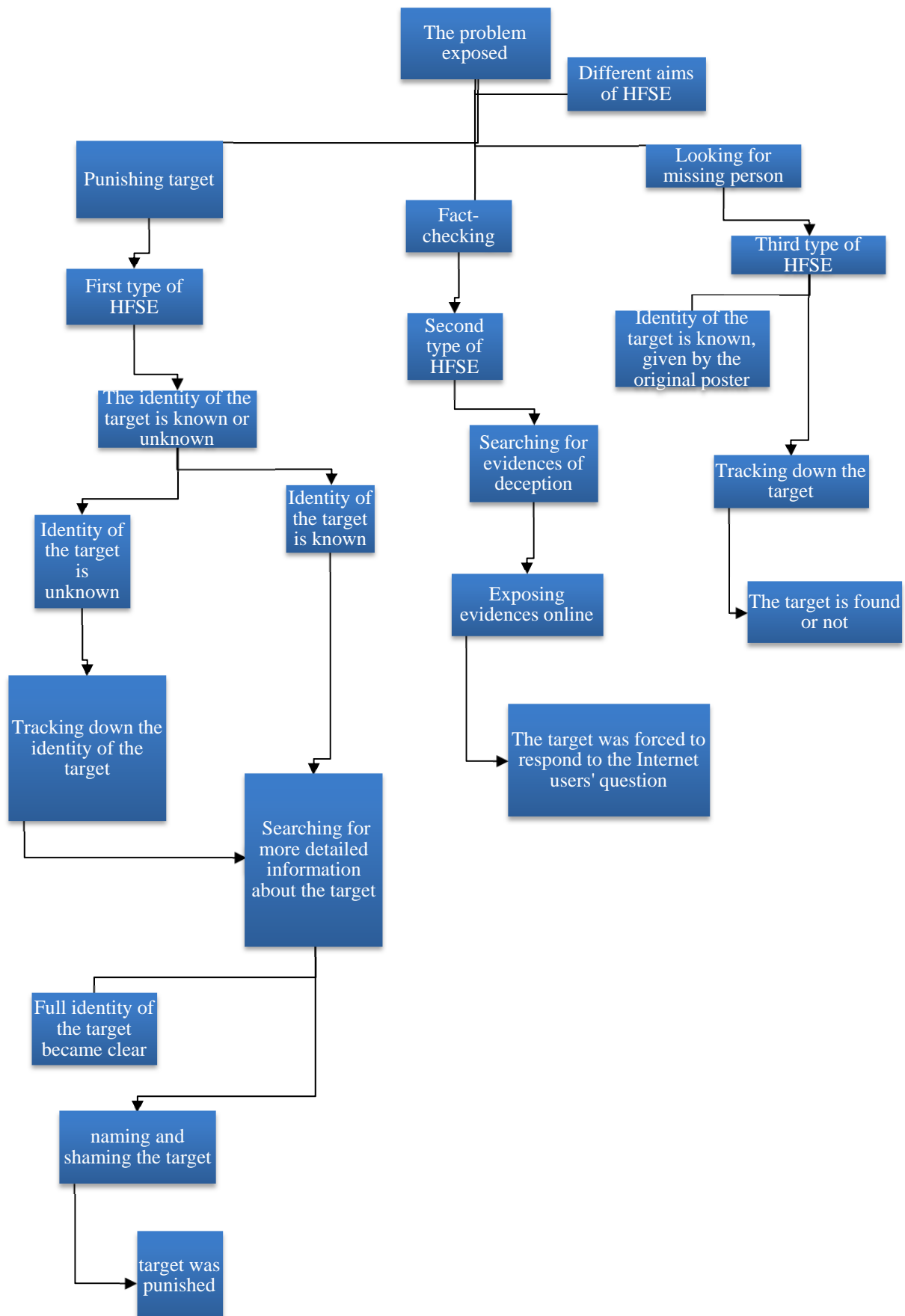
Empirically, there are more than 20 examples, but only these listed here have been carefully triangulated (see the introduction of triangulation in the Methodology chapter) and could be corroborated through multiple sources. Among these cases listed above, there are 12 non-government/official-focused HFSEs and 8 government/official-focused ones. For the former type, the aims vary from tracking down immoral citizens, to fact-checking credibility of an announcement made by a member of the public, the news content of national media, to looking for missing person; while for the latter type, the aims range from tracking down government officials for misconduct (e.g. corruption) to fact-checking credibility of official announcements.

Besides being classified into the government/official-focused and non-government/official-focused HFSEs, based on the details of the 20 cases listed in Table 5.1, HFSE can also be classified into three types according to the aim that HFSE is used for. Basically, the aims include punishing a target (either government officials or members of the public), checking the credibility of a publicized announcement (made by either a local government or a citizen) or the news content of national media (e.g. CCTV), and looking for missing person (e.g. a family member). The reason why HFSE is classified in this way is that the HFSEs with different aims usually involve different processes. The HFSE with the aim of punishing a target usually has five stages, including particularly the stage of naming and shaming, which the other two types do not have; for the HFSE used to look for missing person, it displays the simplest process of HFSE: starting with the personal information (e.g. photo, name, physical traits) of the missing person exposed online by his/her relative(s), followed by the Internet users' tracking down via their online and offline contacts, and ending with the conclusion about whether or not the missing person could be found.

The first reported case of HFSE was under the type of fact-checking, in which an Internet user claimed on an online forum that the girl Chen Ziyao was his girlfriend and posted photos of her; others questioned his claim and tried to find out the real identity of Chen Ziyao; as more and more personal information about Chen Ziyao was exposed, she was shown to be a model working for the Microsoft company. Fact-checking HFSE has also focused on official announcements, such as the South China Tiger event. In this even the Shaanxi government's

announcement of the existence of wild South China Tiger (a tiger subspecies that was native to southern areas of China and has been classified as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature since 1996; no official or biologist has seen a wild South China tiger since the early 1970s) provoked questions from both Internet users and offline media, and the Shaanxi government was forced to confess its deception after the relevant evidence was exposed by Internet users. Fact-checking HFSE also focused on the news content of national media, such as the CCTV, which, along with the Xinhua News Agency, is seen as the most authoritative media in China. A girl interviewed in a news programme by the CCTV and the journalist of this news programme were tracked down by the Internet users who were suspicious about whether or not what the girl said in the interview was scripted by the CCTV journalist. Target-punishing HFSE have targeted both corrupt government officials and immoral members of the public (e.g. those who had abused animals or elderly people, or had insulted the victims of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake). HFSE have been used to look for missing persons is illustrated by the case of Guo Ziyin, in which Ziyin's elder brother tried to get help from Internet users to locate his sister, who had been sold by his father to pay off his debt. The following diagram integrates the three types of HFSE, showing their different processes.

Diagram 5.1: The processes of the three types of HFSE



HFSE and the other five types of collective action (riot, rebellion, demonstration, petition, and strike) are different responses to the triggers of protest; the three types of HFSE are also different responses to the problems which also display certain kinds of injustice. For example, the first type of HFSE is a response to corruption and immorality, the second type of HFSE is a response to the official dishonesty and the third type of HFSE is a response to the offline police's incompetence of helping people out of trouble.

As shown by the diagram above, online exposure is the common stage for all the three types of HFSE (online exposure is the second stage, after the trigger emerged offline, which will be discussed in the following comparison of HFSE and offline protests). After the second stage online exposure, the processes of the three type of HFSE diverge according to their different aims. For the target-punishing HFSE, there are differences in how the process could unfold. In some cases, the identity of the target was given initially, such as the case of Zhou Jiugeng that started with an Internet user publishing a posting on a local online forum to question Zhou's remark on a local news programme about the real-estate market. In this situation, the third stage tracking down does not involve finding out who the target is through exploring clues from the initial picture or video, which is the key part of the third stage in the situation where the identity of the target was initially unknown to the Internet users who then need to discover the identity of the target before they proceed to the stage of naming and shaming. Under both situations, however, full identity of the target is necessary prior to the common stages naming and shaming and punishment.

For the fact-checking HFSE, the aim is not punishing but forcing the target to confess the deception. Sometimes, the confession is accompanied by the punishment. In the case of the South China Tiger, the local government had to confess its deception after the Chinese Internet users had proved that the tiger photos taken by the local government as evidence of the existence of the wild South China Tiger had been faked, leading to several public officers in the local government being dismissed. But not all cases of fact-checking HFSE ended with the punishment of the target, such as the case of Chen Ziyao in which the target who had claimed Chen was his girlfriend provided redress by publishing online an statement confessing he had lied, and the case in which news content by the CCTV was questioned by Chinese Internet users but with no evidence that the CCTV has given any response. The difference between the target-punishing HFSE and the fact-checking HFSE is that, for the former, the punishment is its general aim, and for the latter, the punishment is better viewed as the by-product of the Internet users' action rather than their initial aim. Moreover, the

target of the target-punishing HFSE is usually the individual person, making punishment more feasible than the fact-checking HFSE, in which the target is usually the government or the police rather than individuals (among the six cases of fact-checking HFSE listed in table 5.1, there is only one with the target of an individual person while the others involve such targets as the CCTV, the local government or the local police). With respect to HFSE used to look for a missing person, as illustrated by the case of Guo Ziyin, the full identity of the target was initially available, provided by the people who wanted to get help from the Internet users to locate their lost family members, thus this type of HFSE may simply involve the middle stage of tracking down and the final stage where the missing person is found (or not found, for the case of Guo Ziyin, there has been no information about whether Ziyin has been found).

The aim of this section is to give a full picture of the HFSE phenomenon through piecing together its different types. The next section focuses on the political dimension of HFSE, by comparing the government/official focused HFSE with those offline protests to find out if there is offline equivalent of HFSE and establish the relationship between online and offline, bottom-up collective actions in the early twenty-first century in China. While the offline examples of Chinese bottom-up collective action that aim to check the credibility of announcements made by authorities are not easy to detect, the offline protests similar to government/official-focused HFSEs focusing on local governments and officials can frequently be seen in news coverage by both domestic and foreign media. As seen in Chapter 3, the focus is still the bottom-up collective action, but instead of embracing a historical perspective, this chapter looks at Chinese bottom-up collective actions in the most recent years (2000-2012) from a comparative perspective. The grassroots, localized, small-scale and spontaneous popular protests have been the main form of bottom-up collective action in this period and they share common dynamics with the government/official-focused HFSE. But common dynamics do not necessarily mean the same process and also are unable to reveal the online-offline relationship underlying bottom-up collective action in recent years (exploring the online-offline relationship is meaningful only when all the cases under investigation happen during the period that the Internet has been available, because the main question here is why, with the availability of the Internet, why some protests go online and others offline). So two questions remain unresolved: one is to what degree the process of government/official-focused HFSE is similar to that of those offline protests (the greater the degree is, the more convincingly we could conclude that HFSE has an offline equivalent);

another one is that, with the availability of the Internet, why some protests went offline and others online. The second question would be helpful in explaining the exact role of the Internet in HFSE (as stated in the Chapter 3, the Internet is not decisive for the occurrence of HFSE, but it may take significant part in its process).

Six cases of Chinese offline popular protest and their processes

I used several key words (e.g. protest, riot, rebellion, collective violence, strike and sit-in) to search for instances of Chinese popular protest on the Nexis database, but this does not mean that the analytical types of popular protest shown in this chapter match these key words. The language used to search for cases may differ from the language used in academic analysis. With respect to this research, the language used in case searching aims to find as many instances of Chinese popular protest as possible in order to make sure that the cases selected for analysis could be representative of all the others as much as possible. So the key words could be viewed only as quantitative categories. The usage of language in analysis should consider issues of conceptualization and categorization, making sure of the qualitative difference among the analytical categories. For example, collective violence could be seen in most examples of protest, e.g. riot and rebellion, so it can be used in searching for cases of popular protest, as some journalists mentioned collective violence when describing the process of a protest. But we should treat the collective violence as only a quantitative rather than a qualitative category because collective violence is usually only one part or one stage of a protest. It is unable to represent a sub-category of protest that involves a whole process broadly defined as, first, a trigger emerging, then actors responding to the trigger and, finally, the outcome. But due to the fact that journalists may in their reports name a protest differently and view the popular protests from a different perspective, we'd better to include the term 'collective violence' when searching but exclude it when analysing. For another example, sit-in is the key word used in searching for examples of popular protest; but after examples under this key word were collected, it became clear that examples of sit-in that happened in China shared lots of similarities with a strike, mainly participated in by the teachers or workers who asked for increased salaries and improved working conditions. Thus the 'sit-in' is grouped into the analytical category 'strike'.

Sartori's Ladder of Abstraction is insightful for the process of conceptualization. According to Sartori, a significant aspect of the relationship between the meaning of concepts and the range of cases to which they apply can be understood in terms of a 'ladder of generality'

(Collier and Levitsky 1997). This ladder is based on a pattern of inverse variation between the number of defining attributes and number of cases. Thus, the concept of collective action with fewer defining attributes commonly applies to most cases and is therefore at the top of the ladder (the whole ladder can be viewed as a family of collective action); the protest, with more attributes than collective action, which is labelled with additional attributes – ‘grassroots’ and ‘against those in power’ – lies within the concept of collective action on the ladder; riot, rebellion, demonstration, strike, petition, and HFSE all have more attributes than protest – the government/official-focused HFSE is an Internet-based protest – they thus come at the bottom of the ladder.

It is necessary to mention here the diminished subtypes of protest. According to Collier and Levitsky (1997), the diminished subtypes, in the case of democracy, are not full instances of democracy; in other words, the diminished subtypes of democracy refer to those countries that lack one or more attributes of democracy, such as full suffrage and full contestation. Identifying diminished subtypes is to increase differentiation and avoid conceptual stretching. For this research, the protest is viewed as a device used by powerless people to confront the authority over issues related to citizens’ basic interests but which are damaged or ignored by the authority (precising the definition of protest is also a manner of avoiding conceptual stretching). Under this précised definition of protest, the non-government/official-focused HFSE can be seen as diminished subtype of protest, some incidents of which, e.g. those condemning immorality of certain members of the public, are collective action and fit the generally defined concept of protest that is a statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something, but meantime lacks one key attribute of the protest defined in this research, namely a confrontation between citizens and authority. Similarly, some incidents of Chinese offline protest, such as when citizens in 2008 boycotted the French retailer Carrefour over their pro-Tibet stance (Jacobs and Wang 2008) and Internet users protested in 1998 about high connection fees with a boycott of China Telecom (No author 1998), fit the generally defined concept of protest, but they are not examples of confrontation between citizens and authority. These incidents above can be grouped as non-government/official-focused protest, which, in this research, is a diminished subtype of protest and excluded from the following comparison in order to increase the similarity of the compared cases. But what cannot be ignored is that identifying the diminished subtypes of a given concept is helpful for making sense of the complexity of the concept and creating new analytic categories. However,

in this research, as the political dimension of HFSE is the focus, only the protests involving confrontation between citizens and the authority are used.

The following sections give details of the six cases representative, separately, of riot, rebellion, demonstration, strike, petition, and HFSE (government/official focused).

Weng'an Riot

Riot is an incident in which dozens, hundreds, or thousands of persons gather – either with or without prior planning – and use violence to injure or intimidate their victims. Violence here is the infliction of pain, injury or damage to persons or property. Riots ... usually involved two groups of citizens battling each other, but they also could consist of groups attacking isolated individuals or groups confronting the official forces of order. (Feldberg, 1980, p.1)

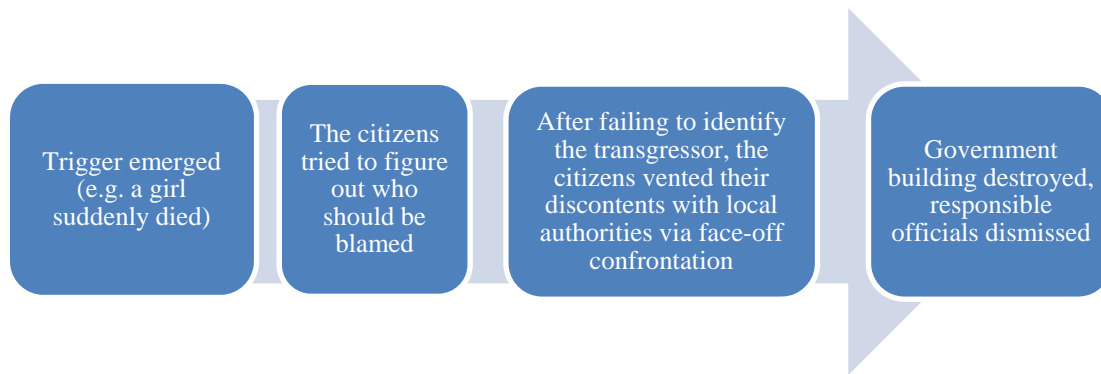
Weng'an is a small county in Guizhou Province, which is one of the poorest provinces in China. Before 2008 it was little known to the public. However, it became famous because of a riot that happened in 2008. This riot has been widely reported in domestic and international media. On the 28 June 2008, thousands of people walked along a street, protesting against the local government and police, and then besieged the government buildings and police station, throwing bricks at these buildings, destroying nearby vehicles, and attacking government officials (Ding 2008). This riot resulted in more than 160 offices and 40 vehicles being destroyed and more than 150 people hurt (Xiong 2008a). The trigger was a teenage girl who was found dead on the early morning of 22 June 2008 in a river that ran across the centre of Weng'an County. This girl's name was Li Shufen, whose female friend first informed Shufen's parents via a phone call that Shufen had jumped into the river. Then Shufen's family found her body and immediately reported this to the local police. They put Shufen's body on the bridge over the river, waiting for the police investigation. That evening, the police declared that Shufen had died of drowning. Shufen's female friend and the other two boys, who were with Shufen just before she jumped into the river, were set free by the police as it was claimed that there was no evidence to confirm that the three teenagers had anything to do with Shufen's death (Xiong 2008b). This first incurred suspicion among the public in Weng'an, who felt that there might be a cover-up.

Shufen's family was not satisfied with this result and refused to inter her body until the police could give a convincing result from their investigation. During the period from 23 June to 1 July 2008, Shufen's body was put in an ice coffin on the riverside, which worked as an exhibition, attracting people who wanted to know what had happened. The local police, even though facing Shufen's family's question, did not conduct any further investigation.

Meanwhile, rumours around this girl's death started to spread and quickly covered the whole county (Qian 2008), the creation and spreading of which reflected people's determination to find out the truth of what led to Shufen's death as they could not get any convincing answer from the local authorities. The riverside became a camp where people who were discontented with local authorities gathered. They talked about not only this girl's death, but also other issues that had caused their discontent, such as the local government's over-exploitation of natural resources in Weng'an, forced house demolition and declining social security (Qian 2008).

As the questioning from the public intensified, more and more people gathered on the riverside; the local police conducted two more autopsies of Shufen's body and further confirmed that she had died of drowning. This however did not help calm the public uproar, which reached its peak on 28 June 2008 when the police issued a notification asking Shufen's family to bury the body as soon as possible. Seeing that the police could not give a satisfactory result in the five days since the girl died and the spreading rumours having failed to figure out who to blame for the 'murder', the citizens in Weng'an turned to the local government and police. In the afternoon on 28 June, a small group of teenage students who first started their protest on street moved toward the government building and the police station; more and more people joined and, when they arrived, they began to destroy the government building, burn nearby cars, attack the officials and armed policemen who came to stop them (Hou 2012). It was only after Shufen's father told the crowd that he had made an agreement with the local authorities on how to deal with Shufen's body, that the protestors gradually dispersed (Wang 2010). The chief of the Weng'an Public Security Bureau and secretary of Weng'an Politics and Law Committee were dismissed for malfeasance; later on, the head of Weng'an County and secretary of Weng'an Party Committee were all dismissed for not having handled properly the social conflicts and government-public relation in Weng'an (He and Shi 2008).

Diagram 5.2: Stages of Weng'an Riot



Bobai villagers' rebellion against one-child campaign

The rebellion is an 'expression of alienation from socially present authorities. ... (rebellion) is a manifestation of expressive alienation and has the quality of hatred or sullenness' (Stinchcombe 1964); as long as individuals live together under the authority of sovereign governments, rebellion will be employed as a strategy of resistance (Weinstein 2007, p. 350); some clarifying distinctions can be made between riots, rebellions, and revolutions: riots are unsustained violence, rebellions are sustained violence; revolutions are defined by the amount of social change produced and are not necessarily violent. (Petersen 2001, p. 14).

While the riot is more an expression of discontent with authority, the rebellion is an expression of resistance against existing rules, orders or policies and, as evidenced by the Bobai rebellion, it is sustained and involves collective violence. Among all China's state policies, the one-child policy is unique to mainland China. Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping issued on 25 September 1980 an 'open letter' to all members of the party and the Communist Youth League, urging them to take the lead in having only one child. From then on, the one-child policy was formally implemented, first among government officials who would be dismissed if they gave birth to their second child, then among the citizens who would be severely fined for violating the one-child policy. Implementing the one-child policy particularly in rural China has incurred widespread complaints from peasants who believe that more family members mean more labourers and better future. And the Chinese traditional culture of treating woman as inferior to man has encouraged many rural families to keep giving birth to children until a boy is born.

The rebellion over the one-child policy in the Bobai County of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (the Zhuang are an ethnic minority in China) was not an isolated event but consisted of a series of conflicts between the villagers and local governments in dozens of township in Bobai County in May 2007 (Xu, Y. 2007). In the spring of 2007, Bobai county government, which had lax enforcement of the one-child policy over the past years, suddenly launched a

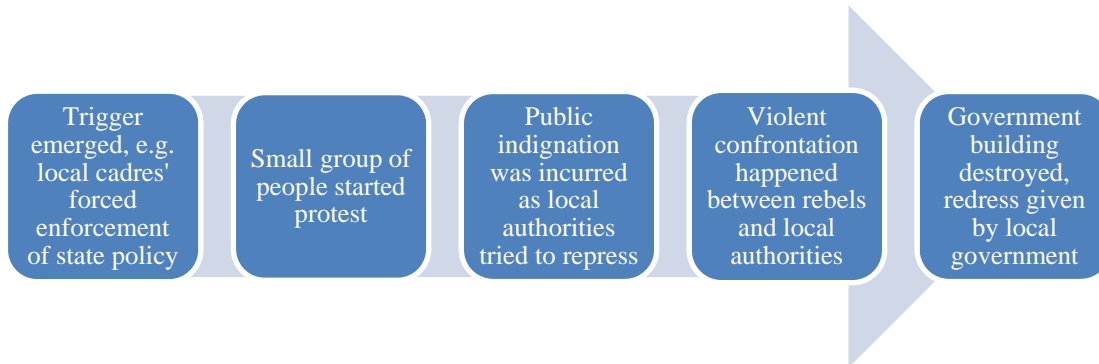
campaign by introducing tough new measures against family planning violation: financial penalties were thus increased and parents who failed to pay would be punished by having their property confiscated or destroyed; 'family planning work squads' were established to collect penalties retrospectively; women who had given birth to more than two children were asked to undergo sterilization; cadres from other government departments irrelevant to family planning were called to collect fines among villages (Watts 2007); pregnant women who lacked the approval to give birth were forced to undergo abortions; cadres were assigned a fixed amount of penalties to be collected and a fixed number of women persuaded to have sterilization surgery, which if were not met, the cadres themselves would be punished (Lei and Liang 2007).

At the beginning of May 2007 there had been several conflicts between villagers and cadres due to rude behaviour from the cadres when collecting fines from villagers' homes. The few rich families were free from the rude treatment after they had paid the fines but, for the majority, the poor families that could not afford fines, they had to see their houses destroyed and furniture smashed. Among a series of confrontations, a rebellion that happened on 19 May 2007 in Shapi Township was the most violent one that started after a work team bulldozed the house of a poor farmer who could not afford the fine (Watts 2007). This farmer reportedly went to the municipal office to complain but returned with three broken fingers, stirring up indignation within his community. During this single rebellion, thousands of peasants besieged the Shapi government; they broke through government buildings, then ransacked offices, smashed computers and destroyed documents, set fire to the buildings, turned over official vehicles, and clashed with riot police (Zhang and Liang 2007).

In Dunbu township on 17 May, two dozen officials, dressed in uniforms and carrying electric cattle prods, barged into a small store and demanded that the owner pay an overdue fine or his inventory would be carried off; neighbours then quickly gathered around, and scores of police were sent to back up the family planning cadres; by the end of that evening, thousands of villagers and hundreds of policemen violently confronted each other near the Dunbu government building, leading to several villagers and policemen being injured (Cody 2007). By the 22 May, calm finally returned to Bobai County after the local government announced it had suspended the one-child campaign; meanwhile, the Guangxi Autonomous Region government organized 28 work teams consisting of about 4200 cadres, under the leadership of the deputy secretary of Guangxi provincial party committee, to visit villages to resolve conflicts through face-to-face communication with villagers (Zhang and Liang 2007). Those

one-child-policy posters written in rude tones in Bobai County public areas were changed to new ones that were more polite and moderate (Lei and Liang 2007).

Diagram 5.3: Stages of Bobai Rebellion



Shanghai truckers' strike

Unlike the peasant revolt, which was inseparable from the seigniorial system, the strike was invented as it was not inseparable from any particular occupation ..., striking spread from skilled to unskilled workers, from large factory to small firms, from withholding labour to the withholding of produce, from industry to agriculture..., strikes could be employed in combination with other forms: occupations, marches, industrial sabotage, petitions and legal actions. From a spontaneous withdrawal of labour, the strike became the means through which workers built and expressed solidarity, put pressure on opponents, sought external support. (Tarrow 1994, p.106)

The labour strike is as common in China as it in western countries. It is a social phenomenon derived from industrialization that has brought about the increasing number of factories established and the demand for more labour. Although its course of industrialization is several-decades later than in western countries, China is equally unable to avoid labour strikes, an accompanying element and inevitable outcome of industrialization all over the world. However, on the micro level, there is a basic distinction of labour strike between China and western countries. In western countries, a labour union is a part of the whole political atmosphere but independent of the political system; the leaders of labour unions have their weight in political elections and policy making, but they have complete control over their own agenda and conducts. Therefore, labour unions in western industrial countries are able to exert pressure on government on labour-related issues. Besides negotiating with government and politicians, organizing labour strikes is their main method of producing pressure. In sum, labour strikes in western countries are usually organized, independent and powerful.

In China there are labour unions in nearly every factory; it is an internal department of the factory, with the role of mainly organizing workers for recreation and organizing meetings

where workers together learn about state policies and party guidelines. There is a national trade union, 'The All-China Federation of Trade Unions', which is a party-led institution. Labour unions in China are either dependent on government or have nothing to do with labour politics, and are not approved to organize any labour strike. Therefore, as analysed in Chapter 3, labour strikes in China are usually spontaneous, unsustained and thus have much less influence on government's decision making. Although labour disputes in China have been quickly expanding and intensifying, Chinese workers have not placed much hope on labour unions but simply stopped working for a few days and then got back to work with or without redress from factory managers or local governments.

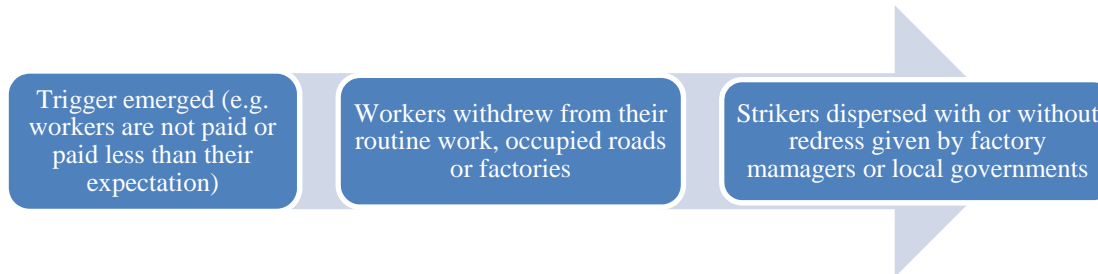
The Shanghai truckers' strike is one of the most recent examples illustrating the status quo of labour strike in China. Shanghai is a harbour city with an advanced logistics industry that has employed numerous independent lorry and truck drivers, whose profits depend on not only their employers but also the petrol market. On 20 April 2011, thousands of lorry drivers stopped their working for the ports of Shanghai and parked their lorries on main roads connecting the ports, cutting off transportation and disrupting the flow of goods in protest against the Shanghai government's inaction about the rising cost of diesel that made it impossible for them to make ends meet (Hook 2011).

The strike started on 20 April and lasted until the 23rd, during which there were no banners, no slogans, truck drivers used their own way of addressing their claim: let the trucks and transportation be paralysed (Yan 2011). On the 21st, the Shanghai police took away several drivers, which caused confrontation between drivers and police; on the 22nd, as more policemen came, lorry drivers threw stones and bricks at the police and destroyed several vehicles of non-strikers (Lee and Chan 2011); on the 23rd, strikers dispersed as the Shanghai government announced calls to container shipping centres to cancel or reduce a range of fees, including those for unloading containers, road tolls, and higher charges for night-time loading (Hook 2011).

Shenzhen, China's manufacturing heartland, has witnessed frequent strikes by factory workers. In the middle of 2011, strikes had been rippling from factory to factory. Outside Merry Electronics in Shenzhen, in early June, workers spontaneously blocked the road, triggered by the fact that their employers did not pay overtime rates for work at weekends but demanded that they work seven days a week, 11 hours a day (No author 2010). Most strikers

in China usually deploy this method of gaining attention for their cause and will settle for an assurance that their wages will be paid or will rise modestly.

Diagram 5.4: Stages of Shanghai Strike



Dalian Street Demonstration against PX Project

Unlike strikes, which required some relationship to the withholding of labour or a product to attract supporters, demonstrations could spread rapidly because they were almost infinitely flexible. They could be employed on behalf of a claim, against an opponent, to express the existence of a group or its solidarity with another group, or celebrate a victory or mourn the passage of a leader. Demonstration thus became the classical modular form of collective action. ... demonstrations were legalized. ... Even the role of nonparticipants – the press, the force of order, bystanders and opponents – eventually became part of demonstration ritual. (Tarrow 1994, p. 107)

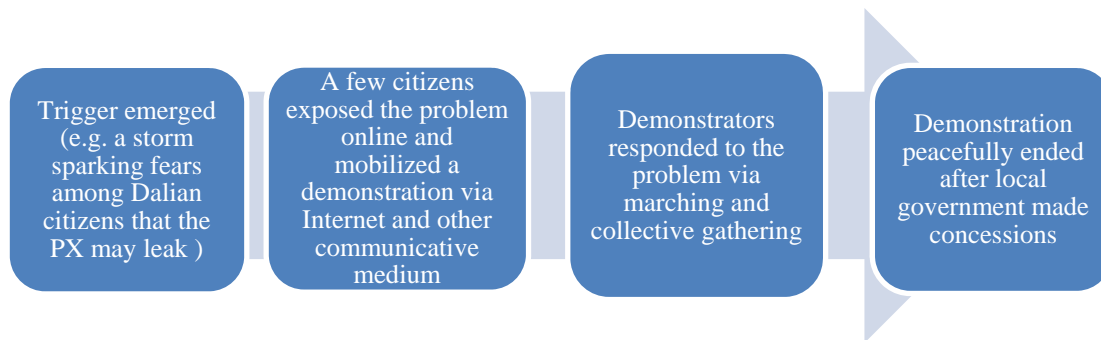
Dalian, the capital of Liaoning province in China witnessed on 14 August 2011 a large-scale street demonstration (involving about ten thousand people) against an existing chemical plant project (No author 2011a). The chemical material concerned was paraxylene (PX), used in fabric manufacture and is a carcinogenic chemical that has huge potential to pollute the environment and damage human health. This plant was built near the sea and its surrounding dyke was breached by a storm, sparking fears among Dalian citizens that the PX may spill, leading to residents taking part in the protest on 14 August. They moved across the city, chanting slogans and waving banners (No author 2011b). Their street demonstration was termed as a ‘group stroll’ that had been frequently used by city residents as a tactic to show discontent with the government. A video on the YouTube shows that a massive crowd gathered in front of the Dalian government building (YouTube 2011a); another one shows a march constituted of thousands of young people who moved slowly along the streets, most of them wearing white T-shirts with the pattern of a bomb and words under it that read ‘Reject PX project, return my Dalian!’ (YouTube 2011b).

Besides the fact that the Dalian demonstration was large-scale and peaceful without violent confrontation between demonstrators and local authorities, the way that people were mobilized sheds light on the power of the Internet and wireless communication in bringing

together people with similar concerns. Dalian Internet users' embrace of text messaging, online chat rooms, Renren (similar to Facebook) and micro-blogs (similar to Twitter) (Watts 2011) helped fuel the Dalian demonstration at its very beginning, then allowed scattered individuals to share their grievances in a way that had never been possible before. A few days before this demonstration, a lot of Dalian citizens including university students and company employees received an email titled 'To Tianjian Net (a government sponsored news website): the scheme of the demonstration on August 14th', in which was written: 'the theme of the activity on August 14th is a large-scale outdoor commonweal activity; it will start at 10 am on the People's Square of the city centre; anyone who is concerned about public health and has social responsibility is welcomed'. This email was posted simultaneously on Douban (a popular online community in China), Renren and Tianjian Forum, and was responded to by numerous Dalian citizens (Zhang 2011). On 13 August, a posting titled '8.14 Dalian environmental strolling on People's Square', with detailed information about strolling time and location as well as calling for people to go to the strolling location on foot or by public transportation, was published on the website of Dalian Hiking Camp (Zhang 2011). Street strolling happened as appointed, participated in by thousands of people who finally gathered in front of the government building, asking for the PX project to be abolished. The crowd dispersed after the Dalian government's leading officials promised in a public speech to give up the PX project.

The Dalian demonstration is similar to one in Xiamen city in Fujian province in which citizens carried out a street demonstration on 1 June 2007 against a PX project under construction. A few days before the demonstration, a text message was spread among the public in which the potential harms of the PX to humans were detailed and a call for street demonstration against the PX project was also clearly made (Le 2007). Thousands of people gathered in front of the government building on 1 July, wearing yellow ribbons and holding banners saying 'Stop PX', 'Safeguard Xiamen', 'No poison, Yes environment' and the like (No author 2007b). This demonstration, similarly, ended peacefully after an official announcement was made in which the Xiamen government decided to suspend temporarily the PX project and launch a new round of assessment of its impact on the environment (Zha 2007).

Diagram 5.5: Stages of Dalian Demonstration



Taishi villagers' petition over land expropriation and corrupt cadres

One of the most common methods for establishing the desires of a group with respect to proposed actions is the petition. Candidates seeking political office, groups concerned with city ordinances and zoning, and groups desiring to influence legislation at the national or international level utilize petition endorsements as evidence of public opinion. (Helson, et al. 1958, p. 3)

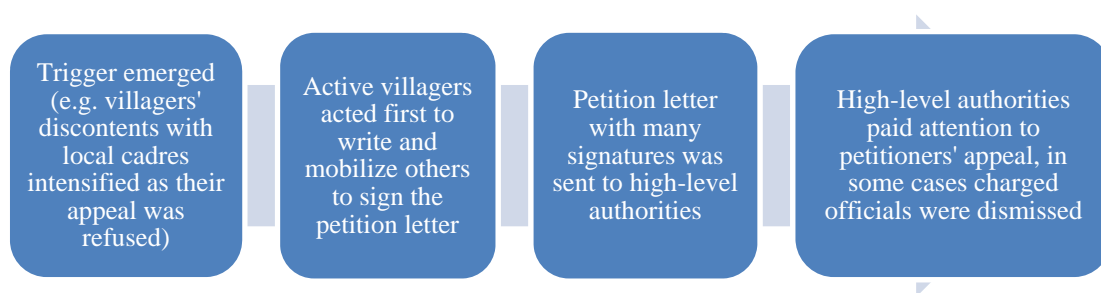
With respect to the Chinese context, the petition as a form of protest has been facilitated largely by the government-established petition system, where petition 'refers to both letters and visits to officials' (Huang 1995, p. 834); the system of petitions, or Xinfang zhidu, has always been an important source of information for policy makers in China: under an authoritarian regime where the press is the voice of the authorities rather than a reflection of public opinion, Chinese policy makers need other channels to obtain objective and truthful information, particularly about the performance of local cadres (p. 834-35). The Taishi petition is a rural protest against, first, land expropriation and then rigged village elections that Taishi villagers thought resulted in corrupt cadres, who were blamed for unjust compensation for land acquisition (Feng 2005). The Taishi villagers desired to influence the election process at the local level by deploying the petition system to present to high-level officials the opinion of the Taishi villagers about their discontent with local cadres.

In April 2005, Chen Jinsheng was re-elected as the head of the Taishi village committee during the third village committee election; in May, Liang Shusheng was elected as the leader of the seventh production team of the village. Before the election, there had been long-term dispute between villagers and local government over land expropriation. Liang, as a team leader, led his fellows to the village committee many times to demand equal distribution of the compensation from land acquisitions, but this was rejected by local cadres, giving the excuse that villagers could not have any share of compensation from expropriation of government land; Liang and others then began to seek 'outside help' and plotted the recall of

the village committee director Chen Jinsheng (Guan 2005), who was blamed for his ‘election bribery’, ‘illegally selling land’ and ‘not explaining where the funds from land sales went’ (No author 2005b).

By the end of July, a petition letter signed by more than 400 villagers (nearly 20 per cent of the whole Tashi population) was submitted to the Panyu government (administrator of Taishi village); however, this was returned by the end of August as the petition letter was copied and not the original (He 2005). In September 2005, a new petition letter of recalling Taishi cadres, signed by more than 800 villagers who made sure of it being the original, was submitted again to Panyu Civil Affairs Bureau (2005). Facing pressure from Taishi villagers’ law-based petitions (petitioners based their claim on the Organic Law of the Villagers’ Committees of the People’s Republic of China, in which if there are more than 20 per cent of a village’s total legal voters asking for recalling local committee members, the township or higher-level government should launch relevant procedures to validate villagers’ complaint), the Panyu Civil Affairs Bureau carefully checked the new petition letter with its 892 signatures, of which 584 were proved to be valid (total population in Taishi was 1502 in 2005). Then the Panyu government organized a work team to audit Taishi village government’s financial activities (Ye 2005). On 20 September 2005, Panyu government announced that most of the problems raised by the Taishi petitioners did not exist; Taishi villagers’ demand for recalling the local cadres was thus not supported (No author 2005b).

Diagram 5.6: Stages of Taishi Petition



The cases above reveal that a trigger is an essential part of the process of an offline protest; the main issues of the contention between citizens and local authorities in the early twenty-first century of China are closely related to citizens’ subsistence, such as the land expropriation, unpaid wages, local cadres’ corruption and non-rightful enforcement of state policies, which have been the main triggers of popular protests in the twentieth century of China. The government/official-focused HFSE, as a form of protest, mainly concerns the

official corruption; from this perspective, it can be seen as an online version of these frequent offline protests, albeit with some differences. In the following sections, how the government/official-focused HFSE differs from the offline protests will be elaborated.

Government/official-focused HFSE and the case of Zhou Jiugeng

Table 5.1 identified 8 cases of the ‘government/official-focused’ HFSE. The following table provides more details on each of these 8 cases.

Table 5.2: Cases of the ‘government/official focused’ HFSE

Types of government/official focused HFSE	Case	Date	Trigger	Target	Result
Target-punishing-	Case 1	Nov.2008	A broadcast news programme showing a public official saying that the government would punish real estate developers who sold houses lower than cost price, which incurred public outrage about the unaffordable house prices in the region.	Zhou Jiugeng, an official who received public criticism first because of his inappropriate remark on the house-price market in an interview	Evidences of Zhou’s corruption were dug out by Internet users, thus he was dismissed and jailed for corruption (Moore 2008)
	Case 2	Nov.2008	CCTV footage showing a man quarrelling with a family and claiming loudly that he was high-level government official and nobody could touch him.	Lin Jiaxiang, who was filmed in a restaurant, showing suspicion of him assaulting a little girl	Lin was identified by Internet users and dismissed due to his rude words and deeds in public (Branigan 2008b)
	Case 3	Dec.2009	Documents found by a Shanghai citizen showing the costs of a trip by a group of government officials and posted on the Internet	Government officials who took luxury trips to foreign attractions.	Officials on this luxury trip were all identified by Internet users, two of them were dismissed and others were given disciplinary warnings
	Case 4	Jun. 2008	A woman posted on Tianya forum a series of photos, showing her luxury life and also messages about her relationship with a high-level government official.	A series of photos showing a woman’s luxury lifestyle	The woman shown in these photos was identified but she denied and asserted she had been played by someone else
Fact-checking	Case 5	Oct.2007	Shaanxi government announced via a news conference that the South China Tiger still existed in its wild areas	Online photos of the South China tiger that had been officially alleged extinct in Shaanxi where these tiger photos originally emerged.	Photos were found to be faked and the photo forger Zhou Zhenglong was thus put in prison.
	Case 6	Jun. 2009	A male master graduate was reported as the youngest	The newly-appointed mayor of	It was proved by both media and Internet

			mayor in China, which incurred online discussion about whether the young man was appointed due to his family background rather than his ability (Xie, L. B. 2009)	Yicheng city in Hubei province of China	users that there was nothing wrong with the mayor's appointment.
	Case 7	Feb.2009	Local police's unconvincing explanation of a prisoner's death (Allegedly, he died when playing 'Hide and Seek' with other prisoners)	The group members organized by Yunan government to investigate the cause of one prisoner's death (Internet users wanted to find out if these members were 'insiders', which may prevent the truth from being uncovered)	Public's question speeded up the investigation on this prisoner's death, two prison guards were charged for malpractice and the dead man's family got compensation
	Case 8	Jun. 2009	A female witness Deng Yujiao had been sentenced to jail for having stabbed a local official to death, which incurred online discussion about her right to violently defend herself from sexual assault by local government officials	Local officials who were reported having sexually assaulted a female waiter Deng Yujiao in a hotel and thus involved in a criminal case	Facing pressure from online uproar and media questioning, local police re-evaluated Deng's case and finally released her after the charge was changed from murder to excessive self-defence and also due to it being medically proved that Deng had a mental illness

Basically, there are two types of government/official-focused HFSE, differentiated according to their different aims: one is punishing the targeted officials and the other fact-checking official announcements. For the first type, Internet users track down corrupt government officials in the hope of getting them punished. For the second type, Internet users search for evidence to make sure whether or not the announcement made by the government or police is credible, or to check if there is an underlying official deception or a cover-up. In the following section, one case of the target-punishing 'government/official-focused' HFSE is presented to show its internal process. This type of government/official-focused HFSE is more comparable to the other five cases of offline protest than the fact-checking government-official-focused HFSE due to the fact that it is easier to detect the online and offline protests that have similar targets of local cadres or governments, but no offline case has been found targeting official announcements. So, based on the fact that the two types of government/official-focused HFSE are bottom-up collective action, as both of them are the response (but in different ways) to the injustice relevant to political issues, it could be argued

that the fact-checking government/official-focused HFSE is uniquely online, to which no offline protest is comparable. But whether or not the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE is uniquely online remains uncertain until the online-offline comparison is finished.

Corrupt official jailed after his careless words lead to evidence of corruption

On 10 December 2008 (Moore 2008), Zhou Jiugeng, the chief of the Real Estate Management Bureau in the Jiangning district of Nanjin City (the capital of Jiangsu province, one of the most developed provinces in China), stated when interviewed by journalists that the Real Estate Management Bureau would closely monitor the real estate market in Jiangning and punish real estate developers who sold houses lower than cost price (due to high house prices, in some cities of China, such as Jiangning, lots of new houses could not be sold, pushing real estate developers to think about other ways such as lowering house prices to relieve the problem of overstock). After Zhou's statement had been widely reported by the media, he became the target of Internet users who were displeased with his insensitivity about house prices that had greatly exceeded ordinary people's affordability – a source of general grievance among the Chinese public (Wang 2011; Wu 2010). People believed that the government should take some measures to lower house prices to a generally-affordable level rather than encourage real estate developers to keep the price high (Zhou's remarks meant to prevent local real estate developers from lowering house prices, while the public hoped that the house prices should be lowered). The indignation spread on the Internet immediately after media reporting. On 11 December 2008, an Internet user nicknamed *xiao hua ban li* posted on an online forum, 'Nanjing Focus Estate Net', the article, 'Eight questions to the chief of Jiangning Real Estate Management Bureau', which was then republished to other online forums, such as Tianya, Kaidi and Mop, three major Chinese Bulletin Board System (BBS) websites. On the same day, another Internet user *xuan chuan ji sheng 9* published on the Kaidi forum an article titled, 'Calling for Internet heroes to track down the chief of the Real Estate Management Bureau: Zhou Jiugeng'. This was then taken as a call to launch an HFSE to target this government official (Zhu 2008). The questioning of Zhou's remark by traditional media started at nearly the same time that Chinese Internet users started to express their doubt online (Yang, M. Q. 2008), but the majority of exposure was done by Internet users.

In the following days, more and more information about Zhou Jiugeng was revealed. On 12 December 2008, an Internet user *bao cun 100 nian* revealed on the Kaidi forum that Zhou smoked luxury brand cigarettes worth 1500 Yuan (roughly USD 238) a pack (Zhu 2008). This Internet user uploaded pictures of Zhou attending a government meeting with a pack of luxury brand cigarettes on the table besides him and commented that a government official on a normal salary could not afford the most expensive brand cigarettes in Nanjing. On 15 December, an Internet user *Cheyoun007* published a post titled ‘Zhou Jiugeng smokes luxury cigarettes and wears an expensive watch.’ *Cheyoun007* found some old newspaper pictures which showed Zhou wearing a Vacheron Constantin watch worth 100,000 Yuan (roughly USD 15,891). The following day, an Internet user *Guo Xinpeng* sent an email to the governor of Jiangning District, reporting Zhou Jiugeng’s misbehaviours and requesting a thorough inquiry into him (Zeng 2009).

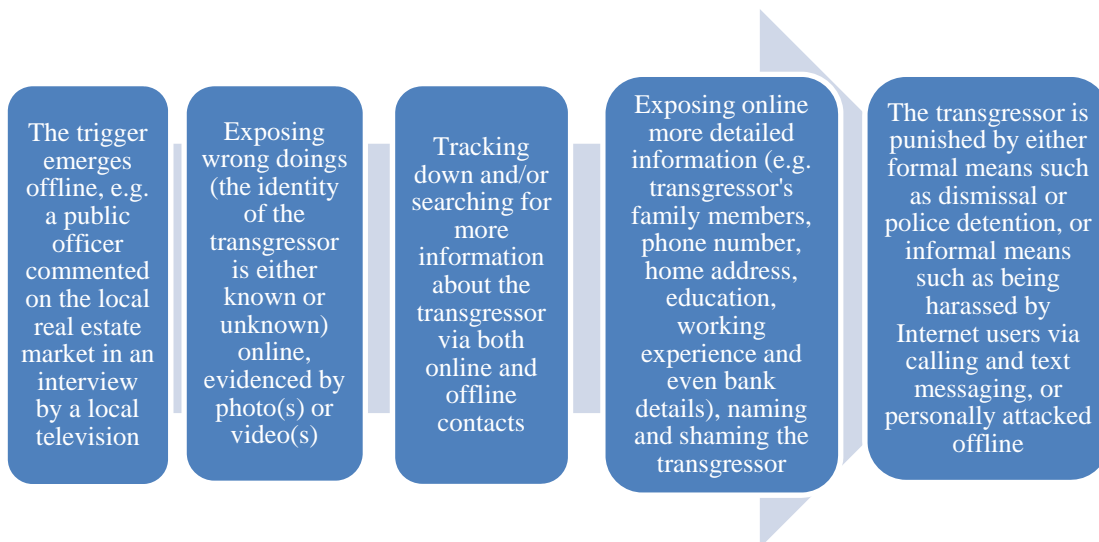
On 17 December, an Internet user *wei da de ren min* revealed that Zhou’s brother was a real estate developer and stressed that Zhou’s remarks on the real estate market was relevant to his brother and intended to protect his family’s interests. On 20 December, ten days after Zhou’s remark was broadcast, the government of Jiangning District first responded to the online uproar by announcing that they had started an inquiry into Zhou Jiugeng. On 28 December 2008, Zhou was dismissed due to his inappropriate remarks and for misusing public funds to buy luxury goods. As the investigation became more detailed, more evidence of Zhou’s corruption surfaced. According to the investigation, from 2003 to 2008, Zhou accepted more than 1 million Yuan (roughly USD 158,916) from others. On 10 October 2009, Zhou was sentenced to 11 years in jail for corruption (Wang and Cai 2009).

Zhou would not have been punished if public attention had focused only on his inappropriate remark on the real estate market, however, it was Internet users, angered by his remark, searching for and finding photos of him which raised suspicions of corruption. The photographs generated public opprobrium about corruption and led Internet users to work together to find more photographic evidence. The example illustrates the way HFSE is used to hold usually unaccountable corrupt officials to account. As noted, official corruption is a major source of public grievance in China; however, it is often unchecked by official sources and official media (Lum 2006). If official channels for removing corrupt officers are not available or not effective, then unofficial channels become an important outlet. The incompetence of the political system in dealing with corruption (Pei 2006) and strictly-censored media environment (Lagerkvist 2005; Zhao 2004) are handicapping official

exposure of corruption and encouraging the Chinese public to look for additional outlets to gain justice.

With regard to the internal process of HFSE, a basic sequential structure can be identified. Each starts with a trigger, that emerges offline, presenting a certain kind of transgressive behaviour, followed by the revelation of the transgression – this is usually in some form of hard evidence, a sound recording, photograph, document or a questionable statement by an official. This initial revelation might be partial or seen as questionable. This provokes the *second phase* – a response from Internet users. If the corrupt official is still unnamed, the second phase initiates the hunt to identify the culprit; if the official is known, it may provoke a trawling for further information. This phase may well vary in timescale but involves frequent requests for information amongst online community members. The move to the *third phase* is triggered by the exposure of more contextualizing information: a name, a rank, the names of others involved who know the official, or evidence that contradicts the government official’s claim. The case can no longer be ignored by officials; they have to respond. This response might well bring the incident to an end but, if justice is not seen to be done, it might provoke further opprobrium and calls for justice. The following diagram displays in more detail the internal process of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE.

Diagram 5.7: Stages of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE



Comparing offline protests and HFSE

Strictly speaking, not all types of HFSE are Chinese bottom-up collective action, such as the type of HFSE that is used to look for missing persons. This is the simplest form of HFSE

with less than 5 stages. Instead of going to the police, some Chinese posted their ask-for-help messages on online forums, in the hope of quickly locating their lost friends, family members or personal belongings. But as its target is not government or public official and thus is not bottom-up collective action, it is excluded from the following comparison that focuses on online and offline protests. Moreover, target-punishing HFSE sometimes targets members of the public, thus cases under this type are also excluded from the online-offline comparison. But no matter what kind of target it involved (government/official-focused or non-government/official-focused), the cases of the target-punishing HFSE tend to have a similar process involving five stages, as displayed in the diagram 5.7. The stage of naming and shaming is the key distinguishing feature between the target-punishing HFSE and fact-checking HFSE; it seems that for Internet users conducting naming and shaming online is necessary and their own way of punishing the transgressor because the Internet amplifies the effect of naming and shaming so that the wrongdoing of the transgressor is known by a nationwide and even global audience, and quickly ruins the reputation of the transgressor, leading to, at least, dismissal from a job, or, worse, detention or jail sentence. So we should view the naming and shaming as not only an essential stage of the target-punishing HFSE but also a way of online punishment initiated and controlled by the Internet users (or we may say the naming and shaming are a personalized way of punishment, as it usually involves online bullying and flaming, which is one reason why the HFSE has been criticized), and is often followed by offline punishment by either the police (where the target was a member of the public, who had been found behaving illegally) or the government (the government that the officer worked for was usually the first to respond). The offline punishment is the final result pursued by HFSE participants, but compared to the online punishment (naming and shaming), the offline punishment is more conditional and depends on whether or not there is a responsive government.

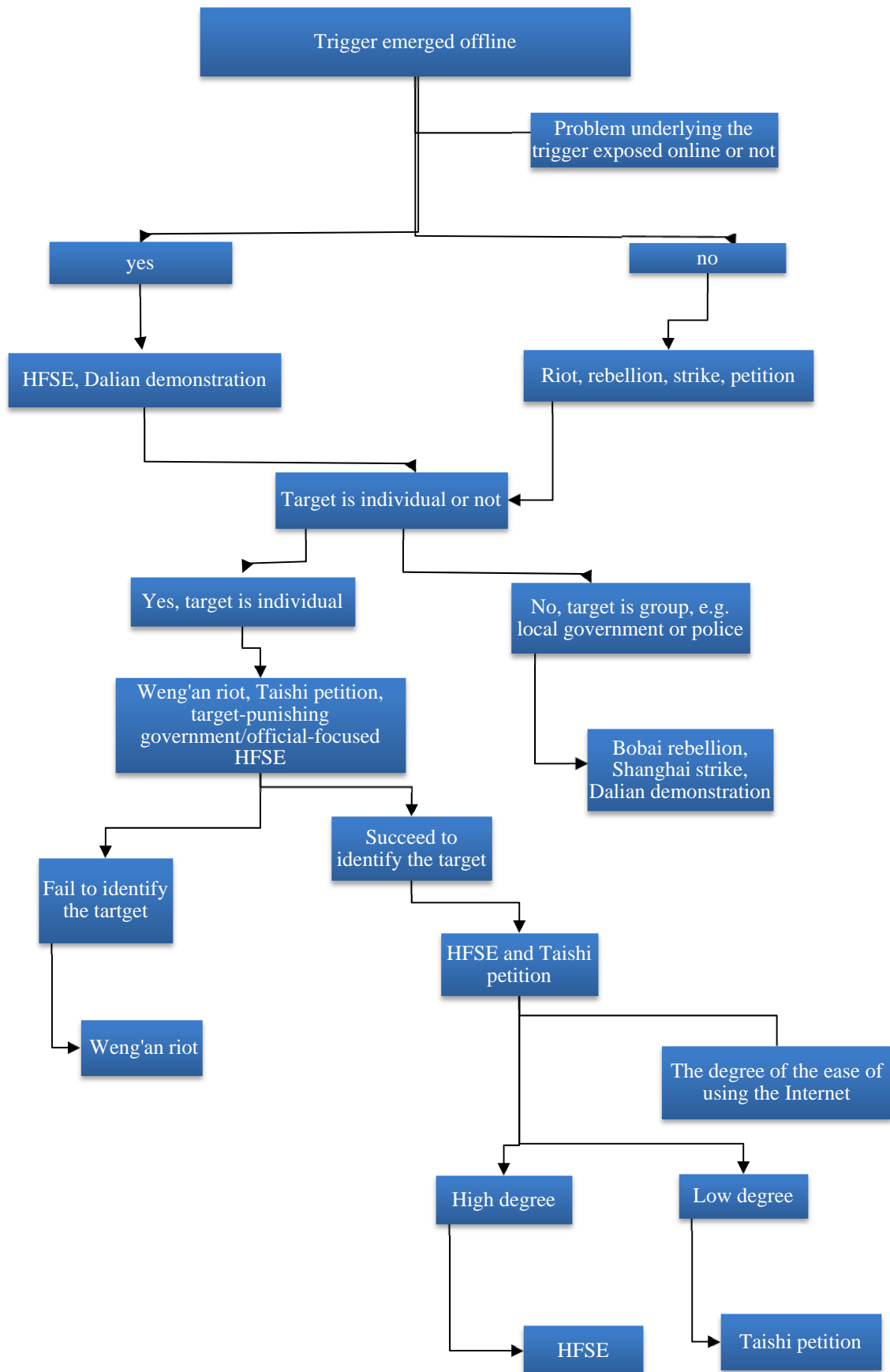
There are similarities among different types of HFSE, but in order to enhance the accuracy of comparison of online-offline Chinese bottom-up collective actions and increase the similarity of cases under comparison, the type of HFSE used to look for missing person is excluded, the target-punishing HFSE targeting the member of the public is excluded and the fact-checking HFSE is also excluded as no offline case has been found comparable. In general, there are three criteria of determining which type of HFSE should be included in the comparison: the aim of HFSE, the target of HFSE and the availability of comparable offline cases. A case of HFSE can be included in the comparison only when it meets the three criteria at the same

time: its aim is confronting authorities not helping others; its target is local government and cadres, not members of the public; it is comparable to offline protests.

Overview of the relationship among six subtypes of Chinese popular protest

Diagram 5.9 shows the relationship among the six subtypes of Chinese popular protest (riot, rebellion, strike, demonstration, petition, government/official-focused HFSE). It also shows to what extent they can match each other. Their relationship is mainly based on the six cases that have been carefully triangulated and substantiated in order to be representative of the others that have been collected but not mentioned here. The above diagrams showing the internal processes of these six cases are generally applicable but not exclusively so, as the internal processes of two examples of riot or rebellion may not be exactly the same, but they all reflect the basic process of a Chinese bottom-up collective action: which is the trigger; actors responding to the trigger (but in different ways); and, finally, relevant authorities response. The following diagram shows the relationship among the six subtypes of Chinese popular protest. Because the availability of the Internet, there is always the possibility that one or more stages of a riot, rebellion, petition, strike, or demonstration could go online. But due to certain and unavoidable facts, some protests (e.g. HFSE) would go online and others (e.g. the Bobai rebellion) stay offline, or one stage of a protest would be online and its other stages would be offline (e.g. the Dalian demonstration).

Diagram 5.8: Relationship among six subtypes of protest



There is a general similarity among the six subtypes of Chinese popular protest, namely the *first stage*. No matter what subtype of protest it is, the trigger usually emerges offline. The trigger of the Weng'an riot is a girl found dead in a river; the trigger of the Bobai rebellion is few peasants bulldozed by local planning cadres; the Shanghai truckers' strike was triggered by raised petrol prices; the Dalian demonstration was triggered by a storm that destroyed the dyke around the PX plant; the Internet-based government/official-focused HFSE was also triggered by an offline event, such as the case of Zhou Jiugeng in which a HFSE call was issued online because of Zhou's remark on the local real estate market, broadcast on a local news TV programme, and the case of Lin Jiaxiang, who was targeted by HFSE after his quarrel with a girl's parents in a restaurant was exposed. But after the first stage, the six subtypes of Chinese popular protest diversify at the second stage according to whether or not the problem underlying the trigger is exposed online.

At the *second stage*, the government/official-focused HFSE and the Dalian demonstration witnessed a few citizens exposing the problem underlying the trigger on the Internet in order to get public support to secure redress. But for the cases of riot, rebellion, strike and petition, actors stayed offline.

At the *third stage*, the Dalian demonstration returned to the offline world and demonstrators responded to the exposed problem by marching on the streets and gathering collectively in front of the government building; for HFSE, the Internet users stayed online by tracking down their target; the cases of riot, rebellion, strike and petition still stayed offline. A key difference between the online and offline protests at this stage is whether or not the target is individual. For the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE and the Taishi petition, their targets are individual public officers; for the cases of rebellion and strike that stayed offline, their targets are groups, such as the local government; for the Dalian demonstration, its transferring from online at the second stage to offline at the third stage could also be explained by the fact that its target is not individual public officer but the government.

Moreover, the Weng'an riot demonstrates that the target being an individual is not enough to make a protest online. If defined narrowly, the Weng'an riot refers to the protest that happened on 28 June 2008, when there was a direct confrontation between Weng'an residents and local authorities; rioters were mobilized by not only the police failing to give a convincing conclusion on how the teenage girl died, but also by existing public discontent with local government and police over issues of house demolition, declining social security, natural

resource exploitation, and so on. If defined broadly, it involves both the direct confrontation on the day and in the period before it, when local residents tried to identify the ‘murderer’ in terms of producing and spreading rumours, which were different explanations of how the girl died. Without this period, the Weng’an riot may not have happened, but if the local residents succeeded in identifying the ‘murderer’ (if he exists) in this period, it could be reasonable to imagine that the Weng’an riot would also not have happened even though there had been general discontent with the local authorities, because protestors need a trigger to symbolize their grievance and justify their action. Without such a trigger, neither the HFSE nor the Weng’an riot need have happened. More importantly, if looking at the Weng’an riot in detail, we might detect the inconspicuous transformation of its target from an individual to a group because the Weng’an residents failed to identify the ‘murderer’. Differing from the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE in which the target, from the beginning to the end, was consistently an individual, the Weng’an riot experienced the change of its target (from individual to group), which may partially explain why the Weng’an riot did not finally go online. Thus the target being an individual and the identity of the target known to actors could be the key attributes of the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE.

The online exposure, the target being individual and the identity of the target known to actors, however, are still not enough to explain how HFSE differs from offline protests, because the Taishi petition illustrates that the degree of ease of using the Internet is also a necessary factor that needs to be considered when exploring how HFSE and offline protests differ. The target of the Taishi petition is the local cadres, the same as the target of the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE. It might be tempting to relate their difference (online-offline) to the availability of the channels for punishing corrupt local cadres, but the channels such as the Chinese petition system is available not only to the rural population but to all Chinese citizens, even though the petition system might have been deployed more frequently by rural ‘rightful resisters’ than their urban counterparts. Then there is an issue about the public trust in the available channels for punishment. We could not conclude that the demographic difference (e.g rural/urban, peasants/non-peasants) between the peasants and the online population has influenced the degree to which a certain group of people trust the available offline channels, because even though it is clear that the participants of the Taishi petition are peasants, we cannot tell exactly the demographic features of the Internet users involved in the government/official focused HFSE (nowadays, the peasant is also a significant part of the Chinese online population) mainly due to the online anonymity. Therefore, the Taishi villagers

resorting to the petition system does not necessarily mean that there is a demographic difference of public trust about the available offline channels for monitoring and punishing local cadres.

But there is a detectable difference between the Taishi petition and the government-official-focused HFSE which may be helpful to explain their online-offline difference. Although the demographic feature of the HFSE participants is not evident, as part of an online population, the HFSE participants as whole have a higher degree of ease in using the Internet than the peasants as a whole. We should not overlook the primary usages of the Internet among Chinese Internet users, which are entertainment (e.g. playing online games, watching movies, listening to music), instant messaging (e.g. online chat, social network) and e-commerce (online shopping) (CNNIC 2012). Internet users may go online primarily for these functions and then encounter a HFSE call somewhere on the Internet, and get involved if they feel an interest. Some of the HFSE participants might be senior ‘netizens’ and others be ‘freshmen’, but on the whole they may have been online before they participate in an HFSE action. On the other hand, the Chinese peasants on the whole face evident limitations of using the Internet: although in general the popularity of the Internet in China has been largely increased, the percentage of rural Internet users (26.5 per cent) still lags far behind their urban counterparts mainly due to the uneven distribution of access to the Internet between rural and urban areas, and the peasants’ lack of computer skills and awareness of using the Internet (CNNIC 2012). Therefore, compared to the Chinese online population as whole, the peasants may have a lower degree of ease in using the Internet.

In sum, there are four basic differences between HFSE and offline protests, which include online exposure, the target being an individual, the identity of the target known to actors and a high degree of ease in using the Internet. They are the essential elements of the pattern that is exclusively for the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE. In the following section, a more detailed comparison among the six subtypes of Chinese popular protest is conducted through a matching strategy to explore if there is an offline equivalent of HFSE.

Is there an offline example of HFSE?

There are two possible conclusions at the end of this section:

- I. If there are cases that match at least 4 stages of the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE (80 per cent similarity level): HFSE does not solely

happen online, under certain conditions, it may happen offline (the similarity level depends on the number of stages: as the online-offline comparison in this chapter is between offline protests and target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE that has five stages, matching four of its stages means an 80 per cent similarity level, but matching four stages of the fact-checking government/official focused HFSE that has four stages means a 100 per cent similarity level);

II. If there is no offline case that reaches the 80 per cent similarity level: the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE solely happens online.

Basically, the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE has five stages. As shown by the diagram 5.9, the six subtypes of Chinese popular protest match each other at their first stage, namely the trigger emerged offline. This means that the online protests originate from offline reasons, and also means that the five cases of Chinese offline protest all match at least 20 per cent of the online protest HFSE. The similarity level is defined here as due to the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE (the only type among all the types of HFSE that not only could be defined as bottom-up collective action but also has comparable offline protests; the fact-checking government/official-focused HFSE could also be defined as bottom-up collective action but has no comparable offline protest) has five stages; if any of the five subtypes of offline protest could match one stage of this type of HFSE, it means that this subtype of offline protest has 20 per cent similarity level, if matching 2 stages, the similarity level is 40 per cent, and so on.

The Weng'an riot with a 40 per cent similarity level The process of the Weng'an riot witnessed the first stage of HFSE, namely the trigger emerging offline. The absence of the second stage online exposure in the Weng'an riot may be about the Weng'an residents' lower degree of ease in using the Internet, evidenced by the data that on average, the rate of the popularity of the Internet in Guizhou Province (under which the Weng'an county is administered) was the lowest among all the provinces in China in 2008 (CNNIC 2008). The absences of the two stages tracking down and naming and shaming may be related to the Weng'an residents' failure to identify the 'murderer' and thus turning to attack the local government and police, which are groups not an individual cadre member, and thus no effort is needed to identify their target by tracking and it is not necessary to conduct naming and shaming which have usually been used for punishing individual transgressors. Finally, like the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE in which the target was punished by

either dismissal or a jail sentence, the final stage of the Weng'an riot also witnessed the target being punished in terms of the government building and police vehicles destroyed, several public officers and riot policemen hurt. In both the Weng'an riot and the HFSE targeting of corrupt public officers, we could see a responsive and correctional attitude by higher-level governments toward misconduct by their local departments and cadres.

The Bobai rebellion with a 40 per cent similarity level The process of the Bobai rebellion matches the first stage of government/official focused-HFSE: the trigger emerges offline. The absence of the online exposure stage could also be related to the low degree of ease in using the Internet among villagers in the Bobai County, which is a less-developed rural area with limited access to the Internet, and lack of computer skills and awareness of the Internet. The absences of the stages tracking down and naming and shaming could be attributed to the target of Bobai rebellion being a group (local government) not individual members of a cadre, and the identity of its target being initially evident (clearly, it was the one-child policy campaign launched by the local government that had brought about overwhelming discontent among Bobai villagers). As for the outcome of the Bobai rebellion, its target was also punished in terms of the government building being burnt and offices ransacked. Although there was no punishment for local cadres, we could still be able to see a responsive and correctional attitude from the higher-level government in Guangxi province, which was expressed in terms not of punishment but in suspending the one-child policy campaign.

Dalian demonstration with a 40 per cent similarity level This matches the first stage of HFSE: the trigger emerged offline; it also matches the second stage of HFSE, which is online exposure, this can be attributed to the high degree of ease in using the Internet among the citizens in Dalian, a much developed harbour city in China. In 2011 (when the Dalian demonstration happened), the rate of popularity of the Internet in Liaoning Province (under which Dalian is administered) is 47.8 per cent, ranking sixth among all the 31 provinces of China. Moreover, the majority of participants in the Dalian demonstration, as shown by the relevant videos on the YouTube, were young people (students and company employees) who may have better computer skills and stronger awareness of using the Internet than other social groups, such as the peasants. But due to the fact that the identity of the target in Dalian demonstration was initially evident and the target was local government not individuals (before the Dalian demonstration, there had been reports by local media informing the Dalian citizens about the government-authorized and sponsored PX project), there are no stages of

tracking down and naming and shaming. The target of the Dalian demonstration was local government, but its aim was not punishment but pushing the Dalian government to abandon the PX project, thus it did not have a result similar to the target-punishing government/official-focused HFSE.

Shanghai strike with a 20 per cent similarity level This matches the first stage of HFSE. The absence of the stage online exposure may again be related to the strikers' low degree of ease in using the Internet, as the majority of the truckers working for the Shanghai harbours are rural migrant workers who lack computer skills and awareness of using the Internet. The absence of the stages of tracking down and naming and shaming could be attributed to the identity of the target in the strike being initially evident (certainly, the government has the responsibility of monitoring and regulating the petrol price) and the target being the Shanghai government not individuals. Similar to the Dalian demonstration, the Shanghai truckers' strike aimed not to punish their target (otherwise they would have gathered in front of the Shanghai government building, as the Weng'an rioters had done, breaking into the government building and burning office facilities), but to attract local government's attention to their claims by paralysing the transportation, thus the final stage of the Shanghai truckers' strike was different from that of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE.

Taishi Petition with a 20 per cent similarity level This matches the first stage of HFSE: the trigger emerged offline. The absence of the stage online exposure may again be related to the low degree of ease in using the Internet among the Taishi villagers, who lack computer skills, awareness of using the Internet, and access to the Internet. The target of the Taishi petition was individual cadres but the identity of the target was initially evident (before the Taishi petition, there had been a long-term dispute over the land expropriation, leading to popular discontent that made Taishi villagers blame the unjust compensation of land expropriation on individual cadres who allegedly had been elected via rigged process), thus there was no tracking down stage. As stated before, the target of naming and shaming is usually an individual, it might be reasonable to expect to see the naming and shaming in the Taishi petition. But due to Taishi villagers' low degree of ease with the Internet and other media that could be used for naming and shaming, they may first resort to methods with which they are at ease, such as producing a petition letter or, more extremely, a face-off confrontation, to secure the target's punishment. As for the outcome of the Taishi petition, although the villagers' demand for summoning the local cadres was refused by higher-level authorities because of lack of evidence, this does not mean that such methods have failed elsewhere.

Actually, as Huang (1995) observes, ‘in the mid-1980s, of all the cases of illicit conduct involving cadres under investigation, about 80 per cent were revealed through the petition system; the provincial petition offices were informed about and directly conducted investigations of about 150,000 such cases (Huang 1995). Thus we could assume that some examples of the petition (as a subtype of protest) in China may have reached the similarity level of 40 per cent, which means matching the first and final stages (trigger emerged offline and target was punished) of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE.

It is worth noting that the cases of riot, rebellion and petition, like the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE, aimed to punish their target, but they differ in terms of how the punishment is achieved. For the riot and rebellion, the punishment was achieved via collective violence; it seems that once the protestors chose to directly confront local authorities, punishment in some form was unavoidable: damage to government building and/or police station broken into and destroyed; public officers and riot policemen hurt. But the petitioners took a more moderate way to achieve their aim, and in the cases of strike and demonstration, their aim was not punishment and thus it is much less likely for them to have the same result as the target-punishing, government/official focused HFSE.

It is clear that none of the five cases of Chinese offline protest can match at least 4 stages of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE, as all have similarity levels lower than 80 per cent. The five representative cases of Chinese offline protest thus cannot be viewed as offline HFSE. Therefore it is reasonable to say that certainly the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE has things in common with offline protests, but the comparison above shows that, as a complete process of collective action, HFSE happens only online rather than offline. The comparison above further demonstrates that the four factors, including online exposure, that the target is individual, the identity of the target becomes known to the actors, and there is a high degree of ease in using the Internet, are essential in distinguishing HFSE from offline protests; and it also brings about the fifth and sixth factors that need to be added into the pattern of HFSE: the aim is punishment and the identity of the target is initially unknown to actors.

The main reason why the Dalian demonstration and the Shanghai truckers’ strike did not have an outcome similar to the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE is that their aims were not to inflict punishment on their targets but to make the local governments notice the claims of the protestors, who could then secure redress. Among the offline protests,

the way redress (justice) was obtained differs from case to case, either by exerting punishment on target via direct confrontation or through a petition, or by making claims heard by the target through street marches or collective gathering. And the reason why there was no stage of tracking down in the cases of riot (the Weng'an riot, narrowly defined), rebellion, demonstration, strike and petition is that, in these cases of offline protests, the identity of the target (either group or individual) was initially known to actors, thus it was not necessary to conduct the tracking down.

It is worth noting that for each subtype of protest, its similarity level could differ from case to case. In my sample, the similarity level of a riot is 40 per cent, when concerning some examples outside of my sample (e.g. riots that have happened in other countries or will happen in China after this research is finished), the similarity level may be less or more than 40 per cent; moreover, the processes of the five subtypes of Chinese offline protest are not exclusively confined to the processes presented in this chapter; it is still possible that a riot or rebellion, which is outside of my sample, has more or less than 5 stages. The comparison above aims not to give an exclusive and generally applicable argument on the internal process of a riot, a rebellion, or a demonstration; rather, it relates only to my sample and focuses on HFSE, with the aim of illustrating that, when being a form of protest, HFSE assumes significant differences from offline protests. It has been shown that although some stages of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE can be witnessed in offline protests, as a complete process of collective action, it cannot be observed beyond the Internet.

The patterns of government/official-focused HFSE

Through comparison, the differences that HFSE has from offline protests have been explored, and form the key elements of the pattern of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE. Overall, the conclusions derived from the online-offline comparison are summarized as follows. *First*, HFSE, sometimes as a form of online protest, is not different from offline protests in terms of their first stage, namely the trigger emerged offline. No matter what subtype of protest it is, the trigger emerging at their first stage has commonly originated from the offline world and assumed to be some kind of injustice, a common motivation of protest.

Second, there is no subtype of offline protest that can match at least four stages of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE. But it is necessary to make it clear that the way each of the five cases of Chinese offline protest differs from the HFSE is not the same. Put another way, the Weng'an riot, Bobai rebellion and Dalian demonstration have the same

similarity level 40 per cent, but this does not mean that they differ from the HFSE in the same way. For example, the Weng'an riot has a similarity level of 40 per cent because that it differs from the HFSE mainly in that there was a low degree of ease in using the Internet, the target was a group not an individual, and the identity of the target was initially known to actors; while the Dalian demonstration has a similarity level of 40 per cent because it differs from the HFSE mainly in that the target was a group not an individual, the identity of the target was initially known to actors, and the aim was not punishment. The Shanghai truckers' strike and Taishi petition have the same similarity level of 20 per cent, but the former differs from the HFSE in that the target was a group not an individual, the identity of the target was initially known to actors, there was a low degree of ease in using the Internet and the aim was not punishment; the latter differs from HFSE mainly in that the identity of the target was initially known to actors and there was a low degree of ease in using the Internet.

Third, as already identified, there are six major differences between the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE and offline protests, or, in other words, there are six key characteristics of this type of HFSE, which make it different from offline protests in general: 1) there is online exposure; 2) the identity of the target is initially unknown to actors; 3) the identity of the target becomes known to actors; 4) the target is an individual public officer; 5) there is a high degree of ease in using the Internet; 6) the aim is punishing the target. The first and fifth factors can be integrated into one, as whether or not there is online exposure is determined by the degree of ease for actors' use of the Internet, which means that the higher the degree of ease is, the more the possible actors resort to the Internet for exposure and punishment (via naming and shaming). Whether or not the identity of the target is initially known to actors is the main difference between the HFSE and offline protests, which can explain why in HFSE there is a tracking down stage while in offline protests there is not. But it may be problematic to put this factor into the pattern of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE because, in some of its cases, the identity of the target is initially known to Internet users. Such as the case of Zhou Jiugeng, the identity of Zhou Jiugeng was initially exposed by a Chinese Internet user who was the first one to question Zhou's remark on the local real estate market online. Therefore, in this case, Internet users were not trying to find out who was the target, but to look for the evidence of Zhou's corruption. In the case of Lin Jiaxiang, the tracking down stage played an important part in digging out the identity of Lin Jiaxiang, who was first exposed to the public in a video showing him quarrelling with the girl's parents, but at that moment, nobody knew who he

was. This means that the second factor is not necessarily an essential element of the pattern of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE. As exemplified by the cases, the tracking down stage is always a part of its process, whether or not the identity of the target is initially known to actors, because the function of the tracking down in HFSE is not only finding out who the target is, but also looking for more evidence of the target's misbehaviour. Thus, the second factor can be excluded from the pattern. As for the third factor, because the target of this type of HFSE is an individual person, only when the identity of the target becomes known to actors (either initially exposed or dug out after Internet users' tracking), the stage of naming and shaming is feasible. So this factor should be added into the pattern.

The following is the pattern of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE. In this statement, multiplication (denoted with mid-level dots) indicates combinations of elements (logic and). This pattern shows the key elements (characteristics) which significantly make this type of HFSE different from Chinese offline protests.

The aim being punishing target · the identity of target known to actors · the target being individual public officer · high degree of ease in using the Internet → target-punishing government/official focused HFSE

As stated before, there are two types of government/official-focused HFSE: one is fact-checking and the other target-punishing. Both of the two types could be viewed as online protest that corresponds to offline protest. The type of fact-checking is not included in the online-offline comparison above because it has no comparable offline examples that similarly aim to check the credibility of official announcement, or find out if there is government deception or cover-up. This may be a unique feature of HFSE: whenever the aim of a protest is fact-checking of official announcement, the protest tends to take place online. But for the second type, we need more attributes to define its pattern, as a lot of offline protests similarly target local governments and/or individual public officers. The online-offline comparison above just aims to explore these attributes that can distinguish the target-punishing, government/official focused-HFSE from offline protests. We may update the pattern above to the pattern of the government/official-focused HFSE by adding in the fact-checking type. Addition indicates alternate elements (logic or). Because there is also a case of HFSE with the aim of fact-checking an announcement made by the member of the public (e.g. the case of Chen Ziyao), the fact-checking government/official-focused HFSE needs one more attribute

to distinguish it from fact-checking HFSE that is not a protest: the target is official announcement.

The aim being fact - checking · the target being official announcement + the aim being punishing target · the identity of target known to actors · the target being individual public officer · high degree of the ease for using the Internet → government/official-focused HFSE

Translated to prose, the equation states simply that when the aim is fact-checking and the target is an official announcement, Chinese bottom-up collective action (or, narrowly, the protest) tends to be government/official-focused HFSE; when the aim is punishing the target, the target is an individual public officer, the identity of the target is known to actors, and there is a high degree of ease in using the Internet, the Chinese bottom-up collective action also tends to be the government/official-focused HFSE.

Summary

The cases of Chinese offline protest presented in this chapter illustrate again the dynamics of Chinese bottom-up collective action, which are spontaneity, having a claim that is specific and reactive, the target is specific, the utilization of political opportunity (e.g. the Taishi villagers deploying the petition system) and the involvement of mass media (e.g. the usage of the Internet for mobilization in the Dalian demonstration). Moreover, media coverage being the main source of the cases analysed in this chapter can also demonstrate the role of mass media in Chinese bottom-up collective action, which may mainly take the form of reporting rather than investigating. Instead of a historical perspective, this chapter embraces a comparative perspective by asking the main question of how the government/official-focused HFSE differs from those similar offline protests in the early twenty-first century. According to the result of the online-offline comparison, it could be reasonable to argue that even though some of its stages could be witnessed in offline protests, the government/official-focused HFSE as whole is a social phenomenon that happens solely online. But on a broad level, the government/official-focused HFSE, as a subtype of protest, just like those cases of riot, rebellion, demonstration, strike and petition, aimed to correct injustice. No matter which subtype of protest it is, actors all make an effort to get justice done but in different ways. From this point of view, there is nothing new in HFSE.

The comparison in this chapter has two goals: one is exploring possible offline examples of the government/official-focused HFSE and the other is establishing its pattern. Until now, we might be quite sure that although sharing things in common with offline protests, the government/official focused-HFSE does not have an offline equivalent. The process of exploration has pushed me to realize the major differences between the government/official-focused HFSE and offline protests. They share common dynamics because both of them are Chinese bottom-up collective action but they have different internal processes due to their differences in the aim of action (fact-checking official announcement, punishing the target or simply making the claim heard by the target), the type of the target (individual or group), and the degree of confidence of actors in using the Internet. These differences can be converted into the elements that represent the key characteristics of the government/official-focused HFSE. These elements are important for distinguishing the HFSE from offline protests and they constitute the pattern of the government/official-focused HFSE.

This pattern does not reveal the causal mechanism of the government/official-focused HFSE but only its key characteristics. In the next chapter, the analysis will be focused on exploring its underlying causal mechanism. Not all the 20 cases listed in the table 5.1 are to be looked at and only few of them will be examined in detail. As a subtype of protest, the government/official-focused HFSE shows similarities with and differences from traditional protests. But there is still a question unsolved: why the government/official-focused HFSE occurred. So, in the next chapter, the main task is to explore the underlying causal mechanism of the government/official-focused HFSE to see what causal conditions it has and how these causal conditions lead to its outcome.

Chapter 6

Human Flesh Search Engine: why it occurs

Introduction and chapter outline

The Human Flesh Search Engine (HFSE) is a phenomenon that happens in Chinese cyberspace: it is a kind of collective action conducted by Internet users to either look for missing persons, or punish immoral members of the public or corrupt government officials, or check the credibility of announcements made by government/police or members of the public. According to its different aims, HFSE can be divided into three types: first is looking for missing persons, second is target-punishing and third is fact-checking. It has been shown that the government/official-focused HFSE as a subtype of protest solely occurred online, but some of its stages could be witnessed in offline protests. According to its different aims, the government/official focused-HFSE can be classified into two types: fact-checking and target-punishing. The pattern of government/official-focused HFSE integrates these two types with its own attributes, which reveals how this form of online protest differs from offline protests.

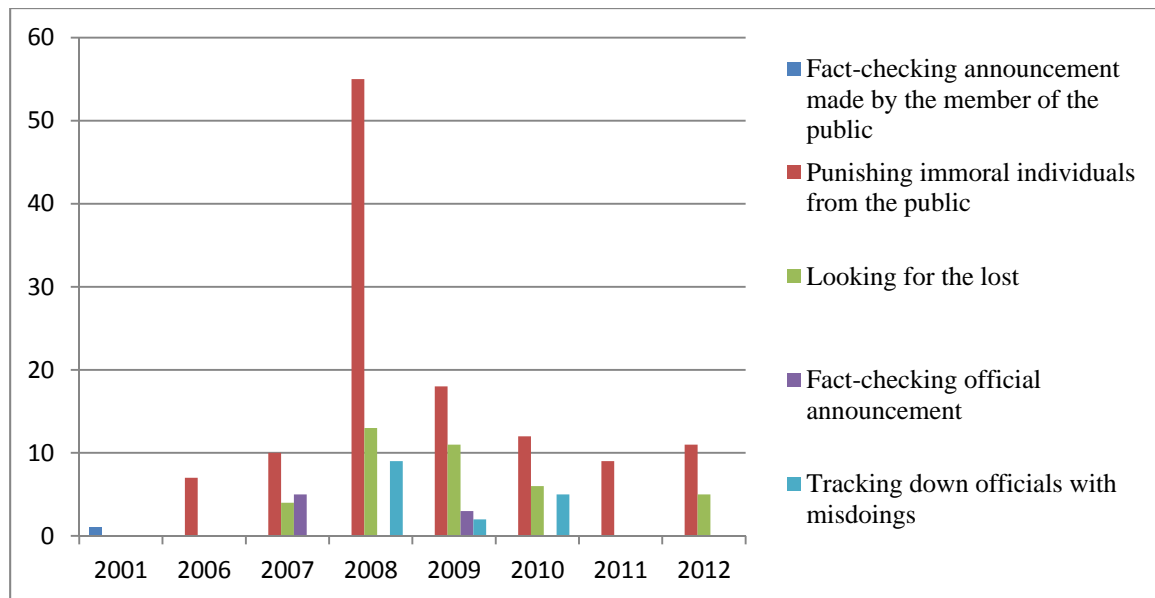
While the previous chapters focus on the similarities and differences between the government/official-focused HFSE and Chinese offline protests, this chapter aims to answer a key question of this research: why did the HFSE occur? The answer of this question is related to the causal mechanism underlying the HFSE phenomenon. Based on the standpoint that the Internet is a necessary but not sufficient condition for HFSE's occurrence, the task of this chapter is to explore its more causal conditions and find out how these conditions result in the outcome. The government/official-focused HFSE is the theme of this research but it is not the full image of the HFSE phenomenon. So the non-government/official-focused HFSE will be analysed via introducing its characteristics and causal conditions, as well as establishing the causal mechanisms of its different types, classified according to its different aims. By sticking to the theme being government/official focused HFSE, I analyse first the non-government/official-focused-HFSE because I want to make sure there is no biased understanding of the HFSE that has both political and non-political dimensions, and also, because there are common dynamics between both HFSEs, analysing the latter would give some insights to understanding the former. Then, the focus is put on the government/official-

focused HFSE to explore via the process tracing of specific cases its complicated underlying causal mechanisms.

The characteristics of non-government/official-focused HFSE and how to understand them

Generally speaking, the target of non-government/official-focused HFSE is a member of the public. Its aims involve fact-checking personal announcements, tracking down and punishing immoral individuals and looking for the lost (families, friends, or personal belongings). The target of the government/official-focused HFSE is the government or public officer, and its aims involve fact-checking official announcements, assuming suspicion of government deception or cover-up and punishing public officers who are found corrupt. In order to find out how frequently these different aims of HFSE have been pursued by Chinese Internet users, I searched for HFSE-related postings on the Tianya forum. The Tianya forum is among the most popular online forums in China (Qu et al. 2009). Compared to other online forums such as the Mop, which is one of the most influential interactive entertainment platforms in Chinese cyberspace (Li 2011, p. 77), the topics shown on the Tianya forum are more serious and its members are more educated, which increases the possibility that postings calling for HFSE on the Tianya forum are more likely based on real situations rather than fabricated by someone just to attract attention. I used the key words ‘人肉搜索’ (Human Flesh Search Engine) to search Tianya for all relevant postings. Overall, there were 64,365 (by 15 May 2012) postings titled ‘人肉搜索’, spanning from 2001 to 2012, among which only 750 were allowed to display their details. Among these with details, only 186 postings are HFSE calls while others are just expressions of opinions on HFSE. The following chart shows how frequently the different aims of HFSE have been pursued by users of the Tianya forum. The frequency is measured by the number of postings that have been published as HFSE calls and contain the key words ‘人肉搜索’ (Human Flesh Search Engine). The more the call-for-HFSE postings with a particular aim of HFSE there are, the more frequently this aim has been pursued by Chinese Internet users.

Chart 6.1: Showing-up frequencies of different calls for HFSE in Tianya forum



From the chart above, it is clear to see that among all the aims of HFSE, calls on punishing immoral individuals occupy the majority of total postings in each of these years. From 2006, the diversity of the aims of HFSE increased until 2009, which witnessed four kinds of aims. The aim of fact-checking an announcement made by member of the public is the least frequent one that was proposed, with one posting in 2001. The aim of looking for a missing person (or personal belongings) has been frequently seen in postings in each of these years and was proposed most frequently in 2008. This is probably due to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, during which the Tianya forum became an important channel for seeking information of missing family members and friends (Qu et al. 2009). The aim of punishing immoral individuals from the public has been most frequently proposed in each of these years (except 2001), while the aims of fact-checking of official announcements and punishing public officers have been less frequently proposed by Internet users.

Why has the non-government/official-focused HFSE been more frequently proposed than the government/official-focused HFSE by Chinese Internet users on the Tianya forum? One reason might be related to the difference in their target. Although the Internet has provided Chinese citizens with a relatively freer and more open platform for communication, there is still a difference in the degree to which a topic can be freely discussed. Chinese Internet users who have a strong incentive to talk about political issues on the Internet do not feel absolutely free and safe because of the strict online censorship. This may have prevented some Chinese Internet users from proposing a HFSE online to confirm a government deception or expose

and punish a corrupt government official. Moreover, since the initiator and participants of the government/official-focused HFSE face more risks than that of non-government/official-focused HFSE, they may need more convincing evidence to justify their actions, which increases the difficulty of their success and thus negatively influences the popularity of government/official-focused HFSE. On the Tianya forum, it is not rare to see postings exposing corrupt public officers, but not all of them could develop into a real collective action, particularly those without pictures or videos as hard evidences. It is usually the text-only call-for-HFSE postings that have got much fewer hits and comments, which means less attention and thus a lower chance of the occurrence of a collective action. It could be hard to convince Internet users by texts alone due to the fact that the credibility of online content has already become a big concern for the Chinese online population (Xu, Y. G. 2007). Those well-known cases of government/official-focused HFSE suggest that Chinese Internet users did not randomly choose their target but paid attention to those clearly shown in pictures or videos that evidenced the misconduct.

Among the 20 well-documented cases of HFSE listed in the table 5.1, there are 12 cases of non-government/official-focused HFSE and 8 cases of government/official-focused HFSE. The higher frequency of the occurrence of the former could be understood from the perspective of the difference in their targets, which has decided the degree to which Chinese Internet users can feel free to initiate and participate in an HFSE action. Among the 12 cases of non-government/official-focused HFSE, except one case of fact-checking an announcement made by a member of the public (the case of Chen Ziyao), one case of looking for a missing person (the case of Guo Ziyin), and one case of fact-checking the news content of national media, the remaining cases are all about tracking down and punishing immoral members of the public. So what can the non-government/official-focused HFSE tell us about the HFSE phenomenon?

The social-cultural aspects of HFSE: Confucianism and popular moral codes

While the government/official-focused HFSE reflects how the Chinese Internet users respond to and interact with the government, the non-government/official-focused HFSE illustrates more the social-cultural aspects of the HFSE. A fair understanding of the development of cyber China requires an appreciation of her unique historical, political and cultural contexts. The Chinese culture background represents a basis, with a focus on problems of governance within the setting of sustaining social integration and community well-being. The belief that

good society will develop through the upholding of morality and strict standards based on objective and generally-accepted norms, rather than subjective decision, leads to a society 'ruled by morality' (Chu and Cheng 2011, p. 27). So, in China, there have been two systems of social governance: one is by formalized legal codes and the other by popular moral codes. Such concepts as 'moral construction' (*daode jianshe*) has been often mentioned in official statements and is very popular among political elites in China (Chu and Cheng 2011, p. 26). The non-government/official-focused HFSE is an illustration of the community, particularly the online community, which tends to be ruled by the popular moral codes.

The core concept of Confucianism is harmony (*he*), which requires that one should act in a proper way, employing courtesy (*li*), loyalty (*zhong*), obedience (*xiao*), righteousness (*yi*), kindness (*shan*), and sincerity (*cheng*) to achieve the goal of harmony. This concept has influenced Chinese society for thousands of years. The basic moral codes, such as respecting the old and cherishing the young (*zunlao aiyou*), being loyal to family and marriage and being kind and honest to others, have been taught to every Chinese person since their childhood. These human characters have been advocated all over the world, but there are few countries like China where people have applied these traditional moral codes to their daily lives and even their lives in the virtual world. The HFSE is just the evidence to this. If looking at those issues involved in the cases of non-government/official-focused HFSE, we may notice that these moral codes were often utilized by Chinese Internet users as the grounds of their action. Abusing old people, torturing animals, extramarital affairs, cheating and insulting others have been proved to have easily enraged the online population in Chinese cyberspace. The Confucian scholar Shu-ming Liang (1987) concludes that the chief characteristic of Chinese society is that it is ethics based (*lunli benwei*). The non-government/official-focused HFSE illustrates that Chinese society is ethics based and the way to make sure an ethically-sound society can be both online and offline.

Francis Hsu coined the term 'situation-centred' nature of Chinese culture to compare it with the 'individual-centred' nature of the West (Hsu 1981). This is the essence of the 'relational being' described by Ambrose King (1985, p. 63-6): the life of the traditional Chinese is largely determined by a person's concrete obligations toward concrete people in the form of basic moral codes, which are standards of how people maintain the relationship with their surroundings. As reviewed in the Chapter 2, examples similar to the Chinese HFSE also happened in other countries, where people employed the Internet to look for their lost mobile phone, or expose online those who were not friendly to animals, or expose and shame those

who showed indecent behaviour in public. But it is rare to see in other countries where people with bad attitudes and conduct towards other people have been exposed and condemned on the Internet. The ‘individual-centred’ nature of the West may entitle the individuals with great freedom and respect to decide how to speak and behave, but the ‘situation-centred’ nature of the Chinese society emphasizes the person-person relationship to determine an individual’s words and deeds. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that the individuals found causing damage to others have been much more frequently targeted by Chinese Internet users participating in the non-government/official-focused HFSE, not necessarily because someone was hurt but, essentially, because the person-person relationship based on moral obligations was damaged.

Crowdsourcing

HFSE that is used to look for missing person straightforwardly illustrates how the Chinese Internet users take advantage of the Internet-based crowdsourcing to achieve their goals. It is not to say that only the HFSE used to look for missing person applies the crowdsourcing to its process; it is essential for all the types of HFSE with different aims, it is essential in both the government/official- and non-government/official-focused HFSEs. None of the aims of HFSE can be achieved by a single Internet user, and crowdsourcing is an advantage of the Internet that makes it so attractive to Chinese citizens who want to get redress and justice that they cannot easily get from offline channels. Coined by Jeff Howe and Mark Robinson in one article of Wire magazine (Howe 2006b), the term crowdsourcing describes a new web-based business model that harnesses the creative solutions of a distributed network of individuals through what amounts to an open call for proposals. Howe offers the following definition:

Simply defined, crowdsourcing represents the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call. This can take the form of peer-production (when the job is performed collaboratively), but is also often undertaken by sole individuals. The crucial prerequisite is the use of the open call format and the large network of potential labourers (Howe 2006b, p. 5).

If Howe learnt about the HFSE, he would adjust his definition of crowdsourcing, which is not confined to the business area. The model of crowdsourcing in HFSE is based on peer-cooperation and happens spontaneously. The crowdsourcing in the business arena is based on material rewards for individuals who contribute to solving problems. But the crowdsourcing in HFSE depends on Internet users’ voluntary work, which has been mobilized not by material rewards but by certain emotions, such as public discontent with the immorality of

individuals or with official corruption, or sympathy for those who are looking for their missing family members.

Nearly all the cases of HFSE occurred in online forums, such as the Tianya, Mop and NetEase. The interactive nature of online forums facilitates the model of crowdsourcing in HFSE. The process of the HFSE is interactive, in that participants decide what to do next according to what others have achieved. For example, some may use the clues or information provided by others to locate their target. The open structure of the online forum and its real-time information exchange can make the participants of a HFSE informed with the whole progress of their action without delay. Moreover, Chinese online forums have a fixed recruiting policy: Internet users who want to publish or review postings or want to interact with others need first to register as a forum member. This makes sure that a popular online forum, such as those mentioned above, has a certain number of members and some of them have consistently taken more active roles than others (e.g. opinion leaders). A picture or video published on an online forum could quickly attract lots of attention from forum members; as active members begin to discuss, others would quickly follow in terms of giving comments or reproducing the picture or video onto other online forums; as the number of its hits increases, the original posting would be labelled by the webmaster with the tag ‘精华帖’ (means very popular) and its title would be put into the list of most-popular postings shown on the home page of the forum, creating more attention. An online collective action is thus ready to erupt. Chinese Internet users utilize the functions of online forums to launch and carry out HFSE, and they take full advantage of the Internet on which information and knowledge can be exchanged freely and quickly.

A case of HFSE aimed at looking for missing person emerged on the Tianya forum, in which a little girl’s elder brother published a posting calling for help to look for his sister, sold by their father to pay off his debt. This helpless brother attached his sister’s pictures to the original posting and told of his offline experience when the local police refused to help him because his father had friends in the local police station, which had prevented his sister’s plight being taken seriously. The huge numbers of hits (58,400 by 30 May 2012) and replies (1,136) (Tianya 2012) show how much this posting attracted Chinese Internet users. The replies demonstrate Internet users’ wish to help this brother: some suggested that he gave more clues about his sister, so they would have a greater chance of locating her; some

suggested asking for offline media's help; some expressed their indignation toward the local police and their intention of travelling there to confront; and someone wrote that they might have encountered this girl somewhere and would go to check again. Unfortunately, until this research is finished, there is still no information about whether or not this girl has been found, but the Internet users' response to this HFSE call illustrates how the model of crowdsourcing in HFSE works. Crowdsourcing is a fundamental part of HFSE's causal mechanism, no matter what aim it has, because a basic function of HFSE is searching. And an outstanding advantage of HFSE over traditional search engines is that it combines Internet search engines with human interaction, which has greatly enhanced the efficiency of searching.

Online anonymity

While the model of crowdsourcing is a necessary condition of the searching stage, online anonymity is a necessary condition of the naming and shaming stage, particularly when this stage involves online bullying and flaming. Covered by online anonymity, Internet users feel free to condemn the transgressor in any way they like. Both the government/official- and non-government/official-focused HFSEs illustrate the importance of online anonymity in encouraging Chinese Internet users to participate in HFSE that aims to punish transgressors. Anonymity, on its own, has dual effects: it protects vital outlets of truly creative, democratic discourse (Akdeniz 2002) while at the same time affords abuse of body and spirit, such as those from lone, unaccountable bullies engaged in flaming (Alonzo 2004). Online anonymity may be less significant in the HFSE used to look for missing person than it is in the HFSE used to track down and punish transgressors who are members of the public. When concerning political issues, such as the HFSE aiming to confirm a government deception or get a corrupt public officer punished, particularly in Chinese cyberspace with its strict censorship on online political discourses and actions, Chinese Internet users may view online anonymity as the 'umbrella' keeping them safe from possible blame and suppression.

Online anonymity allows citizens to escape the imagined, ever-present gaze of the state (Foucault 1995). They are able to elude the system of government controls and the self-enforced compliance of citizens attendant with their general online visibility (Farrall and Herold 2011, p. 165). The anonymity in Chinese cyberspace is different from that in cyberspaces of other countries.

Contrary to Euro-American Internet behaviour, though, their anonymity is not an assumed one, hiding an individual's identity to avoid the consequences of the one's action. Instead, ... Chinese practice of anonymity online is fundamentally different from Euro-American practice. Specifically, it is based on different 'defaults', around the absence of a link between an online identity and the offline user, rather than hiding of such a link in specific contexts. (Farrall and Herold 2011, p. 165)

The difference of online anonymity between Chinese and non-Chinese cyberspaces highlights the cultural underpinnings of Chinese online practice, illustrated by not only the non-government/official-focused HFSE in which Internet users are less afraid of being detected for harassing others but also the government/official-focused HFSE in which Internet users have increasingly involved themselves in the political process originally dominated by government.

The association of online identities with specific offline individuals has become the default position in human interactions with computers in Europe and North America (Farrall and Herold 2011, p. 167). An individual obtains an email account linked to his/her offline identity, e.g. through his/her employment or studies, or through buying online access from an Internet Services Provider (ISP), then uses this email address to register for online banking services, business websites, social networking sites, etc., thus becoming identifiable in all his/her online activities. In China, however, an individual's initial engagement with computers and the Internet is fundamentally different and avoids the establishment of such a link between the offline individual and an online identity (Farrall and Herold, p. 167). An individual can easily get an email address online without providing much personal information (such as via the QQ, which started out as a Chinese form of an online chat service comparable to ICQ and MSN, assigning its subscribers a random number as their identity, and an email address in the format of numbers@qq.com.cn); companies, universities and NGO, etc., rarely require their staff to log in to their work stations with a personalized ID and the provision of formal organization emails, such as university or government, is very rare. As a result, in Chinese cyberspace, the online persona of a user could not easily be linked to an offline individual (it is still possible to track down individuals according to the IP address of the computer from which he/she made specific online postings or purchases, but this is cumbersome). There is evidence suggesting that Chinese Internet users have got used to and strongly support online anonymity. In early January 2007, *China Youth Daily* published a national poll of 1,843 Internet users, among which 83.5 per cent were opposed to the real-name policy initiated by the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) in 2006, which then announced the necessity of requiring all Chinese bloggers to register their real names before using blogging services. The

proposal led to nationwide debate and was strongly opposed by many Internet users (Zhao 2006). It was finally suspended due to overwhelming opposition online. For the HFSE participants, they benefit from the online anonymity but at the same time the absence of a link between online individual and offline identity makes their identification of a target difficult. In non-Chinese cyberspace, a search engine could easily track down the target if his/her email address is available but, in Chinese cyberspace, a randomly-assigned email address does not help unless the traditional search engine and human interaction are combined to enhance the possibility of a successful tracking down.

Underlying causal conditions of non-government/official-focused HFSE

The characteristics of the non-government/official-focused HFSE can be converted into its causal conditions. For example, its social-cultural aspect indicates a causal condition which is transgression of Chinese moral codes. Online anonymity and crowdsourcing are two conditions, and from the case of Guo Ziyin, we may detect a causal condition related to the reason why some people resorted to the Internet to look for their lost family member, which is the incompetence of the offline police. This condition can be described in a more general way: lack of offline alternative solutions. The case of Chen Ziyao also reflects a condition related to the reason why people chose not to accept but to question the personal statement made online by other Internet users, which is the declining credibility of online content. Different combinations of these conditions imply different aims of HFSE.

The five basic causal conditions of the non-government/official-focused HFSE are:

- I. Transgression of Chinese moral codes;
- II. The model of crowdsourcing;
- III. Online anonymity;
- IV. Declining credibility of online content;
- V. Lack of offline alternative solutions (e.g. incapability/inaction of the police, shortage of offline channels for justice).

The following diagrams show different combinations of these conditions implying different aims of the non-government/official focused HFSE.

Diagram 6.1: Causal conditions of the HFSE used to look for missing person

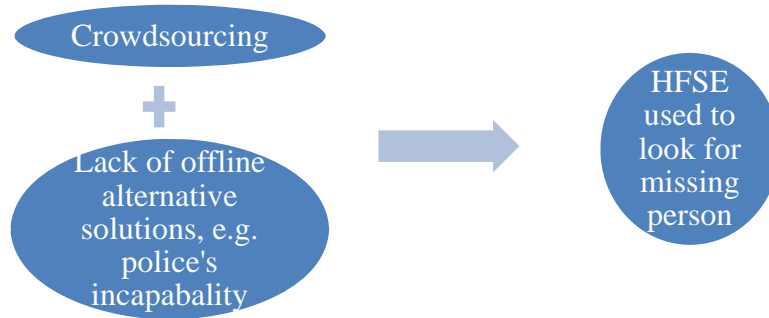


Diagram 6.2: Causal conditions of the HFSE used to check announcement made by the member of the public

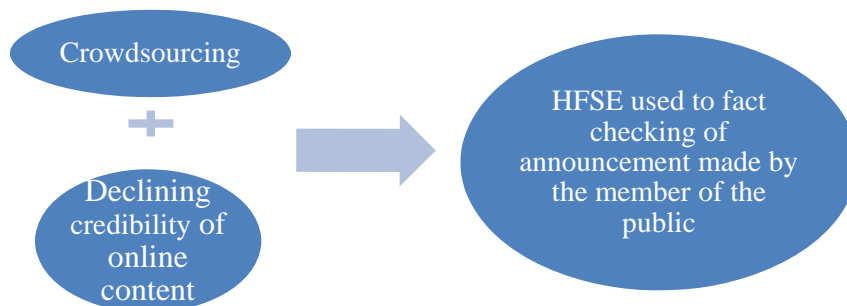
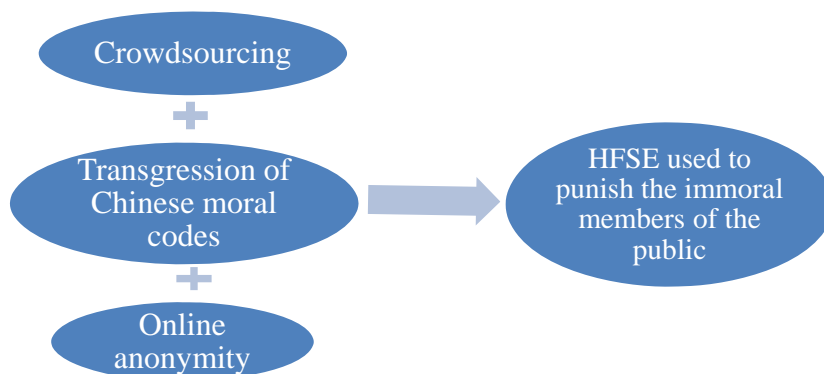


Diagram 6.3: Causal conditions of the HFSE used to punish immoral members of the public



Two cases of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE

In the following sections, government/official-focused HFSE will be examined to explore its complex nature and causal mechanisms, which are not observed in non-government/official-focused HFSE. There are two types of government/official-focused HFSE, differentiated according to their different aims: one is fact-checking and the other target-punishing. The fact-checking, government/official focused-HFSE aims to check the announcement made by the government or police to see if there is a deception or cover-up. According to the empirical cases, its targets usually involve those official announcements relevant to government decision making such as setting up a nature reserve zone, appointing high-level officials, and police announcement about the result of an investigation of someone's death. Two cases of the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE are given to show how this type of HFSE works and its internal process.

Government credibility and the fake tiger photo

On 12 October 2007, the Provincial Forestry Bureau in Shaanxi province of China publicized via a news conference two South China Tiger photos taken by Zhou Zhenglong, a hunter in the Zhenpin county of Shaanxi province (Shan 2007). During this conference, senior officials of the Shaanxi Provincial Forestry Bureau (SPFB) announced that, according to the opinion of three zoologists, these photos confirmed the existence of the wild South China Tiger in the forests of Zhenpin County (this place has been historically seen as the main habitat of the South China Tiger). Immediately after this news conference, as well as after news coverage on it, the two tiger photos rapidly spread on and offline. However, a posting of 15 October 2007 on the Tianya forum caught people's attention by its title 'South China Tiger, another faked news story?' Its author highlighted six problems with these photos. The emergence of this posting became a turning point, after which more and more questioning voices emerged. On the same day, the news that 'the South China Tiger was found in Shaanxi' was reproduced by several newspapers and broadcasts, intensifying the public questions about the tiger photos' credibility (No author 2007c).

Facing questions, on 16 October, the Shaanxi Forest Bureau insisted that the tiger photos were real; on 23 October, Zhou and a few officials from the local government went to the National Forestry Department (NFD) in Beijing to submit these photos, report the result of their follow-up investigation, and, more importantly, applied for administrative permission to establish a conservation zone for the South China Tiger in Zhenpin County (No author 2007).

On 12 November 2007, Zhou insisted that he had not faked the tiger photos and planned to sue those experts who had questioned him (Deng and Wang 2007). However, Zhou and local cadres stuck to their original statements, which only fuelled the Internet users' passion to look for new evidence to disprove their statements.

Commonly, it would be expected that the involvement of central government would bring about a convincing conclusion on the photos' authenticity. However, what disappointed the public was that the NFD was unable to tell if these photos were real or not; instead, it organized an expert team to go to Zhenpin County for a field investigation. The spokesman of the NFD said that the responsibility of NFD was making sure there was a real population of the South China Tiger in Zhenpin, rather than checking if these photos were real or not. This response from high-level authority made this whole incident more confused. There was a second turning point when an Internet user, on 15 November 2007, exposed that the original image of the tiger may be copied from an old Chinese lunar year calendar, a screenshot of which was also uploaded (Tan 2007). More and more Internet users joined the online investigation, discussing and analysing how these tiger photos had been faked (Guo 2010).

Besides the online uproar, offline investigation was also started. Civic investigation teams were organized by media organizations and professional associations in the hope of imposing pressure on the central government and further confirming that hunter Zhou and local governments had been lying. As the online uproar extended to offline, the National Forestry Department finally issued a demand that the Shaanxi Provincial Forestry Bureau should submit all the tiger photos taken by Zhou, check their credibility and publicize the results as soon as possible. On 29 June 2008, the Shaanxi Provincial Government held a news conference to publicize its investigation result. This incident finally ended with the local government's confession that these tiger photos had been faked by Zhou Zhenglong; thirteen officials in the Shaanxi Provincial Forestry Bureau were dismissed for their irresponsibility in their evaluation of the photos and for holding a news conference without the authorization of supervisors; three officials of the Zhenpin County government were dismissed for faking relevant reports; hunter Zhou Zhenlong was also sentenced to 30 months in jail for the charge of faking tiger photos (Ding 2008). Chinese Internet users' questioning of the tiger photos indicates public distrust of official announcements; they resorted to the Internet to express their doubts because of limited offline channels for the public to voice their opinions concerning political issues; they were actively engaging in online discussion because the online anonymity made them feel safe when confronting authority; the finding of the old

lunar year calendar came from Internet users' crowdsourcing; and the traditional media's involvement extended the online uproar to offline, intensifying the public doubt about the tiger photos and thus pressuring the local government to confess about its deception.

The 'hide and seek' event

This case illustrates a fact-checking HFSE that targeted an attempted cover-up of a prisoner's death in police custody. On 13 February 2009, the Yunnan.cn (the news website sponsored by the Yunnan Daily News Group in Yunnan Province) reported that Li Qiaomin, a 24-year-old man, detained in prison for illegal logging, had died of a severe brain injury in hospital (Wang, V. 2009a). Local police explained that Li's brain injury was due to his head hitting the wall after he was kicked by another prisoner when they were playing the game 'hide and seek' (Li, J. 2009). However, the police's claim was greeted with scepticism. Many Internet users expressed their doubts about the official claim about Li's death (Li, J. S. 2009; Wang, V. 2009b).

This prisoner's death then became a hot public topic and the Chinese phrase '躲猫猫' ('hide and seek' in Chinese) became one of the most popular online phrases in Chinese cyberspace in 2009 (Wang, V. 2009b). In online forums, communities and chat groups there were intense discussions on the 'hide and seek' event. In the afternoon on 13 February 2009, only a few hours after the official announcement was publicized, a local online forum devoted to the discussion proposed launching an HFSE to uncover the truth behind the hide and seek event (Zhou, Q. 2009). Facing intensified online uproar and growing media question, on 19 February 2009, the Yunnan Provincial Propaganda Department published an announcement on its website: in order to provide the public with a chance to uncover the truth, the Yunnan Provincial Propaganda Department was going to organize a civic team to investigate Li's death; this team would be composed of citizens, who, if interested, should call a hotline set up especially for recruiting team members (Xie, L. D. 2009). One day later the civic team was established and started its investigation immediately; in the morning of 21 February 2009, the civic team publicized its report, which, however, produced more questions (Dong 2009).

The proposal of organizing a civic investigation team by the Yunnan government was initially aimed at calming down the online outcry about Li's death and to prevent its reputation from being questioned and even damaged by the public discussion. However, its failure to uncover the 'truth' raised the question of an official cover-up, particularly among

Internet users who were able to read the publicized investigation report in the first place. The team members were labelled as ‘insiders’ who allegedly kept the truth hidden intentionally. Thus Chinese Internet users launched the HFSE to search for the real identities of the team members, who were found to be mainly journalists and webmasters and, further, blamed by Internet users who insisted they were ‘insiders’ (Zhang, Z. 2009). On 24 February 2009, the website of the government of Jinning (the county where the prison was located) was hacked by Internet users, who changed all the contents shown on its homepage into one term ‘躲猫猫’ (‘hide and seek’) (Guan 2009). Pressured by on- and offline questioning, on 27 February 2009 the Yunnan Provincial government held a news conference, announcing that, instead of accepting the initial investigation result given by the Jinning County Public Security Bureau, the Yunnan Provincial Public Security Bureau concluded that Li had been beaten to death by other prisoners. Meanwhile, it was also announced that the vice director of the Jinning Public Security Bureau and the chief of Jinning County Prison were dismissed and two prison guards were sentenced to jail for malfeasance (Luo 2009).

The internal process and causal conditions of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE

There are four stages of the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE: trigger emerging offline; online exposure; searching for evidence; and the government/police forced to confess its deception (if it exists). There are causal conditions underlying different stages. For the first stage, the case of the South China Tiger tells us that local government’s intention in publicizing the tiger photos was out of not protecting endangered animals but, rather, seeking financial support from the central government, with which the local government could be able to establish a South China Tiger conservation area and thus increase its fiscal revenue via tourism and other industries relevant to the conservation area. The case of ‘hide and seek’ demonstrates the local government’s intention to cover up its officers’ misconduct out of worry that its reputation would be damaged if the truth became known to the public. Therefore, the causal condition of the first stage in both of the two cases is local governments’ emphasis on their own financial and political interests rather than the public’s interest.

Then there are two questions: why did Chinese citizens question instead of comply with those official announcements and why did they resort to the Internet to express their doubts? The Internet enables online cooperation but has no default capability of indicating what is suspicious and should be questioned. One possible explanation might be related to the decline

of credibility of and public trust in the Chinese authorities (Zhang, H. Y. 2012; Zhang, J. Q. 2012; Zhong 2008, Yiluyouni 2011). Three determinants of trust and credibility were suggested by Aristotle over two thousand years ago: knowledge and expertise; openness and honesty; and concern and care (Peters et al. 1997, p.45). Kasperson (1986) for example, has argued that trust is composed of perception of competence, of absence of bias, and of caring and a commitment to due process. Renn and Levine (1991) have also proposed a set of components that determine perceptions of trust and credibility, which consists of competence, objectivity, fairness, consistency and faith. All these statements indicate the key elements of credibility and trust from the perspective of politics: government commitment to the public (e.g. concerning and protecting public interest); openness and transparency of the political system and political process (ensuring of public faith, less bias, more objectivity); and competence of the political agencies (ensuring of fairness, knowledge and expertise). Compared to western democratic countries, non-democratic China differs largely in its lack of an institutionalized mechanism to involve the members of the public in the process of political decision making (Wang 2012). Such facts as the one-party system and government-monopolized information dissemination have built barriers to establishing an open and transparent political system. Poor economic condition of the majority of the Chinese population makes the possibility of appeals for transforming the broader political system rare, but they can be as specific as just asking for improving their subsistence conditions.

Moreover, the public trust of government in China has been damaged by a series of actions by local and regional governments, such as building chemical plants with potential environmental damage without negotiating with local residents (Yuan 2011); constructing luxury government buildings without asking for taxpayers' advice (Xiao 2011); appointing government officials without due process (in China high-level officials often appoint their relatives, e.g. wife, son/daughter, as officers of their subordinate departments) (Chen 2010; Zhou, X. 2009); land acquisition without reasonable compensation to landowners (Tan 2012); and forced house demolition without properly resettling the owners (Tian 2010). Consequently, overwhelming criticism has been incurred among the Chinese public, leading to public distrust of government, particularly regional and local governments which have shown obvious intentions of excluding the public from the process of their decision making. The two cases of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE reflect such a public distrust of local governments. Chinese citizens have limited opportunities to get involved in the political process and, when the government fails to fulfil its commitment to the public,

they are not able to change the situation easily due to the lack of channels in which to voice their dissatisfaction. However, the Internet provides the Chinese public with an alternative channel to engage and express. The application of Internet in the two cases above aired and amplified the distrust as well as the embarrassment caused by those fake tiger photos and the so-called ‘died of playing hide and seek’, pushing the Shaanxi and Yunnan provincial governments to confess the deception by their local departments.

In the offline world, complaints about official announcements could be heard only via interpersonal communication and rarely reach a wider audience; on the Internet, with numerous forum members interacting every day, a posting questioning an official announcement could easily attract the attention of Internet users who have the similar concern about government credibility. Besides these offline reasons that have promoted the occurrence of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE, crowdsourcing and online anonymity are also key conditions that have facilitated its occurrence. The model of crowdsourcing on the Internet allows the HFSE participants to search for and gather evidence of a government deception or cover-up, such as the case of South China Tiger. Chinese Internet users started to discuss the photos’ authenticity online, and those who thought the photos had been faked made the effort both online and offline to look for evidence to support their question, including an Internet user’ identification of an old lunar year calendar, from which the original image of the tiger was supposedly copied and used to analyse how the photos could be faked. Thus the online uproar changed from two-sided debate to a one-side condemnation of Shaanxi government’s deception over the existence of wild South China Tiger. This pushed the case to a conclusion with the confession of deception by local government and the dismissal of public officers responsible. At the same time, the online anonymity made Internet users in fact-checking government/official focused HFSE feel safe when confronting the authority.

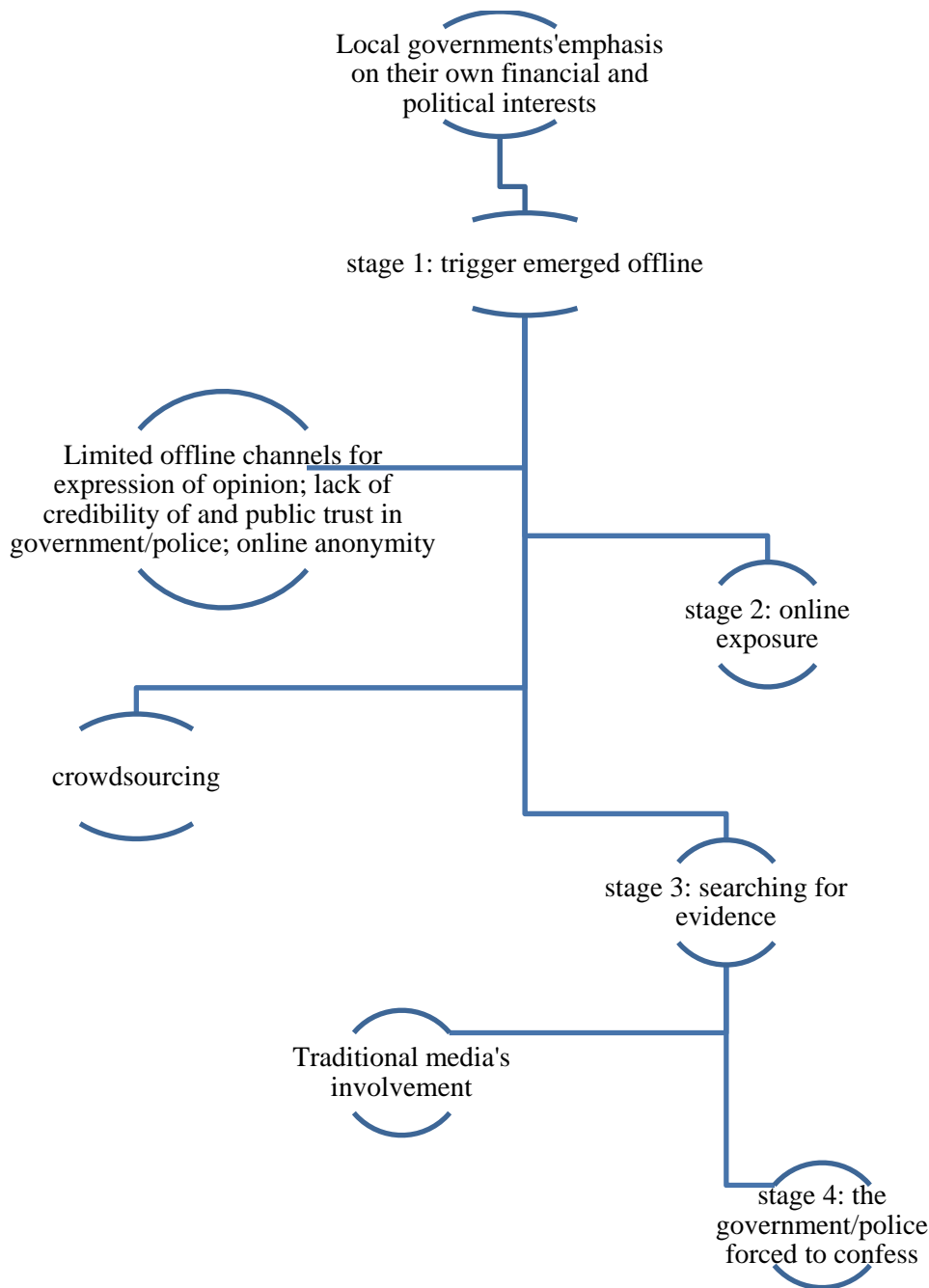
The traditional media’s involvement in fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE cannot be overlooked. It is almost axiomatic that the Internet has an increasing impact on Chinese political life. Investigating the relationship between the Internet and traditional media is important in understanding state reaction to a social event, particularly in the Chinese context where there is strict media censorship both online and offline. The interaction between the Internet and traditional media in China is not free from control or suppression, so we have reason to believe that any occurrence of their interaction implies the state’s tolerance of those political discourses and actions that are at least not anti-state and

anti-party. Hassid argues (2012, p. 213) that when Internet content precedes print media and sets the agenda before the journalists do, political and social tensions are likely to increase; on the other hand, on those issues where Internet commentary follows newspapers in broaching similar topics, online discussion can help soothe an inflamed mass public. The two cases of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE illustrate that the traditional media usually got involved after the initial story had emerged online. The pattern of the interaction between traditional media and the Internet in this type of HFSE, where the Internet first publicizes a story and then the traditional media follow, works as a ‘pressure cooker’, intensifying public discussion and thus pushing the relevant government or police to respond. It seems that the Chinese party/state does not deal well with surprises and tends to react less repressively to ‘known’ issues than novel ones (Hassid 2012. p. 213). The Internet’s initiating and traditional media’s reporting make an HFSE event become a public focus. Therefore, the traditional media’s involvement is also a causal condition of the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE, which has helped bring about such outcomes as the Shaanxi and Yunnan provincial governments confessing to the deception of their local departments.

In sum, the causal conditions of the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE include local governments’ emphasis on their own financial and political interests (such as seeking for financial support from the central to establish wild South China Tiger reserve and, protecting government’s reputation from being damaged by its officials’ malfeasance); declining credibility of and public trust in the government/police; limited offline channels for the public to express opinions on political issues; online anonymity; crowdsourcing; and the traditional media’s involvement. In more detail, the local governments’ emphasis on their own financial and political interests brings about injustice that constitutes a potential trigger for a protest. Because of the declining credibility of and public trust in the government/police, Chinese citizens chose to question instead of comply with official announcements that assumed a certain kind of injustice. Because of limited offline channels for them to express their doubts, Chinese citizens resort to the Internet, on which online anonymity makes them feel free and safe when confronting authority, and the web-based crowdsourcing makes sure there is mass participation in searching for evidence and thus they stand a greater chance of gaining redress. After the traditional media’s reporting makes the story known to a wider audience and become a public event, the enlarged public opinion both online and offline pushes the government/police to make changes. The following diagram shows the basic

causal mechanism of the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE. It is a presentation of the relationship between its causal conditions and stages.

Diagram 6.4: The causal mechanism of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE



This diagram shows that the causal conditions mentioned above contribute differently to the causal mechanism of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE. For example, the local government' emphasis on their own financial and political interests is important for explaining why there is such a trigger, it may be meaningless to the second and third stages

because existence of injustice does not necessarily mean there are online exposure and searching. When there are offline channels available for the citizens to express their opinions, they may go for either the offline channels (particularly for those who lack of computer skills or awareness of using the Internet) or the Internet (particularly for those who have a high degree of ease in using the Internet). Online anonymity means nothing for the first stage but important for the second stage because even where they perceive something wrong in an official announcement, Chinese citizens would not likely expose anything online if they feel the Internet is not safe. But online anonymity alone cannot bring about the online exposure stage, as Chinese citizens (e.g. peasants) may still resort to the offline channels if available especially when they lack of computer skills. Accordingly, the online exposure is impossible if no citizen initially questions the official announcement and perceives the injustice of it. The crowdsourcing is important for the searching stage. Moreover, online anonymity is an objective aspect of Chinese cyberspace, but it does not work in every stage of the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE, certainly not in the first and final stages that are offline, and also not necessarily in the searching stage. What Internet users do during this stage may be just using the search engines to look for relevant information and doing detective work offline, their pseudonyms and IP addresses do not necessarily appear online, which diminishes the potential of them to be identified and thus diminishes their dependence on the online anonymity. Therefore, online anonymity is not a necessary condition of the searching stage.

As for the causal condition traditional media's involvement, it is better to keep an open mind about the points at which the traditional media get involved in the process of HFSE. In the case of the South China Tiger, the traditional media were involved at several points: the first is the news conference held by the local government to publicize those tiger photos and announce the existence of the wild South China Tiger, but it is the Internet users who first questioned the authenticity of the tiger photos; the second is after the online exposing that incurred heated online discussion; the third is following the searching that identified the old lunar year calendar. At this point, the traditional media got involved in terms of not only reporting but also investigating, which enlarged and intensified the public doubts about the official announcement. It is clear that, in the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE, it is usually the Internet that sets the agenda first but the role of the traditional media in enlarging public discussion and thus helping pressure the government/police to confess to deception cannot be overlooked. In diagram 6.4, the causal condition of the traditional

media's involvement is placed close to the final stage, not because the traditional media is involved only after the third stage, but in order to highlight its significance to the outcome of the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE.

The target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE and the case of Lin Jiaxiang

The target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE is the most complicated type of HFSE due to it usually having five stages and thus involving more causal conditions. It shares some stages and causal conditions with the fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE (e.g. the first stage trigger emerging offline and the condition of online anonymity) and the non-government/official-focused HFSE (e.g. the searching stage and crowdsourcing). It also has distinctive aspects that other types of HFSE do not have. The fact-checking and target-punishing government/official-focused HFSEs have common causal conditions of crowdsourcing and online anonymity, because both of them are Internet-based and target political subjects; but due to the target of the latter being an individual public officer rather than an official announcement, it may engage different causal conditions. The following sections focus on the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE to explore its causal mechanism via a process of tracing each of its five stages. First, a case of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE is given, to which the method of process-tracing is applied, also to the case of Zhou Jiugeng introduced in Chapter 5. While the case of Zhou Jiugeng focuses on financial malfeasance, the case of Lin Jiaxiang concerns the abuse of power.

Political official sacked 24 hours after restaurant cctv footage is exposed online

On the evening of 29 October 2008, Lin Jiaxiang, the then party secretary and deputy director-general of Shenzhen Maritime Safety Administration (in Guangdong Province), was quarrelling in a restaurant lobby with a little girl's parents who insisted that Lin had assaulted their 11-year-old daughter in the corridor leading to men's toilet. Facing the complaining parents, Lin said: 'I did that, so what? How much money do you want? Do you know who I am? I am from the Ministry of Transport. I rank as high as your mayor. How dare you quarrel with me?' A security camera in the lobby filmed the incident and the footage was posted anonymously the next day on an online forum Aoyi (the news portal website founded by the South News Group based in Guangdong). One hour later a journalist of the *Southern Metropolitan Daily* published a report titled 'A little girl assaulted in a restaurant by a man on the way to toilet'. So far nobody had known the identity of this man.

At around 22:30 on the same day after the first media report concerning Lin was published, a posting emerged in the Aoyi online forum with the title ‘Human Flesh Search Engine, let’s track down the self-called high-level official’. In the morning of 31 October 2008, a lot of news websites and online forums in China reproduced this story and much of the mainstream media immediately followed (Feng 2008). On the same day, an Internet user *osnuigj* revealed the man’s identity; another Internet user provided an audio clip of the dialogue between the man and the girl’s parents in the local police station, which showed that the man wanted to use money to pay for his misdeeds but it was refused by the girl’s parents.

In the afternoon of 31 October 2008, Shenzhen Maritime Safety Administration admitted that the man in the footage was their officer Lin Jiayang and announced that Lin had been suspended from his position and a team organized by the Ministry of Transport from Beijing had arrived in Shenzhen to investigate. Many Chinese Internet users were not satisfied with this and insisted that Lin had committed child molestation but was being shielded from punishment. On 5 November 2008, the Shenzhen police held a news conference to announce the result of their follow-up investigation. Lin was dismissed from his government position for his inappropriate conduct in public. It was also announced that there was not sufficient evidence of assault as the camera in that hotel did not cover the passage leading to the toilet, and thus was unable to show if the assault really happened or not. The case against Lin for child molestation was finally rejected. Meanwhile, persistent Internet users started searching for details of the woman shown in the video having dinner with Lin in that restaurant, who in the view of Chinese Internet users was probably Lin’s mistress (Feng 2008). But the police investigation revealed that the woman was just Lin’s friend.

Process tracing of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE

There are five stages of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE: trigger emerging offline, online exposing, tracking down, naming and shaming, and finally punishing. Before conducting process tracing of each of the five stages, I would like to talk about, first, the online discussion, which is viewed not as a separate stage of the HFSE because it is carried out by the Chinese Internet users throughout nearly the whole process of HFSE (except that the first stage trigger emerged offline and also the last stage – punishment). Since the HFSE is Internet-based collective action, the online discussion is inevitable; but it is not proper to see the online discussion as a separate stage because the stages tracking down and naming and shaming are all based on the online discussion, during which the Internet

users explore possible clues from the exposed picture(s) or video(s), get close to the consensus on the problem embedded in the exposed evidence(s), frame the target, coordinate their action, create the online public opinion, attract attention from the offline audience, and thus pressure their target to give redress. Online discussion is not confined to the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE; it is conducted by Internet users and has similar functions in all the types of HFSE. I put the analysis of online discussion in the section focusing on the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE in order to show the implication of Chinese cyberspace, which highlights Chinese citizens actively engaging in discussion on politically-sensitive topics, expressing different opinions of these issues and even criticizing the government. ‘Though still not a routine experience for Chinese citizens, online political discussion has been steadily growing in prevalence and importance’ (Zhou Xiang 2009, p. 1005). The government/official-focused HFSE is an illustration of the increasingly deliberative role of the Internet in monitoring and examining Chinese local governments and public officers.

Online discussion

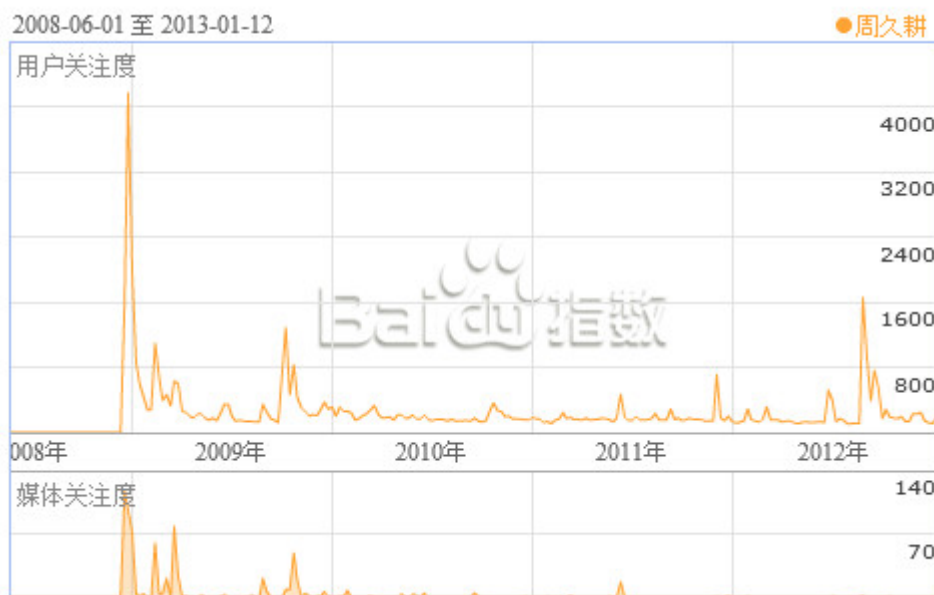
The online discussion in the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE benefits from online anonymity. Covered by a pseudonym, the Chinese Internet users consider the Internet as a freer and more open place for public discussion about political issues such as official corruption. The web-based crowdsourcing allows the Chinese Internet users to interact and exchange effectively and conveniently. But these two conditions alone cannot bring about the online discussion in HFSE; the increasing political awareness of Chinese citizens and public grievance over such issues of official corruption have been encouraging Chinese citizens to go online for discussion and expression, particularly when the web-based crowdsourcing and online anonymity are available. Since the 1990s, the number of modern discussion programmes has mushroomed in the USA (Ryfe 2002), China has also seen the growth of political writings on online forums such as Qiangguo Luntan (Strengthening the Nation Forum), Huaxia Zhiqing Net (China Educated Youth Net) and Xici Hutong and deliberative practices within online environments (Yang 2003; Zhou 2005, Zhou 2006). The rise of online political forums in Chinese cyberspace reflects the increasing political awareness of Chinese citizens. Meanwhile, the offline realities, such as local governments’ emphasis on their financial and political interests and putting aside public interest (one causal condition of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE) and the prevalent phenomenon of official corruption have pushed Chinese citizens to discuss not only broad

issues such as political reform but also specific ones such as how to punish corrupt public officers. Zhang and Lou (2006) have noticed the impact of political blogs in terms of their influence on the state's politics, surveillance of the political behaviour of officials and the government, and engagement of citizens in political discussion, and Zhou, X. (2009) analyses how the Chinese bloggers respond to the dismissal of a Chinese high-level government official. The target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE similarly and more specifically demonstrates Chinese citizens' concern of one of the most focused political issues in China, which is official corruption.

Empirical data gained from a general Internet search In order to detect to what extent Chinese Internet users have paid attention to the targets in the two cases of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE, I searched for relevant information about them on the Internet by using the key words '周久耕' (Zhou Jiugeng in Chinese) and '林嘉祥' (Lin Jiexiang in Chinese) via Baidu, the most popular Chinese search engine. More matching items mean more attention and may imply more relevant online discussions. There are overall 835,000 items matching the key word '周久耕' (by 25 May 2012), most of which record how Zhou fell from his position and was arrested for corruption. He is titled by Chinese Internet users and journalists as 'Tianjiayan Juzhang' (luxury-cigarette bureau chief). His case has been listed among the most well-known HFSE incidents and his name has also been included into the Baidu Baike (Chinese Wikipedia). In the Baidu Zhou Jiugeng Tieba (Baidu Tieba is an online space established by Baidu, in which Internet users exchange and interact with others via publishing postings and giving comments; each section of this online space is assigned to a given topic, the Baidu Zhou Jiugeng Tieba is a section set up especially for online discussion about Zhou Jiugeng), there are overall 5930 postings (by 25 May 2012). The earliest one was published on 12 December 2008, the same day that Zhou was first exposed online. This posting writes 'People in Jiangning [the city where Zhou Jiugeng worked] are poor, real officials are few and dogs [indicating bad officials] are many, so the house price is pushed only to increase rather than decline'. The most recent posting was published on 5 September 2009, almost 9 months after Zhou was first exposed online and close to the date when Zhou was sentenced to jail. This posting reproduced a news report about Zhou being arrested for the charge of accepting bribes worth millions of Yuan. It seems that Chinese Internet users had been closely following the whole process of Zhou's case; although it had taken 9 months before Zhou was finally punished, the attention from the Chinese public did not disappear but did fluctuate within this period, as shown in the

following figures from the Baidu Hot List, an useful tool for learning to what degree the Internet users and media have paid attention to a certain topic within a certain period. The attention given by Internet users is measured by their key-word (Zhou Jiugeng and Lin Jiaxiang) searching online and the attention given by media is measured by the number of the news reports (containing the key words Zhou Jiugeng and Lin Jiaxiang) published online. The more the key-word searches there are, the more the Internet users have cared about Zhou and Lin and the more likely they have involved into relevant online discussions. Similarly, the more the online news are, the more intensely the media have paid attention to Zhou and Lin and the more likely they have initiated online discussion.

Figure 6.1: Chinese Internet users and media’s attentions on the case of Zhou Jiugeng



The figures are from the period from 1 June 2008 to 12 January 2013 (Baidu Index 2013). The upper section indicates the attentions by Internet users (the numbers on the right side of the upper section indicate how frequently Chinese Internet users use the Baidu search engine to search for the information about Zhou Jiugeng in a single day; the number 4,000 or 3,200 does not mean exactly the times of a key-word searching in a single day but is calculated through special algorithms and is based on several dozen million Internet users using the Baidu search engine every day) and the lower one indicates media’s attention (the numbers on the right side of the lower section indicate the number of the news items containing the key word Zhou Jiugeng, which have been published online and included into the Baidu News Channel). The first peak of the curve in the upper row corresponds to the time shortly after Zhou was first exposed online; the media’s attention also reached its peak at this time. After

the peak, the attention by Chinese Internet users largely declined and kept on a steady level between 2010 and 2012. Meanwhile, the attention by Chinese media also largely dropped after the peak and then it shows that Chinese media paid nearly no attention to Zhou Jiugeng after 2009. The figure shows that Chinese Internet users quickly responded to the case of Zhou Jiugeng after his remark on the real estate market was first questioned online, with intensive activity in the first several days. Although the intensity decreased after the peak days, Chinese Internet users retained their interest over the next several months, suggesting that their political sensitivity was relatively high. Then the attention by Chinese Internet users to Zhou Jiugeng reached the second peak in 2009, which corresponds to the time when Zhou was sentenced to jail. After keeping on a steady level for nearly three years, the curve reached its third peak, which may relate not directly to Zhou Jiugeng but to another public officer in Shaanxi province, who was shown in a photo published online smiling at a traffic accident scene that caused 36 deaths. Enraged by the huge contrast between the public grievance toward the serious traffic accident and the public officer's relaxed expression at the scene, the Chinese Internet users targeted the 'smiling officer' and found out about his luxury lifestyle, like Zhou Jiugeng, wearing expensive watches in several occasions (Liu 2012). This public officer reminded Chinese citizens of Zhou Jiugeng and this led to heated online discussion on whether he would be another Zhou Jiugeng and be similarly punished for corruption (Gong 2012). Certainly, Zhou Jiugeng has become a symbol of Chinese Internet users' discussing, exposing and punishing corrupt public officers. The attention paid by Chinese Internet users to Zhou Jiugeng and Zhou Jiugeng-alike public officers will not disappear as long as the problem of corruption continues, the political awareness of Chinese citizens keeps alive, and the Internet is still available for online political discussion.

We can see again that the media has never been absent in the events that have started online. In the case of Zhou Jiugeng, the media attention was most intensive in the days after Zhou was first exposed online and also peaked in the days close to the date when Zhou was sentenced to jail. But differing from attention by Internet users, media's attention to Zhou Jiugeng was not sustained. This might be related to the timeliness of news that usually focuses on the events that have happened most recently. But no matter if the attention is from Internet users or media and no matter if the attention is in online discussion or news coverage, they all have helped in creating and intensifying public opinion on topics such as official corruption and thus forcing the relevant government to give redress in response to public criticism.

Empirical data gained from content searching on Chinese forums I also searched for the relevant postings on other popular Chinese forums, such as the Sina and the Tianya forums. On the Sina forum (Sina is among the most popular news portals in China, most postings on its forums are news reproduced by Internet users from multiple sources), there are 2,994 items (by 4 June 2012) matching the keyword Zhou Jiugeng who has been viewed as a synonym of Chinese corrupt officials, for instance there are items about second Zhou Jiugeng, third Zhou Jiugeng and Zhou Jiugengs; his case has also been repeatedly cited by journalists as a successful example of online anti-corruption. On the Tianya forum, there are 2,385 relevant discussion threads, among which the earliest one was started on 11 December 2008, titled ‘Most wanted: Nanjing Jiangning Real Estate Bureau Chief Zhou Jiugeng! Let’s discuss and comment.’ This thread got 11,356 hits and 246 replies (By 4 June 2012). It emerged on the day when Zhou was first exposed online; nearly all its replies blamed Zhou and Zhou-alike officials for high house prices, but few mentioned Zhou’s corruption because no relevant evidence had yet been exposed. The last reply in this discussion thread was on 18 December 2008, when another new discussion thread was started, titled ‘the most recent progress of HFSE on Zhou Jiugeng’, which got 11,673 hits and 113 replies. Obviously this new discussion thread diverted Internet users’ attention from the earlier as its author gathered evidence from Internet users about Zhou’s corruption, such as who sent Zhou those luxury cigarettes and watches, who was the real-estate developer he wanted to shield, what was the relationship between them, and so on.

Relevant online contents about Lin Jiaxiang I used the same methods in searching for Lin Jiaxiang-related online content. Through using the searching engine Baidu, there are 456,000 items matching ‘林嘉祥’ (by 25 May 2012). In the Baidu Lin Jiaxiang Tieba, there are 6,561 postings, the earliest one from 31 October 2008, one day after the video evidence of Lin’s rude behaviour in public was first exposed online. In this posting, the author attached a few pictures of Lin Jiaxiang who was photographed when inspecting his subordinate departments. Among the replies to it, Internet users published more pictures of Lin and one of them wrote ‘the man in that video showing him assaulting a girl and calling himself a high-level official from Beijing looks like Lin Jiaxiang in these pictures’. Another one wrote ‘Rubbish! I will chop you to death whenever I see you.’ On the Sina forum, there were only 821 items relevant to Lin Jiaxiang, the earliest one published on 5 November 2008 (nearly one week after the original video was published online) which reproduced a piece of news about Lin’s dismissal. There were fewer postings relevant to Lin than that to Zhou. It seems that Chinese

media had less enthusiasm for the case of Lin Jiaxiang, probably because in China issues about financial malfeasance instead of power abuse are more attractive for the media as the public care more about the former.

On the Tianya forum, however, the discussion threads relevant to Lin were 13,956, far exceeding those relevant to Zhou. The earliest ones emerged on 31 October 2008, one day after the video evidence of Lin's rude behaviour in public was exposed online. Among these discussion threads there was one that had got an extremely high number of hits (178,912) and comments (2,177), titled 'what else Lin has assaulted?' In this discussion thread, the initiator *dongbeihu9* wrote that Lin had not only assaulted a teenage girl but also assaulted the whole Chinese population. Another emerged on the same day when the Shenzhen police announced that the charge on Lin of child molestation was turned down by the court because there was no convincing evidence supporting the charge raised by the girl's parents. This discussion thread was titled as 'Lin is so lucky to escape from criminal charge – Shenzhen police says: the charge child molestation is refused as Lin's behaviour is viewed only as drunken indecent behaviour.' Among the replies to this discussion thread, most Internet users expressed their resistance against this result. And many other discussion threads relevant to Lin on the Tianya forum all emerged after the announcement was made public, which expressed a general concern that this charge should not have been refused and there might be a cover-up preventing Lin from being punished seriously.

What these empirical data above tell us about the HFSE Chinese Internet users demonstrated a stronger tendency for self-expression on the Tianya forum. The postings on the Sina forum tell us that the Chinese media followed the two cases of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE but, due to the timeliness of news, the media's attention paid to these cases was not as sustained as that paid by the Internet users. Moreover, in order to cater for the audience, the media focused more on the corruption in terms of financial malfeasance rather than power abuse. There may be two reasons why the financial malfeasance instead of power abuse is more of a concern for the Chinese public. First, among all the forms of corruption, economic offences such as bribery and embezzlement (on both provincial and lower levels) occupy the majority of the corruption cases that have been revealed under investigation by the state supervisory system (Wederman 2004; Li 2013). This has given an impression to the Chinese public that Chinese public officers are either good or financially corrupt, and also an impression that financial malfeasance is a common

phenomenon in the Chinese political system, incurring wider public discontent. Second, as some scholars state, social unrest in China is deeply rooted in the economic dissatisfaction felt by the Chinese citizens.

While reforms and modernization make popular dissatisfaction and social unrest unavoidable, corruption and malfeasance by employers and government worsen the impact of these trends to such a degree that what may have been bearable in the transition to markets and global opening becomes insufferable, triggering open hostility and violence. (Keidel 2005, p. 8)

While it would be a mistake to attribute social unrest completely to corruption and malfeasance, corruption and malfeasance clearly have generated much of the distrust and anger that convert underlying economic disaffection into open hostility and social unrest. The financial malfeasance undoubtedly intensifies the economic disaffection felt by the ordinary Chinese people especially when they struggle for a living while government officials are found wearing luxury watches and smoking luxury cigarettes.

A detailed examination of the online discussions relevant to Zhou and Lin on the Tianya forum demonstrates that the Internet users involved in the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE were concerned more about the financial malfeasance of their targets and had a strong and clear orientation in their online collective action, which is getting their targets punished. On the Tianya forum, the discussion threads relevant to Lin are far more than those relevant to Zhou and the majority of the discussion threads relevant to Lin emerged after the Shenzhen police announced that the charge of child molestation against Lin was turned down due to lack of evidence. These discussion threads tell us that the Internet users were not satisfied with the result. They insisted in their online discussions that Lin should be put into prison for his behaviour in public; they also proposed a new round of HFSE to find out if Lin was corrupt, which could bring Lin a punishment more serious than dismissal. It is reasonable to suppose that if the Chinese Internet users could foresee that one month later another public officer Zhou Jiugeng was given an 11-year jail sentence they may feel even more unwilling to accept the result of Lin's case. The comparison between Zhou and Lin' cases with respect to the online discussions on them reflects the popular concern of Chinese citizens over the financial malfeasance of Chinese public officers and the strong desire of Chinese Internet users in the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE to exert a 'just' punishment on their targets.

First stage: trigger emerged offline

The causal conditions of the first stage refer to the reasons why the official corruption occurred in China. The corruption is generally defined as the misuse of political power for private gain. It has become a major social and political issue in China since 1978 when Chinese authorities began to implement the policy of ‘reform and opening’ (He 2000, p. 243). It may not be the corruption that directly triggered HFSE, but its long existence and prevalence have incurred public grievance and made citizens more and more sensitive to officials’ words and deeds. The case of Zhou Jiugeng did not emerge directly out of Zhou’s corruption because, at the beginning, evidence of Zhou’s corruption had not been discovered. It emerged out of citizens’ sensitivity to officials’ words and deeds that were supposedly related to corruption. Therefore, basically, the causal conditions of this stage are relevant to official corruption in China, but more specifically, it is the citizens’ sensitivity to official corruption that triggered the government/official-focused HFSE.

There are several reasons leading to the occurrence and prevalence of corruption and making financial malfeasance the major form of corruption in China. *First*, economic reform and the decentralization aspect of the market economy have made local government officials important economic actors in developing regional economies (He 2000, p. 248). The promotion of senior officials at local levels is also based on their performance in advancing regional economic development. Moreover, local governments face heavy pressure and fierce competition from other regions in advancing economic development, pressuring them to use irregular ways to beat the competition. All this requires a close relationship between local officials and businessmen in their own regions and provides the businessmen with incentives and opportunities to seek political protection and support by bribing local officials.

Second, ‘the breakdown of the prior distribution of national income among different social strata, i.e. the relative reduction of officials’ income, drives government officials and public institutions to seek extra income to supplement their own or their staff’s relative low and fixed official salaries’ (He 2000, p. 251). In the 1980s, the salary of Chinese public officers was lower than other social groups such as workers in state-owned enterprises and employees of foreign-owned enterprises. The high inflation rates in the 1980s and early 1990s further reduced public officers’ income (Keidel 2005). This redistribution of income drove many public officers, work units and public institutions to illicitly seek extra income by utilizing their institutional power and resources to improve their staff’s welfare. When some public

officials and institutions succeeded in their corruption, others followed, facilitating the spread of various corrupt practices from one department to another, from junior to senior officials, and from lower to higher authorities. When the 'grey income' (the money and the other forms of income garnered through work units) and the 'black income' (garnered from individual officials' corrupt practices) became an important part and source of income of public officials, it proved very difficult to root out such corrupt practice driven by private interests (He 2000, p. 252).

Third, 'the loopholes in, and weakness of, regulatory policies and institutions, certain policy failures, and a lack of experience and technology in the anti-corruption agencies tackling the new forms of corruption, all contributed to the growth of corruption' (He 2000, p. 252-3). This cause may be applied more properly to the periods of 1980s and 1990s when the intensification of corruption in China had just started and new forms of corruption emerged. In these periods, the negative outcome of economic regulations (e.g. allowing the public institutions to engage in business activities) issued shortly after the launch of economic reform, had not been outstanding and the top leaders tolerated official corruption by the excuse that 'the anti-corruption effort may hamper the reform and opening up policy and economic development' (He 2000, p. 252). Such policies drove government functionaries to use their power to collect money to supplement their department's inadequate income and improve their own welfare; top leaders' tolerance made the anti-corruption agencies less required and able to address new forms of corruption.

Fourth, 'the incompleteness of political reform and the weakness of the current political system undermine anti-corruption efforts which, in turn, promote the further proliferation of corruption' (He 2000, p. 253). Treisman (2000, p. 402) links the weakness of the legal system in detecting and punishing corrupt officials to the low cost of a corrupt act, as the most obvious cost of corruption is the risk of getting caught and punished. Differing from the third cause, the application of which is more conditional (depending on the economic policies of the day and the top leaders' attitude toward the corruption), the fourth cause applies to both the last 20 years of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century of China, because the top leadership has been changing and the economic policies have been changing as well, but the nature of the political system in China has always been the same: one-party rule leading to the lack of an effective mechanism of checks and balances in supervising senior officials. There is also a lack of independence of the existing anti-corruption agencies, which undermines the anti-corruption efforts. The current major anti-corruption agencies in China,

such as the central and local Commissions for Discipline Inspection, the Ministry of Supervision and its local branches, the supreme and local Procurators and the Supreme and local Courts, depend on the leadership of the Politburo and local party committees in terms of decision making and financial support. Such a political system seriously restricts the ability of the anti-corruption agencies to investigate and deal with corruption independently.

Corrupt officials have often established networks of personal ties with senior officials that became 'protective umbrellas' which are structured and reinforced by the leadership system. In investigating, detecting, and trying cases of corruption, anti-corruption agencies often face heavy pressure from various sources, sometimes including direct pressure from some senior officials. As a result, many important corrupt officials have not been punished in a timely way and others have escaped punishment completely (He 2000, p. 253).

Fifth, in Chapter 5, talking about the corruption that is one of the triggers of Chinese bottom-up collective action, some traditional factors have been given to explain the cause of corruption in China. In this section, more traditional factors are given to illustrate their contributions to the growth of corruption in China. One is 'the cultural heritage of absolutist rule that lasted for 2000 years' and the other 'many of the social customs and practices of agricultural society are still very popular in today's China' (He 2000, p. 255). Under absolutist rule, rulers treated the state as their own private property and bureaucrats treated the power as theirs, while ideas of public trust and empowerment were non-existent. In today's China, such attitudes are still very common among public officers, who view themselves as the dominant class based on their control of both political power and most of the economic wealth, leading to them enjoying a wide range of privileges and the highest social status (Qingzhemu 2010; Strengthening-China Forum 2012). The career of being a public officer is popularly pursued by young Chinese people because it is a stable, life-time employment (Chinese people call this career an 'iron bowl') and they can enjoy the power, respect and welfare the career endows. The social recognition of working in government as a favourable and profitable career has led to a feeling of superiority among Chinese government officials. In fact the superiority has been not only a feeling but also an actual practice (No author 2011c; Che and Wang 2010). Numerous examples have illustrated power abuse by Chinese public officers, such as their private use of government vehicles (Southcn.com 2012), giving their friends or relatives the priority over others in government-led projects (Judichongyou 2012; Zhu 2012), and using public funds for private travel (Lie 2012). All these practices seem have become long-existing, deep-rooted traditions within the Chinese political system. Now it is easier to understand why, in the case of Lin Jiaxiang, Lin

claimed loudly to be a high-level government official, because he supposed his highly-ranked position could scare away the girl's parents and make himself free from possible punishment.

China is still an agricultural society with 13 hundred million people, mostly peasants (roughly 70 per cent of the population) living in rural areas. A large proportion of public officers come from peasant families, who bring many traditional practices to their public life. 'Particularist practices, i.e. people giving preferential treatment to those with whom they have close relations, are still very common' (He 2000, p. 255). It is quite common to see Chinese public officers who have been exposed furthering the interests of family members by taking advantage of their official posts, such as the former Shanghai leader Chen Liangyu, who was dismissed for financial malfeasance and power abuse (Zhou, X. 2009), and a high-level public officer Wang Dawu in Hunan province who was dismissed for his appointment of his 21-year-old daughter as the chief of a local government department (Lei 2012). In the case of Zhou Jiugeng, Chinese Internet users questioned if Zhou's remark about the real estate market was intended to protect the interests of some real estate developers and then they were searching for information about Zhou's family members in order to find out if some of them were linked to the real estate industry. This case reflects the fact that the particularist practice of Chinese government officials is not new to Chinese citizens and Chinese Internet users' response in terms of conducting HFSE on this well-known tradition means that it has incurred public discontent.

In sum, a series of economic, political, social and cultural factors have contributed to the occurrence and prevalence of corruption in China. The trigger of government/official focused-HFSE, which is about citizens' sensitivity to official corruption brought about by the long existence and prevalence of official corruption in China, is caused mainly by these factors. However it does not necessarily bring about an online protest unless there is an offline-to-online transition during which the phenomenon of corruption is shaped into a specific target, on which the Chinese Internet users can work to achieve limited success. Put another way, the phenomenon of official corruption is so deeply and widely rooted in China that it cannot be eradicated in a short period; targeting individual public officers would be a feasible, even though subtle, way to improve the current situation. The offline-to-online transition also makes the target known to a wider audience and thus enables a mass participation in order to get the target punished. In the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE, the offline-to-online transition refers to its second stage: exposing online.

Second stage: exposing online

Online exposure in the case of Lin Jiexiang This stage is conducted by particular Chinese Internet users who are among the public concerned about official corruption but are the few who first perceived something wrong and initially exposed the problem online. Although we do not know exactly the background information of the initial exposé, at least we can be sure that he/she has a relatively higher degree of ease in using the Internet, which is an essential element of the pattern of government/official-focused HFSE. In the case of Lin Jiexiang, Lin was initially exposed in an online video filmed by a hotel CCTV. Converting CCTV footage to an online video requires certain computer skills and exposing it online needs strong awareness of using the Internet. The initial exposé might be one of the security staff of the hotel, who had easy access to the CCTV footage. In China, it is usually the rural migrant young people who work as security in big cities. The basic characteristics of this group of young people are that they are from rural poor families and forced to move to big cities in search for jobs; they are much less educated and have to look for non-professional jobs such as security; they are isolated from mainstream society and going to the Internet cafe might be among the few recreational activities for them after work (it is much cheaper and easier to access the Internet in Internet cafes than setting up Internet facilities at home); they are different from their father's generation which tends to be obedient, some of them may have felt discontent with the society that has given them fewer opportunities than their urban counterparts to live a better life. They are not naturally rebellious but their experiences may have enabled them to have a relatively higher degree of ease in using the Internet and they could be easily enraged by social injustice related to their own suffering. Lin Jiexiang claiming for himself as a high-level government official and his attempts to use money to pay for his behaviour in public, which highlight two of the most sensitive issues in Chinese society, namely money and power (they are usually interconnected), may have angered those, e.g. rural migrant workers, who have been suffering from their lack of money and power.

Looking in detail at the video exposing Lin Jiexiang, we can see that at the end, the exposé wrote in white Chinese characters (on a black background): 'from the event of Qian Jun abusing an old man to the one in which a government official drove a public vehicle into passengers, to the event of a self-styled high-level government official assaulting a teenage girl, we hope that the society can promote justice, stick to justice, put those thugs holding 'special power' into prison, return us a clean and harmonious society'. Clearly, this video was not randomly uploaded online but was intentionally processed using the original camera

footage before uploading (there were also captions), and was also targeting public discontent with social injustice, especially social injustice related to official corruption. Online exposure in the case of Zhou Jiugeng reflects a public concern about the Chinese real estate prices that has been proved by HFSE actors as potentially linked to official corruption.

Online exposure in the case of Zhou Jiugeng The real estate price has become one of the hottest topics for the Chinese public, particularly concerned by those who form the majority of Chinese population and struggle to afford their own houses. In Beijing, Shanghai, and other big cities, the average house price in 2008 had reached over 12,000 Yuan (USD 1,930) per square metre, which far exceeded the reach of people who earned on average 15,000 Yuan (USD 2,412) per year (by 2008). This means that for a 100-square-metre apartment accommodating a family of three, if the couple earns 30,000 Yuan (USD 4,824) per year, they could pay off such a big apartment within 40 years without other expenditures (certainly this is impossible); meanwhile, the bank rate for personal loans for real estate and commodity prices have been increasing each year. The huge and continually expanding gap between the real estate price and personal income has imposed pressures on many Chinese and further incurred public criticism that the government has not properly regulated the real estate market. In China there is a special term *house slave* (*fang nu*) which describes people who strive to pay off their houses via a bank loan. It has been frequently addressed by Chinese economists such as Lang Xianping who believe that it is the collusion of the local governments, banks and real estate developers that has pushed house prices to such a high level in order to boost their own profits. The local governments' emphasis on economic development and the real estate developers' desire for political protection have provided significant incentives and opportunities for senior officials to engage in corruption. Zhou Jiugeng was the chief of the Jiangning (a major district of Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu province, among the most developed provinces in China) Real Estate Management Bureau; because of this he was interviewed by a local television about the real estate market in Jiangning and also because of this, when he used words like punishing real estate developers who sold houses at a lower-than-cost price (because the high house prices led to an overstock, some real estate developers may have lowered their house price to clean out their stock and get the cash to repay their bank loan), he was initially questioned by a local citizen about his main duty of regulating the Jiangning real estate market.

In the original posting titled 'Eight questions to the chief of Jiangning Real Estate Management Bureau' that initiated the online discussion on Zhou Jiugeng, the author raised

eight questions, such as ‘as a government official, do you have the right to comment on the real estate prices?’, ‘as a government official, do you have the right to say that house prices in Jiangning should not decline?’, ‘what did you do and say when house prices were high and why are you so ambitious when they are declining now?’, ‘whose interest do you represent?’, etc. The author firmly believed that Zhou Jiugeng, as a government official, did not have the right to manipulate the real estate price but should leave it to the market, and the government should protect the public interest rather than shield real estate developers. The popular concern among the Chinese public over the issue of house price meant that this posting attracted a lot of attention after it was published online and got 4894 hits and 47 comments (Hengda lvzhou Forum 2012), most of which expressed support for the author and opposition to Zhou Jiugeng.

How can such a chief of a small local bureau be so arrogant? It seems that in China for the construction of a sound legal system, there is still a long way to go, I am just so wordless, if all the Chinese officials are like Zhou, when will we ordinary people feel relax?

We all support you (the author), we will let the posting seen by more people.

Such a corrupt guy, do an investigation on him; if all Chinese officials are like him, China is close to the end.

F**k local government! How could a government employ such an official no better than a pig? Now it is the worldwide financial crisis, economy should be directed rather than controlled. You f**king use the power in hand to control the Chinese real estate market, what's your aim? Worse than traitor! The oil price has declined from 150 dollar to 30 dollar, why couldn't the house price decline according to the rule of the free market?

We can reasonably suppose that the initial exposé has a higher degree of ease in using the Internet as Nanjing is a highly-developed area, where the popularity of the Internet is greater than in less-developed areas. And, as the target of online exposure are public officers, online anonymity makes Internet users feel safer when confronting authority. The initial exposés in the two cases of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE did not use their real names but pseudonyms to log onto the online forums where they wrote the posting or uploaded the video. The model of crowdsourcing is not necessary in the second stage which is conducted by individual Internet users and does not need mass participation. But there is still a question of why they chose to expose online instead of reporting the problem via either offline channels, such as the government-established petition system, or formal online channels, such as on the official website of the Ministry of Supervision where there is a special section, ‘reporting online’, providing Chinese citizens with online access for reporting official misconduct. A possible answer to this question may be related to the public distrust of

the political system, which is also a causal condition of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE (see the detailed analysis of the declining credibility and public trust of Chinese political system in the section focusing on the fact-checking government/official focused HFSE in this chapter). So a causal condition of the second stage is public distrust of the government-established channels (both online and offline) for reporting official misconducts.

Third stage: searching and tracking down

The case of Zhou Jiugeng demonstrates how the third stage contributes to the outcome of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE. Initially, Zhou was first criticized by Internet users for his inappropriate remarks but later identified as being corrupt. Without HFSE, or more specifically, without the third stage of searching and tracking down, Zhou may have just been given a disciplinary warning for his inappropriate remark in public, which is not serious enough for a jail sentence. In the original posting that first put Zhou Jiugeng onto the public focus, he and the government department he represented were condemned for high house prices, a hot topic for Chinese public; but, as this posting attracted more and more attention, knowledgeable Internet users exposed new details about him and others took on the role of detective, using their own contacts both online and offline to explore more about him. The pictures exposed online showing him smoking luxury cigarettes indicated only a suspicion of corruption which however emboldened more Internet users to look for more evidence of Zhou's corruption. They did not search for Zhou's background information, such as education and family, (which in cases of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE were key points to check to see if a newly appointed mayor was qualified for his appointment). In the case of Zhou Jiugeng, actors focused on exploring Zhou's luxury lifestyle that could be used as evidence of Zhou's corruption. The case of Lin Jiaxiang also exemplifies how Chinese Internet users identified Lin within 24 hours. Suspicion of Lin's assault of a little girl shown in a video exposed online encouraged Chinese Internet users to question Lin's qualification as a public officer by exploring whether or not he was corrupt, and question his private life by tracking down the woman shown in the video having dinner with him at the hotel.

One significant condition of the third stage in the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE is the web-based crowdsourcing. The searching and tracking down were carried out by more than one Internet user who spontaneously and voluntarily contributed

their time, energy, knowledge and experience to tracking down their target and searching for evidence of the target's misdeeds. Without massive participation, the searching and tracking down stage would not be possible and the result that Zhou was identified as being corrupt and Lin identified within only 24 hours would also be impossible. Behind the Internet users' contribution and participation, it is the public discontent with social injustice concerning official corruption and a desire to correct the injustice, and without which it may be harder to see spontaneous and voluntary crowdsourcing. Online anonymity is an essential causal condition for the second, online exposure stage, because online exposing is usually carried out by individual Internet users and this makes them more easily targeted by online censorship. For those individual exposers, they may need online anonymity to cover their real identities due to the worry of persecution, especially when they expose government officials. But for the third stage, online anonymity is not so necessary because the conduct of searching and tracking down does not necessarily require the participants to log onto certain online forums. Their pseudonyms and IP addresses, which have the potential of allowing their owners to be identified, do not necessarily appear online. What they do may be just using the search engines to look for relevant information and even doing detective work offline such as talking to their contacts about whether or not they know their target. Therefore, online anonymity is not a necessary condition of the searching and tracking down stage.

Fourth stage: naming and shaming

Naming and shaming are inherently connected to each other but not causally related. Shaming the identified target is purposefully oriented as shaming is not the by-product or outcome of naming but itself a formal tactic of punishment (Pratt 2000, p. 418). With respect to the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE, naming and shaming are not always in the same stage. In some cases, naming the target was done at the second stage when the original exposers knew the identity of the target, such as the case of Zhou Jiugeng who was clearly named in the original posting. But, in other cases, the original exposers did not know the transgressor and thus went online in the hope that the Internet users could help identify the transgressor, such as the case of Lin Jiaxiang who was initially named by the exposers as a high-level official because his real name was unknown. In order to correspond to the image of them being connected, in this section I put both of them in the same stage when analysing them.

After the emergence of the mass media, humiliation via naming and shaming has become amplified as mass media make those named and shamed known by many more people in a much shorter time. If saying naming is to make the target known publicly, the shaming is more an expression of personal emotion. Katz (1987) has suggested that individuals reading about crime in the news may not only feel personally outraged, but may feel joined to others in an imagined community similarly outraged by the crime. Likewise, Peelo (2006, p. 163) highlights the way that media reporting of extraordinary homicide cases subtly directs audiences to 'emotionally align' with the victims and survivors. Thus, public narratives about crime in the news media operate on a distinctly emotional level, weaving powerful messages about not only the nature and extent of crime but also how the audience ought to feel about crime. The occurrence of HFSE has shown that the public is not only the recipient of media content about the named and shamed but also practitioners of naming and shaming. It is also an illustration that naming and shaming could be used by Internet users to transform a trivial story into a public event by creating the online uproar of condemnation that pushes for the punishment of the transgressor.

The naming and shaming by traditional media is as powerful as that on the Internet, but the motivations behind them are different. Naming and shaming criminals by media (e.g. newspaper) is out of either the media's professional commitment or getting a wider readership via establishing an emotional link with audience. The position of the media in naming and shaming is different from that of the criminal and victim, which is linking the event and audience. The motivation behind the naming and shaming in target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE is the getting of justice by the Chinese Internet users who, if broadly defined, are victims of official corruption. HFSE actors that aimed to protest against individual public officers are not only the link between the event and the wider audience, but also part of the event. Although the outcome of the naming and shaming in HFSE is more and more attention focused on the target, because of the Internet amplifying the effect of naming and shaming via its rapid information dissemination and its capability of reaching a wider audience, the primary motivation behind them is correcting the injustice.

The postings relevant to Zhou Jiugeng and Lin Jiaxiang reflect how the Chinese Internet users named and shamed their targets. Under a discussion thread initiated on the Tianya forum, several Internet users expressed their attitudes toward the Zhou-alike public officers:

The majority of governmental officials are rubbish; how many of them make a real contribution to our state? The majority of them know only eating, drinking, visiting

prostitutes, and gambling; they are corrupt, having mistresses; rubbish! I am waiting the day when our governments are reconstructed.

House Demolition Agency, this title makes us feel horrible! How many people in China have been affected by it? Officials in this agency are very powerful. What are the ordinary people? Maybe in their eyes we are only rubbish, shit; otherwise how there can be forced demolition? ... [I]f our government officials can conduct house demolition rightfully and impartially, who would like to confront them?

Following a discussion thread relevant to Lin Jiaxiang, which was titled ‘What else Lin has assaulted?’, Internet users expressed their concerns about not only public officers but also the government and the whole political system.

You [implying government officials, opposite to ‘we’ as ordinary people] used public funds to eat and drink, we tolerated this; you drove public vehicles for private use, we tolerated this; you had mistress, we tolerated this; you had luxury villas, we tolerated this; but nowadays, you start to molest our children...

Black sheep! Only the tip of the iceberg!

This is the real barbarity covered by the title ‘civil servant’. Nowadays, only those with thick skin and black heart can have such high positions like Lin. How possibly can kind-hearted people get that position? How many of our government officials are really good?

This is by no means an isolated case. Without the atmosphere around government officials, who dare to do like this? Who dare to say like this? This time, Lin’s behaviour was filmed, so we got evidence but, without this video, they could say that we had slandered him. Lin deserves to get the death sentence.

It is better to ask other officials around Lin to expose themselves. I have been always holding an idea: the government used taxpayers’ money to buy vehicles for public service, why not put tags on these vehicles to show they are only for public service, then how do they still dare to use them privately? Government officials’ salaries are from taxpayers, so they have the responsibility to serve the public. It is not that they can’t do that, but in fact they do not want to do that...

Obviously, Chinese Internet users were inclined to relate exposed individual officials to other unexposed ones and depict their corruption as a general problem within the Chinese political system; they also related the exposed misdeeds to other unexposed ones: in both Zhou and Lin’s cases, Internet users associated their misdeeds with forced house demolition, drinking, eating and travelling using public funds, exchange of power with money, having an extramarital affair, etc. After the target was confirmed as having committed corruption, the Chinese Internet users named and shamed not only their target but also the government and more broadly the political system from which the official corruption had originated. The analysis of Chinese bottom-up collective action in Chapter 3 has told us that the power structure and power relationship in China determine that the target of Chinese bottom-up collective action is not as broad as the whole political system, but as specific as the local

governments (e.g. the target of fact-checking, government/official-focused HFSE) and individual members of cadres (e.g. the target of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE). But the naming and shaming in target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE reflects that Chinese citizens' understanding of the official corruption and other problems on the local level is by no means confined to the local level; they attribute the official corruption, as the scholars of Chinese corruption have stated, to the Chinese political system that has brought about such traditions as the government emphasizing economic development, officials seeking personal interests, the low cost of a corrupt act and the superiority of power holders. Therefore a causal condition of the naming and shaming should be the public discontent with official corruption and also with the political system that has contributed to the growth of corruption in China.

As stressed already, the naming and shaming in the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE should be viewed as not only a stage of HFSE but also a personalized method of online punishment. Massaro (1991, p. 1884) states that the revival of emotionally charged legal sanctions (shaming) reflects the profound and widespread dissatisfaction with existing methods of punishment. Accordingly, online naming and shaming in HFSE reflects public distrust of existing formal channels for punishing corrupt officials. As the content of naming and shaming in target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE is relevant to political issues, online anonymity should also be a causal condition under this stage.

Fifth stage: offline punishment

Ambiguity in Internet policy While online naming and shaming brings the target humiliation and a ruined reputation, the offline punishment in the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE brings the target dismissal or a jail sentence. In the case of Zhou Jiugeng, Zhou was sentenced to prison for the charge of corruption and in the case of Lin Jiaixiang, Lin was dismissed for his behaviour in public. Why did the Chinese government positively respond to rather than ignore and even repress the online uproar brought about by the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE? It would be better to answer this question from the perspective of the Chinese government's attitude toward the Internet and Internet users' political discourse and action in cyberspace. There has always been an obvious ambiguity with regard to the Internet censorship in Chinese cyberspace. The state's attitude toward access to foreign websites is clear-cut and determined; for instance YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are blocked within China's territory; meanwhile there is also strict

ensorship on Chinese domestic websites, and Chinese Internet users' online discourse and activity are closely monitored. One of the tactics of online content control is keyword filtering, such as the key words '一党专政' (one party regime in Chinese) are automatically banned in Chinese online forums. However a complete power structure in Chinese cyberspace, like the power structure in the real world, is never as simple as only censoring and being censored, or controlling and being controlled. Evidence has shown creative ways by Chinese Internet users to bypass and resist online censorship (Herold and Marolt 2011; Tang and Yang 2011).

The Chinese government's attitude toward HFSE-alike online collective actions reflects another dimension of Chinese cyberspace: the Chinese government has shown some tolerance toward those emerging online collective actions that are basically not anti-state and anti-party, as well as those not coupled with civil unrest in the real world (Herold 2008). For the non-government/official-focused HFSE, because it is not so relevant to politics, it is out of the state's sight line; the government/official-focused HFSE is an illustration of the contention in Chinese cyberspace between Internet users and local politics and thus has not incurred much repression from central government. Guobin Yang analysed numerous cases in which Chinese Internet users succeeded in bringing injustices to national attention or managed to cause changes in local-government policies of official behaviour, and he argues that the Internet has brought about a 'social revolution, because the ordinary people assume an unprecedented role as agents of change and because new social formations are among its most profound outcomes' (Yang 2009b, p. 213). It is still not clear to what extent HFSE has contributed to this 'social revolution', but its existence shows that even though there has been heated dispute online and offline over whether or not the HFSE should be banned because of negative aspects such as its invasion of individual privacy in terms of exposing online personal details of the target, the central government has been implicitly relying on the Internet not only to promote self-discipline of the members of the public (via non-government/official-focused HFSE) but also to enhance its capability of dealing with problems at the local level (via the government/official-focused HFSE). As the journalist Richburg from *Washington Post* observes:

The Internet is introducing a new measure of public accountability and civic action into China's [...] political system. [...] For the moment, the central government in Beijing appears to be allowing Internet protests to continue, and in some instances even encouraging them – as long as the campaigns are confined to local issues and target local officials. (Richburg 2009)

Discrimination in Internet policy An examination of how Chinese cyberspace displays differently the issues relevant to the central and local governments may further help understand the ambiguity underlying the online content control. The ambiguity here is more like discrimination which could explain why the government/official-focused HFSE is able to survive in a Chinese cyberspace of strict online censorship and has been positively responded to rather than banned by authorities. *Weibo*, or micro-blogging, is among the most popular Internet applications in Chinese cyberspace. According to the CNNIC (2012), by the end of 2011 there had been nearly 250 million Weibo users. Weibo has become one of the most important channels for Chinese to get information and exchange ideas. The Sina Weibo is the most popular. A typical example illustrating the power of Weibo in exerting influence on the political decision making of local issues is the case of Wu Yin, a young woman in Zhejiang province who was sentenced to immediate execution by the Supreme Court for the charge of illegally aggregating private capital. This judgement incurred the most intense online uproar in the Weibo sphere where law experts, government officials, university professors, and businessmen all expressed their opposition to it (Fenghuang Finance 2012). It was generally held that Wu Yin did not deserve the death sentence. The heated online discussion attracted attention from traditional media and thus triggered nationwide discussion, which pushed the Supreme Court to revoke its decision and require the Zhejiang High Court to review Wu's case. On 21 May 2012, Wu was still given the death sentence by the Supreme Court but with a two-year reprieve, which usually means life imprisonment in China.

However, the political scandal of Bo Xilai (one of the most influential politicians in China) witnessed a different process: the online discussion about him emerged in Chinese cyberspace (particularly in Weibo sphere) immediately after his scandal (corruption) was exposed by the Chinese media in March 2012, and then intensified sharply as many Weibo users reproduced news about Bo and his family, and gave comments on Bo's scandal. The intensified online discussion was followed by the start of online censorship via keyword filtering: any content including the key words '薄熙来' (Bo Xilai in Chinese) and/or names of his family members was blocked but then Weibo users would still be able to use Chinese pinyin (the system for writing Chinese in the Roman alphabet) instead of Chinese characters to publish news and information about Bo. Seeing the online discussion was still heated, the Sina webmaster applied more strict control: both Chinese pinyin and characters indicating Bo Xilai were blocked and all the content about him already published on Weibo as well as online forums was deleted (recently, Weibo users have been allowed to circulate information

about Bo Xilai, but the public discussion on him has declined). However, at the same time, there was an increasing number of messages published on Weibo exposing and criticizing misdeeds by local governments and officials, such as when the Qingdao government (in Dalian province) was exposed for planting trees under an overpass and was blamed for wasting public funds, Harbin government (in Heilongjiang province) was condemned for banning its citizens from keeping large dogs, and one local cadre member in Henan province was exposed for having sexually assaulted several teenage girls, the youngest was only 11 years old.

The case of Wu Yin is not directly about politics and it was allowed to be discussed online, and positively responded to by authority; the online discussion and exchange about Bo Xilai's scandal were prohibited due to their direct relevance to the top leadership but the online content exposing misdeeds by local governments and officials were frequently seen and allowed to spread in Chinese cyberspace. The discrimination between political and non-political topics and between topics about the 'central' and 'local' determines that the HFSE involving non-political issues such as extramarital affairs is not within the range of censorship, while government/official-focused HFSE is also able to survive because it rarely targets the central government. From the view of central government, the Internet may have become a channel to monitor and discipline its local agencies that most of the time are beyond the range of its sight as well as to 'control the actions of otherwise unaccountable local officials' (Hassid 2012, p. 226). This leads to the government/official-focused HFSE becoming positively responded to in terms of that the officials targeted by HFSE were dismissed or put into prison via formal and institutionalized channels.

The role of media in target-punishing, government/official focused HFSE

It would be wrong to suggest that the Internet is the sole power holding officials to account. In these carefully-substantiated examples of government/official-focused HFSE, both the Internet and traditional media can be seen as forces that have brought about the just outcomes. For both the fact-checking and target-punishing government/official-focused HFSEs, the traditional media usually get involved after the trigger emerges offline. But in some cases, e.g. the cases of South China Tiger and Zhou Jiugeng, the media gave news coverage before the second stage (online exposure), which did help initiate online exposure and searching; in other cases, such as the case of Lin Jiaxiang, the media followed the online exposure and mainly initiated the online searching only. In more detail, in the case of Zhou Jiugeng, there

are several points during its process, at which the traditional media were involved. But there are two significant points signifying the role of the traditional media in initiating online exposing and searching in the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE. The first point is after the first stage and before the second stage, when Zhou's remark on Jiangning real estate market was broadcast by the local television. Certainly, without the local television's report, Zhou Jiugeng would not have been spotted by the public and, further, there would have been no questioning of Zhou on the Internet. The second point is after the online exposure when the online discussion on Zhou Jiugeng started intensifying. The questioning of Zhou's remark by traditional media started at nearly the same time as Chinese Internet users started to express their doubt online (Yang, M. Q. 2008). While the Internet allows online political discourses and actions to bypass the gatekeepers of the traditional media, the traditional media remain dominant in terms of access to mass publics (Cardoso and Neto 2004). Undoubtedly, traditional media's involvement at the second point made not only Zhou's identity but also the suspicion of his misconduct known to a wider audience. This helped initiate the following searching and tracking down, as well as enabling more online exposure by those who may know Zhou in the offline world.

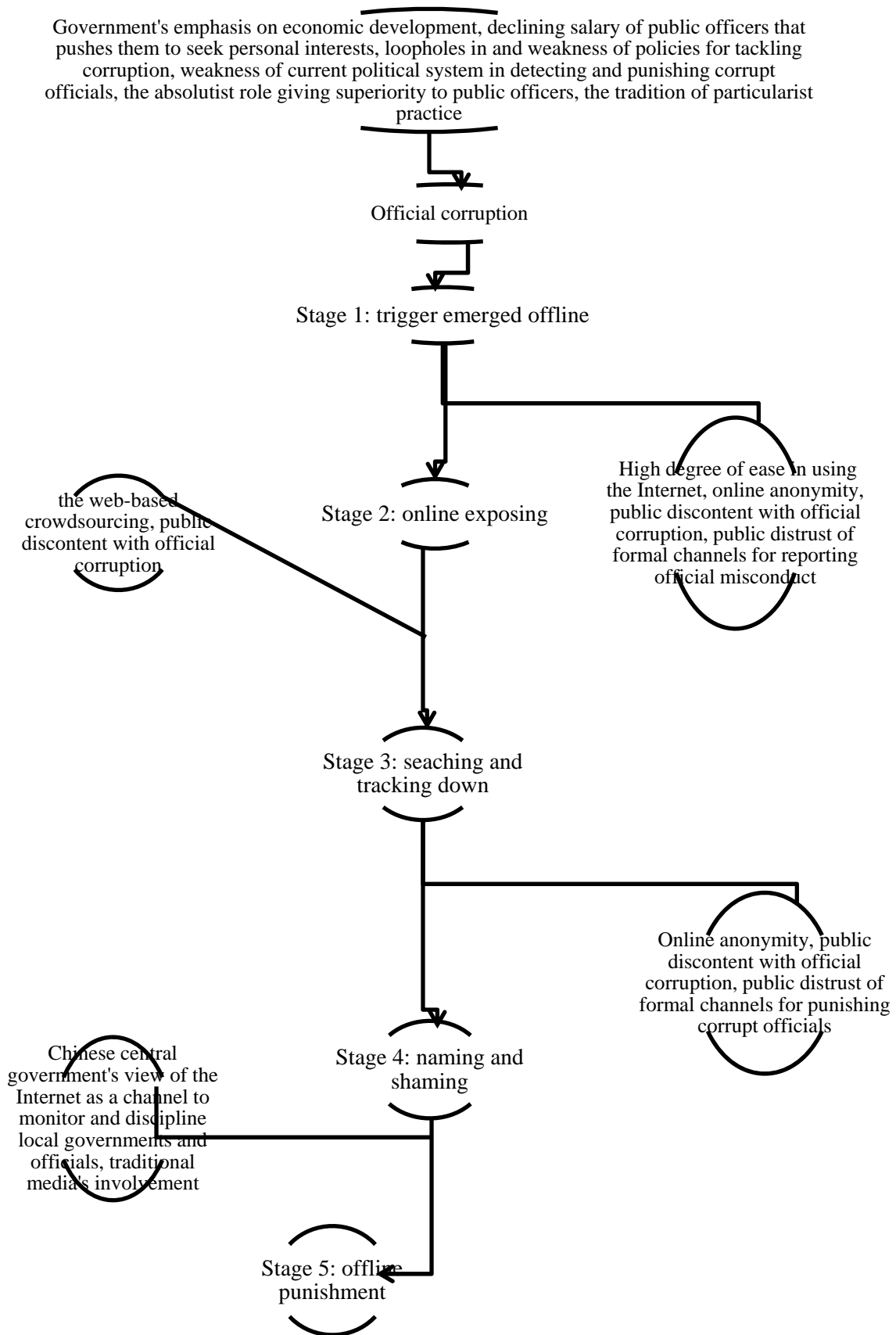
In the case of Lin Jiexiang, there are also two key points at which the traditional media got involved. The first point is after the second, online exposing stage and before the third, searching stage. An hour after the video showing Lin's rude behaviour in public was uploaded online, a journalist from the *Southern Metropolitan Daily* published a report titled 'A little girl assaulted in a hotel by a man on the way to the toilet'. At this time, nobody knew the identity of this man. But this report did initiate searching by those who were angered at his behaviour. The second point is at nearly the same time as the search was started, after which more detailed information about Lin's identity became available on the Internet. The traditional media environment in China, which has not been totally opened up due to strict censorship on news content, is unable to be an alternative channel of exposing misdeeds of political officers in the first place. The cases above show that mass media were involved not at the start but once the story was running, and the majority of exposing and searching was done by Internet users.

In a non-democratic setting such as China, the strictly censored media environment on the one hand makes journalists select their topic carefully and requires them to comply with the party line; but on the other hand, due to media marketization and consideration of financial interests, the conventional media became concerned about their audience appeal and started

to frequently take the Internet as a source of news reporting and news making (Tang and Sampson 2012, p. 458). In developing story lines, journalists frequently check websites for information and from time to time they also pick up on stories which have emerged on a variety of web pages (Bennett 2004; Castells 2007; Chester and Welsh 2005, cited in Tang and Sampson 2012). With regard to sensitive political issues, Chinese journalists, when facing restrictions, regard tapping into public opinion expressed on the Internet and investigating the stories behind such views as a tactic to cater for a wider audience while protecting themselves from political danger, since strong public opinion can serve to legitimize the media's interest in sensitive issues (de Burgh 2003; Tong and Sparks 2009). The government/official-focused HFSE shows a direct link between the Internet, politics, media politics and the politics of scandal. From the perspective of traditional media, its engagement in the government/official-focused HFSE ratchets up public interests in the case, broadens public criticism on the target, and thus brings about increasing pressures that push the relevant government to give redress. This is particularly desirable in China where the legal system is dependent upon administrative authority (Michelson 2007, cited in Tang and Helen 2012). The interplay between the Internet and traditional media in the Chinese context acts as a 'counter-power', that is 'the capacity of a social actor to resist and challenge power relations that are institutionalized' (Castells 2007, p. 239).

The following diagram displays the causal mechanism of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE. The traditional media's involvement is also one of its causal conditions, but due to the fact that it occurred at more than one point during the process of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE, as well as the point at which the media involved differing from case to case, it is problematic to put this condition into the following diagram without a detailed account of the role of traditional media in the government/official-focused HFSE. Based on the explanation above, in order to include the traditional media into the casual mechanism and at the same time to highlight its significant contribution to the outcome of the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE as well as its direct link to the offline politics, I put this condition close to the final stage.

Diagram 6.5: The causal mechanism of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE



Summary

In China, corruption, injustice and the associated conflicts between government agents/officials and ordinary people are burning social issues (Tang and Yang 2011, p. 33). The government/official-focused HFSE demonstrates that ordinary people, when applying the Internet and joined by traditional media, are able to achieve their goal when confronting authority. The causal mechanisms of government/official-focused HFSE show that HFSE is an online phenomenon but also one that cannot be divorced from the political environment. It demonstrates the power of the Internet in gathering collective intelligence, mobilizing human interaction and forming groups based on shared concerns; but the occurrence of government/official-focused HFSE is brought about by a combination of online and offline causal conditions, such as the several causes of official corruption that triggered the online protest, public distrust of formal channels (on and off the Internet) for exposing and punishing corrupt public officers, the decline of government credibility that pushed Chinese citizens to question rather than accept official claims, as well as the online anonymity and web-based crowdsourcing that made Chinese Internet users feel safe and empowered to confront authority (crowdsourcing here indicates not only the idea of ‘safety in numbers’ but also the idea of ‘power in numbers’).

Chapter 7

Conclusion: major findings of this research

Introduction

This study set out to explore a ‘new’ phenomenon in Chinese cyberspace, namely the Human Flesh Search Engine; in doing this in line with its research aims it has not only defined HFSE but also identified for the first time different types of HFSE, the structure of HFSE, the triggers of HFSE and its formation in historical, political and social contexts. The existing studies and media materials on HFSE have not looked at HFSE in this detail nor in this particular way. The phenomenon that is HFSE needs to be understood in relation to these factors. This thesis has treated HFSE as a type of collective action (broadly defined) that can be politically focused (an aspect that has often been ignored) but is not always so. This action is triggered by a range of factors embedded in particular social, economic and political contexts. As this conclusion will show, this understanding of HFSE is not commonplace within existing studies that tend to see it as ‘new’ a strange Internet phenomenon. To reiterate, this thesis by exploring cases studies of HFSE has been able for the first time to assess their structure, what triggers them and the different types that emerge. The rest of the chapter highlights the key findings of the thesis.

What this study added to the understanding of the HFSE phenomenon

The existing studies on HFSE have generally treated HFSE as a phenomenon primarily related to the Internet and tried to explain it from the perspective of technology; in other words, their main research focus was how the Internet had facilitated the occurrence of HFSE. Such a technology-centred perspective, I would argue, has obscured our understanding of it. While technology is important, the growth of the Internet in China in the last twenty years has had a profound effect upon the ways in which people engage in communication, but the emergence of the Internet did not herald the start of collective action. Collective action predated the Internet in China; there is a long history of collective action, from top-down revolution to bottom-up peasant revolt (see Chapter 3). In the following section, the major findings of this research are summarized.

Counting HFSE: how many examples of HFSE?

Until this study there has been no attempt that I know of to count the number of instances of HFSE. In particular there has been no attempt to count the different types of HFSE. Indeed, the political dimension of HFSE has been overlooked by existing studies; before this research was conducted, there had been no effort given to establishing how many cases had focused on wrongdoing by public officials and how many on non-political subjects. This research, for the first time, gave the numbers of examples of politically-focused and non-politically-focused HFSEs (see Chapter 5). There are many more than 20 examples of the HFSE phenomenon but the 20 examples listed in the table 5.1 in Chapter 5 have been carefully triangulated and represent all the types of issue involved in HFSE. Careful establishment of each case is important, and, in this research, is based on several criteria special for defining an HFSE case (See Chapter 4). The specific issues may differ from case to case but, on a broader level, the types of issue can be generalized and can be represented by a small sample of qualitative examples. It is worth repeating that until this study there had been no effort in documenting and classifying cases of HFSE, something essential if we are to understand it.

The structure of HFSE

This thesis for the first time detailed the sequential structure of HFSE and identified clear phases from start to end. Generally, HFSE starts with *a trigger*; this could be a certain kind of transgressive behaviour, followed by the revelation of transgression – this is usually some form of hard evidence, a sound recording, photograph, document – or a questionable statement by an official. This initial revelation might be partial or seen as questionable. This provokes the *second phase* – a response from Internet users. If the target is still unnamed the second phase initiates the hunt to identify the transgressor, if the target is named by the initial exposé, it may provoke a trawling for further information. The move to the *third phase* is triggered by the exposure of more detailed information: a name, a rank, the names of others involved who know the target, or evidence that contradicts the questionable official announcement or announcement made by a member of the public. The case can no longer be ignored by the targets – they have to respond. This response might well bring the incident to an end but, if justice is not seen to be done, it might provoke further opprobrium and calls for justice. It is worth noting that this research found that there were some variations to this sequential structure – for example, the structure of HFSE aimed at searching for a missing

person is different from that of HFSE aimed at fact-checking, the structure of which is also different from that of HFSE aimed at target-punishing.

The HFSE with the aim of looking for missing persons has the simplest process: it starts with *a trigger* emerging offline (e.g. a little girl was sold by her father to pay off his debt), followed by online exposure (e.g. the girl's elder brother exposed online his sister's details in the hope that other Internet users could help to locate his sister) and Internet users' crowdsourcing (e.g. collectively tracking down the target), and ended after Internet users successfully located or failed to locate the target. Fact-checking HFSE, no matter whether it targeted political or non-political subjects, has a unified process which involves mainly four stages: trigger emerging offline, online exposure, searching for evidences, and finally the target was forced to respond. Target-punishing HFSE, no matter whether it targeted political or non-political subjects, usually involves five stages: trigger emerging offline, online exposure, searching and tracking down, naming and shaming, and finally punishment. There is an overlap among all these different types of HFSE, which is that the first trigger stage emerged offline. Another overlap is that no matter what type of HFSE it is, they all involve Internet users' crowdsourcing in terms of either tracking down a missing person, or tracking down government officials accused of misconduct, or searching for evidence of a perceived government deception.

Defining and classifying HFSE

What marks the approach of this thesis as different from others is that it sees HFSE as a form of collective action. Indeed, existing approaches have viewed HFSE primarily as an Internet phenomenon and rarely related it to the physical world. Such an understanding of HFSE (treating it as a form of collective action) has advantage over other approaches in that it sets online activities in a wider context of offline collective action.

A general definition and classification of the HFSE phenomenon This thesis defined HFSE as a form of online collective action in which more than one Internet user contributed collectively to a certain goal but in different ways. For example, some Internet users took the role of initial exposé, who first exposed online the problem they had identified; some joined relevant online discussions through comments or reproducing relevant information to a wider audience; and some took the role of detective through searching both online and offline for more detailed information about the target. HFSE is goal-oriented collective activity, which means that its participants collaborated not for entertainment (e.g. playing online games) or

socializing (e.g. sharing pictures or videos) but in order to achieve a common goal, such as locating a missing person, punishing targets accused of wrongdoing or to check official or individual statements that are suspect in some way. The goals of HFSE are significant in distinguishing it from those online collective actions that similarly involved mass participation but were primarily aimed at entertainment and socializing. The goals of HFSE also indicate that it cannot be divorced from the offline world. The answers to the question of why Chinese Internet users targeted official misconducts or why they wanted to punish immoral individuals are embedded in the contexts of HFSE (see Chapter 6).

None of the aims of HFSE, such as looking for a missing person, tracking down norm transgressors and corrupt officials, or looking for evidence of a government deception, can be achieved by a single Internet user, and crowdsourcing is an advantage of the Internet that makes it so attractive to Chinese citizens who want redress and justice that they cannot easily get from the offline world. Crowdsourcing is a necessary causal condition for HFSE's occurrence and part of the social-cultural context of HFSE because it reflects that even though socializing is not the aim of HFSE, it is an essential part of the process of HFSE. Without the socializing function of the Internet (e.g. discussing, sharing), Internet-based crowdsourcing would be impossible and HFSE participants would not successfully track down their targets. In HFSE, the crowdsourcing is about not only online searching for, exchanging, and gathering information, but also offline detective work by Internet users who ask their offline contacts for useful information. Some studies on HFSE have found that most HFSE episodes involve a strong offline element, mainly in the form of information acquisition (Wang et al. 2010). Moreover, we cannot ignore that what some (or even the majority of) Internet users in HFSE did was not searching for information but simply discussing online, which is an essential part of the process of HFSE (see Chapter 6).

As noted earlier, this thesis for the first time classified HFSE into politically-focused HFSE and non-politically-focused HFSE. It can also be classified according to its different aims. Thus HFSE includes fact-checking HFSE, target-punishing HFSE and also the HFSE aiming to look for a missing person. Fact-checking HFSE involves both the political and non-political subjects. The fact-checking government/official-focused HFSE aims to check official announcements in order to find out if there was government deception or cover-up; the fact-checking, non-government-official-focused HFSE aims to check a personal announcement made by a member of the public. Target-punishing HFSE also involves both political and non-political subjects. The target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE

aims to track down and punish government officials whose misconduct had been exposed online; the target-punishing, non-government/official-focused HFSE aims to track down and punish members of the public who had been judged immoral and were then exposed online. The HFSE used to look for missing persons involves only non-political subjects: Internet users exposed online the details of their missing family members in the hope that other Internet users could help locate them.

The definition of politically-focused HFSE Based on the argument that the HFSE phenomenon should be looked at along with Chinese offline protests, this research unprecedentedly examined government/official-focused HFSE alongside Chinese offline protests in order to find the key attributes of government/official-focused HFSE that distinguish it from offline protests (see details in Chapter 5). The classification matters, here, as not all the examples of government/official-focused HFSE were comparable to offline protests. Only the target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE was used for the online-offline comparison, as no offline protests had been found comparable to fact-checking government/official-focused HFSE. In other words, it was common to see Chinese offline protests that had aimed to punish their target, while no offline protests had been found aiming to fact-check official announcements. So the classification here resulted in a reduction in variance in the online-offline comparison. In this research, the government/official-focused HFSE was defined first as a subtype of protest, which was the device used by ordinary people to confront authority. Government/official-focused HFSE, along with other subtypes of protest including riot, rebellion, demonstration, petition and strike, were viewed as different responses to any injustice that could trigger a protest. The online-offline comparison in Chapter 5 has found that HFSE differs from Chinese offline protests in these aspects of collective action, including actors' ability to use the Internet, the aim of the action (punishment or not), the type of target (individual or group), and the identity of the target (known or unknown to actors).

It is important to add one factor in relation to HFSE, namely anonymity. As discussed in Chapter 6, online anonymity is a feature of cyber culture in China: the link between an online identity and an offline individual is usually absent in Chinese cyberspace. Online anonymity has multiple implications for HFSE. First, online anonymity may bring out the worst in Internet users' online activities: it may have encouraged Internet users' online bullying and flaming. Second, in Chinese cyberspace with strict online censorship, online anonymity may bring Internet users a sense of 'safety' when exposing official misconduct online – naming

and shaming the targeted corrupt official. Therefore, online anonymity is an essential factor in causal mechanisms of government/official- and non-government/official-focused HFSEs. It is a necessary causal condition of HFSE's occurrence and part of a narrower social-cultural context of HFSE. Third, online anonymity makes it hard for Internet users to track down their targets and, thus, they need collaboration to achieve their goal (this means that online anonymity is just a necessary rather than sufficient causal condition). Crowdsourcing is the model of collaborating among Internet users in HFSE.

The context of HFSE phenomenon

As mentioned, this thesis has placed great importance on context. HFSE, even though it involves the Internet, is still first and foremost a type of collective action that can be linked to other offline forms of collective action. This research is the first to make this explicit connection. HFSE needs to be seen in a wider context of historical incidents of bottom-up collective action that have happened in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in China (see Chapter 5). Through the analysis of incidents of collective action in Chinese history, the common dynamics of Chinese bottom-up collective action were identified, including spontaneity, a specific and reactive claim, a specific target, utilization of political opportunity and involvement of the media. The thesis then went on to compare these dynamics with those of HFSE, which could be seen as the emergence of collective action online rather than something completely new without any historical precedents.

We need to bear in mind that the context of HFSE extends into the contemporary political environment. Offline collective protest continues to be part of the Chinese political landscape, particularly where there are huge tensions between government and citizens. It is this context in which the political HFSE emerged. The HFSE that focused on corrupt officials, for example, can be seen as an online version of these frequent offline protests, albeit with some differences. Chapter 5 showed the pattern of politically-focused HFSE, which confirms that a full understanding of online protest would be harmed by divorcing it from the offline world. So, rather than being something new and unique to the Internet, HFSE is embedded in political and historical contexts. Politically-motivated HFSE needs to be understood in this political context.

Context is important for another reason, namely an analysis of why HFSE emerged. This thesis has for the first time examined the triggers of HFSE, something that have been ignored in the literature, mainly because the contexts of HFSE had been overlooked. The causes of a

social phenomenon are embedded in its context. Without knowledge about the HFSE's context, it is impossible to fully explain why it emerged. Through case analysis, this thesis has been able to investigate each incident of HFSE in some detail. This fine-grained analysis of cases (through breaking down the process of HFSE into individual stages) has shone a light on the structure of HFSE and identified the underlying mechanisms that cannot always be identified at first glance. Such a deconstruction is helpful for identifying the causes underlying the appearance of HFSE. For example, official corruption is one trigger of HFSE in this study. Such a finding was only possible through a careful exploration of the underlying conditions for the emergence of HFSE in different contexts.

Of course some scholars have mentioned HFSE's political dimension but did not dig deeper into it, as did this study. This research looked for answers to such key questions as why HFSE looks like it does and why it occurs. The answers to these questions are embedded in the contexts of HFSE. The 20 well-documented case studies of HFSE, as mentioned earlier, enabled the researcher to grasp the dynamics of HFSE and to learn in detail its processes.

HFSE in broader historical context HFSE was understood in this research in its historical context through exploring the common dynamics between HFSE and those Chinese bottom-up collective actions in the twentieth century. The historical perspective looking for continuities from past to present had been rarely used by scholars to examine HFSE. This research broke through the limitations above and applied such a perspective to examining HFSE's historical contexts, for example seeing politically-focused HFSE in relation to Chinese rural resistances and labour strikes (see Chapter 3).

Historically, there are both temporal and spatial continuities underlying the HFSE phenomenon: temporally, Chinese rural resistances in the twentieth century and HFSE in the early twenty-first century have common dynamics (spontaneity, claim being specific and reactive, target being specific); spatially, Chinese rural resistances and labour strikes that happened in the early twenty-first century also share dynamics with HFSE (spontaneity, the claim being specific and reactive, the target being specific, utilization of political opportunity and involvement of media). In general, the dynamics shared by government/official-focused HFSE, Chinese rural resistances and labour strikes are spontaneity, a specific and reactive claim, a specific target, utilization of political opportunity and involvement of media (see details in Chapter 3). The continuities relevant to Chinese bottom-up collective action imply another continuity regarding the power structure in Chinese society. It is by no means a

coincidence that Chinese rural resistances, labour strikes and HFSE share a similar pattern of dynamics; rather, they have deep roots in the structure of the power relationship between Chinese central government, local authorities and citizens, and are influenced by the issues of contention (this is the political context of HFSE, which is elaborated in the following section on HFSE in the political context).

One also needs to consider the influence of religion. Confucianism has had a significant impact on Chinese society for almost two thousand years. Its core concept is that moral virtues are the basis of a sound social order and righteous government (Yao 2000, p. 22). Confucius stated that moral virtues could produce trust and faith in the people, while punitive measures might stop wrongdoing only for a moment; and what made a government good and a society harmonious was the power of moral virtues rather than the power of cruel and punitive laws (Yao 2000, p. 22). As shown in Chapter 3, some scholars point out that Confucianism's stressing of the importance of virtue and morality in guaranteeing a sound social order and smooth community governance has encouraged corrupt activities in China due to a government official's morality being given priority over the judicial supervision meant to ensure official fairness and honesty (Ma, G. R. 2010). This has led to insufficient attention being paid to the establishment of a judicial system for supervising and disciplining government and its officials in China. Confucianism also stressed the primary importance of kinship bonds and demanded that one should abandon everything for the sake of consolidating kinship love in the case of conflict, which, in the view of some scholars, has encouraged such corrupt activities as officials protecting their families' benefits and appointing family members to top jobs. The causes of official corruption discussed in Chapter 6, such as the weakness of the current political system in monitoring and punishing corrupt officials and the tradition of particularist practice among government officials (furthering interests of family members by taking advantage of official posts), which are part of the broader political context of HFSE, may also be causally related to the broader historical context of HFSE.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the non-government/official-focused HFSE mainly concerns norm transgression, which may also be causally related to Confucianism, whose core concept of harmony requires that one should act in a proper way, employing moral virtues such as loyalty, obedience, righteousness, kindness and sincerity to achieve the goal of harmony. These moral codes may have greatly influenced Chinese consciousness about what is wrong and what is right. Thus, we could see in non-government/official-focused HFSEs, individual

behaviours, such as torturing animals, abusing older people, extramarital affairs, cheating and insulting others, have easily enraged Chinese Internet users. Chinese social-culture is also characterized by its 'situation-centred' nature, which means that the life of the traditional Chinese is largely determined by a person's concrete obligations toward real people in the form of basic moral codes, which are standards of how people maintain their relationship with their surroundings (Hsu 1981; King 1986). Confucian morality revolves around family relationships and other social relationships, in which the primary emphasis is put on fulfilling responsibilities to each other with a sincere and conscientious heart (Yao 2000, p. 33). It is not rare to see this in other countries, where individuals who had been found abusing animals were condemned by Internet users, but there are few countries like China where behaviour such as extramarital affairs that harmed the wife-husband relationship could enrage Internet users. The famous case of HFSE that involved a man, Wang Fei, whose wife had committed suicide, allegedly due to her husband's disloyalty, is such an example of behaviour that goes against the obligations essential to maintain good relationships, and can become a potential trigger for non-government/official-focused HFSE.

HFSE in a political context: grievance and the bottom-up struggle for justice The historical examination in Chapter 3 found factors in the broader political context which created the dynamics that HFSE shares with historical, Chinese, bottom-up collective action. Through process-tracing, Chapter 6 highlights factors in both HFSE's broader political context (e.g. causes of official corruption in China) and narrower political context (e.g. media and Internet policy in China). While the narrow context means immediate surroundings of HFSE, the broader context refers to factors, whose interaction with HFSE needs intervening medium. For example, official corruption is a trigger of government/official-focused HFSE; the causes of official corruption are part of the broader context of HFSE, such as the weak legal system that partially allowed the growth of official corruption in China (see discussion of other causes in Chapter 6); but these factors alone cannot bring about HFSE, except when they are joined by other, narrower factors, such as (as shown by the causal mechanism of target-punishing, government/official-focused HFSE in Chapter 6) particular citizens with a high degree of ease in using the Internet who were able to expose on the Internet the problems they had identified in the first place offline.

HFSE is spontaneous, like Chinese rural resistances and labour strikes. The unorganized nature of Chinese bottom-up collective action makes the bottom-up struggle for justice of

short duration, scattered and fragmented, but it is because of the unorganized nature, along with the claim of not being anti-state and anti-party, that Chinese bottom-up collective actions such as government/official-focused HFSE could survive under the 'heavy hand of statist influence' (Perry 2001) and sometimes achieve the goals their participants had been seeking. The targets of government/official-focused HFSE are local cadres engaged in misconduct, or local governments suspected of deception. Its claim is also specific, which is simply punishing the target. Similarly, in Chinese rural resistances and labour strikes, protesters' targets were specific, directly pointing to local governments and cadres; their aim was also specific, such as punishing corrupt cadres, or demanding unpaid wages. Citizens usually relate their sufferings to the cadres they may have direct contact with in their everyday life. This is not unique in Chinese protests but, applied to the lower-class people's movement in general, as Piven and Cloward (1977, p.20-21) state, 'it is the daily experience of people that shapes their grievances, establishes the measure of their demands, and points out the targets of their anger'. Workers experience the factory, the assembly line and their managers, they do not actually experience economic transition; peasants experience farmland, village cadres, and declining living condition, they do not recognize banking, real estate and the top leadership. No small wonder, therefore, when peasants, workers, or Internet users protest, they so often protest against the local government, individual cadres or managers, not against the central government or higher authorities to whom the local government, cadres and enterprise managers (particularly managers of state-owned enterprises, who are usually appointed by government) also defer. But this does not suggest that Chinese citizens are blind to the underlying causal link between the 'central' and 'local' with regard to the prevalence of local cadres' corruption. As shown by online postings in HFSE cases targeting corrupt officials, Chinese Internet users quite often attributed the local problems to the whole political system. The issues of contention involved also determine that the claim of Chinese bottom-up collective action is specific and reactive. The main conflicts between Chinese citizens and local authorities are relevant to taxation and land expropriation (e.g. in rural resistances), unpaid and unjust wages (e.g. in labour strikes) and financial wrongdoing of local cadres (e.g. in government/official-focused HFSE). Worsening economic conditions may have pushed Chinese citizens to concern themselves more with those issues related to their everyday lives, and rarely advocated new rights but sought for solutions of problems that had threatened their subsistence.

There is widespread public distrust of existing formal channels for redress and justice and public discontent with official corruption and low government credibility. This is the mental status of HFSE participants but they have strong connections with the social-cultural realities in China. Moreover, public distrust and public discontent provide the HFSE with a social base: it makes sure there is a 'collective' in HFSE; as discussed in Chapter 2, emotional mobilization is important for the formation of 'collective' in an unorganized collective action. Unsatisfying social realities give rise to these negative emotions amongst the public, which in turn become the social source of HFSE, mainly in terms of mass participation. Chinese citizens distrust formal channels so, when facing the existence of formal channels such as police and the petition system (officially established for citizens to report official misconducts), they resort to informal channels such as the Internet to look for their missing families, expose official misconduct and punish corrupt officials. Public discontent with official corruption and low government credibility initiated the Internet users' collective tactics of searching and tracking down.

HFSE in social-cultural contexts Like the HFSE's political context, the social-cultural contexts of HFSE also have differences in level. While there have been discussions about the cultural context of HFSE, these were incomplete and failed to reveal that there was a difference between narrower and broader social-cultural contexts. This research has identified that in both government/official- and non-government/official-focused HFSEs there are important social-cultural factors. As the main issues involved in non-government/official-focused HFSE are about norm transgression, it reflects the broader social-cultural context of HFSE, which is about Chinese Confucianism and its influence on Internet users' attitudes about what behaviour deserves opprobrium and punishment. Confucianism is also part of broad social-cultural context of government/official-focused HFSE, as ideas advocated by Confucianism have contributed to the growth of official corruption in China (see details in Chapter 3).

Case Study approach

This research adopted case study methodology to explore HSFE, not an approach that has been used before. As mentioned, one of the advantages of this approach is that each instance of HFSE was meticulously researched put together from multiple sources. It is a method that is sensitive to the context in which events unfold. Case studies, in their true essence, explore and investigate a social phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number

of events or conditions, and their relationships (Zainal 2007); it is particularly necessary when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and where multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin 1984, p. 23). There is rich media material about different instances of HFSE and it is believed that the causes of HFSE as a social phenomenon with multiple dimensions are embedded in its contexts, thus the case study approach is undoubtedly ideal for researching HFSE. Another advantage of the case study approach is that it is primarily an inductive process that can identify new variables or causal mechanisms (George and Bennett 2005, p. 111). In light of HFSE being a novel research subject and the existing studies on it not being conclusive in explaining its political dimension and causes of its occurrence, this research thus focused on particular cases of HFSE to establish its causations. Moreover, in light of the complexity of HFSE that involves varying issues, targets and goals, case study allows in-depth exploration and understanding. By including both quantitative and qualitative data, case study helps explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis 1997). This research for the first time examined HFSE by using the method of process-tracing to look into every detail of the process of HFSE (while attending to the specificity of particular cases), including its trigger, outcome and offline media's involvement. Only by so doing can a complete causation of HFSE be figured out. And this research, also for the first time, investigated HFSE alongside Chinese offline protests, using cross-case comparison to identify the differences and similarities between online and offline protests.

The dynamics of the contexts of HFSE explored in this research have answered such vital questions as why HFSE looks like it does in its current mode and why it occurs, as well as how to properly define the HFSE phenomenon. Its political dimension is undoubtedly the most significant aspect of HFSE for Chinese citizens, as well as the whole society. For Chinese citizens, HFSE cases in which exposed officials have been punished are encouragement for them to go online to discuss further political issues and expose more official misconduct; for the whole society, the government/official-focused HFSE demonstrates that the power structure in China underlies a triangular relation between central government, local authorities and citizens. In the early twenty-first century, the mass media (including both the Internet and offline media) are an emerging power within the power structure, which means that the absolutist role of government in China faces more challenges for a counterbalance between the powerful and the powerless. Given the growing access to

the Internet and the fundamental political challenges China faces, HFSE is a phenomenon of online politics that is set to continue.

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