Small-Scale Protests in China: Handling Process Dynamics and Outcomes

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This dissertation aims to answer the puzzles of why small-scale protests which lack social forces can persist and even succeed in the authoritarian state in China, or why the authoritarian state in China which cares so much about social stability makes concessions to small-scale protests.

Theoretically, this dissertation examines the aforementioned puzzles from the perspective of local officials in handling small-scale protests, given that the latter normally lack social forces and is assumed to be too weak to seriously challenge the state in existing literature. By clarifying the handling process dynamics between local officials and protesters, this dissertation aims to contribute a nuanced understanding to the authoritarian state in China and the outcomes of small-scale protests.

This dissertation includes 7 chapters:

Chapter 1 is a short introduction of the thesis.

Chapter 2 is the theoretical chapter, in which I give an in-depth literature review of the limits of existing theoretical lens in explaining the fates of small-scale protests, and further develop a theoretical lens of handling protests, in order to disaggregate the state more carefully.

Chapter 3 is about my methodology, fieldwork, and data collecting.

Chapter 4 is the chapter about local officials’ behavior in handling protests in the petition system, in which I answer how and why they adaptively make a balance between facilitating and controlling protests.

Chapter 5 is the chapter about nail-homeowners’ protest, in which I answer how and why they can succeed.

Chapter 6 is the chapter about nail-petitioners’ protest, in which I answer how and why they can succeed.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion, in which I answer what implications the fate of small–scale protests can reveal.

In the pre-defense seminar, I will present chapter 2, 4, 5.