Determinants of the Struggling Odds of Collective Workers in China

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Abstract. There are hundreds of collective worker struggles happened in China in recent decades. These struggles have different types including striking and protesting. Based on a statistic analysis, three pairs of relationships among workers, employers and governments are compared with each other. We find out three determinant factors to influence the odds of struggling workers. These factors include the intervention of government, style of struggles and the status of worker’s employment. If struggling workers are on-job, or take violent struggles, or get intervene from governments, they are easier to win.

There are hundreds of workers’ struggles collectively, violently happened in China each year. How do workers choose collective struggles to express their discontents in China during 2011-2012? How about the results of these struggles, win, partly win, or fail? Who is easier to make win, the on-job workers or the off-job workers? What impact does the government make on the destiny of dispute between workers and employers by its intervention? All of these questions will be answered by the regressive factor analysis, which are the three pairs of corresponding relationships between workers’ win and status of employment, workers’ win and style of struggles, workers’ win and intervention of government.

In this paper, we make use of multiple channels to get some specific cases and change these cases into numerical data. The major channel is various websites.

Literatures about the Chinese Collective Worker Struggles

Some of researchers have paid attention to the topics on Chinese collective workers’ struggles in recent years. These accomplishments are involving to media news, survey reports, studying works, journal papers and academic books. We collect and read most of these literatures and list some key topics which are closely connected with our topics.

The basic situations about collective Chinese workers’ struggles have been done a lot. Collective struggles have become the inevitable and only channels to air workers’ discontents, to appeal workers’ deserved benefits and subsistence rights (Ding, J.S. et al., 2001; Zhang, Michael.2006). But a lot of worker struggles did not develop into effective movement and failed (Smith, B. et al., 2007). There are some reasons: these struggles are lacks of the support of official unions (Nang, Leung Pak; Ngai, Pun. 2009; Freeman, R.B. 2010); they are short of self-governing organization such as independent trade unions (Chan, A. 2009); these struggles are spontaneous (Pollert, Anna.2010). But there are some collective worker struggles succeeded in their strikes (Clarke. S., Pringle.T.2009; Pollert, Anna.2010). Literatures of collective workers’ struggles above can be seen in politics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, organizational behavior and economics, etc.. Seemly, the case study (Chris.2010), background study (Clarke.2004) and factor-cause-result study dominate the major research scope. Seldom are some special topics about collective Chinese workers’ struggles. Fortunately, there are some topical researches can be found, such as the relationship between laws and workers’ struggles (Freeman, R.B. 2010; Chen Feng.2012), trade unions and workers’ struggles (Chan, A. 2009), globalization and workers’ struggles (L Lisa, N Kathy. 1999), exploitation and workers’ struggles (Chan, A. and Siu, K.2010), managerial
corruption and workers’ struggles (Chen Feng. 2000), psychological behaviors and workers’ struggles (Jill Kickul, Scott W. Lester. 2001), networks and collective resistance (Fayong Shi and Yongshun Cai 2006).

The actors are taken by multitudes of collective struggles. The on-job workers are the main force, and the off-job workers play an important role in collective struggles also. Not only do the migrant workers take strikes (Chan, Jenny Wai-ling. 2005; Chris King-Chi Chan. 2010), but also the laid-off workers (Hurst, William. 2004), veterans, the retirees do so. Up to now, we can’t find a special topic to discuss the different results of struggles separately taken by the on-job workers and the off-job workers.

Various struggles are taken by the collective actors. Stopping work and hampering production are the general targets attained by the striking workers (Chris King-Chi Chan. 2010). Sitting-in, protesting, blocking the factory gate and the public entrance of traffic, parading, jumping-off the building, sabotage, riot, petition, surrounding the government building (Hurst, William. 2004), so on, are the specific kinds of striking. Although these struggles are mentioned by some researchers, seldom of literatures are discussed to the different impacts of different struggles. We just find that few researchers (Nang.2009; Lu.2010) have paid attention to the influence of radical or violent struggles in their article. But the two articles care less about the social influence of other kinds of collective workers’ struggles to the society.

The reactions of managers or governments to collective workers’ struggles are paid attentions by some researchers. After the outbreak of collective action, employers, police and governments are very fearsome (Nang, Leung Pak; Ngai, Pun. 2009). Employers, police and governments agree that “the more participants, the greater the trouble” (Cai 2002). They have to take some urgent measures to extinguish the intense accident. Employers have to negotiate with the representatives of workers, or arrange the firm safeguards to halt the strike, or ask police to protect their managers; police arrive at the striking spot to control the order of conflict, or to arrest the leaders of struggling workers; government officials intervene, mediate and arbitrate the occurrences by the administrative power (Yongshun Cai .2002; Smith, B et al., 2007). But the intervention taken by government to determinate the win or failure of collective workers is not topically discussed.

All above mentioned about the Chinese collective worker struggles most are focus on the relations between action styles and different actors such as on-job workers, migrants, laid-off workers, and retirees, the cause and result between action and protestors’ discontents, and the situations of striking workers’ win.

However, for the above our questions not to be answered, there are left some space topics to be discussed. Seldom or none literatures are separately discussed about the following correlation between workers’ win and the kinds of action, between workers’ win and the population scale of action, between workers’ win and the employment status, between workers’ win and the intervention of government. In particular, the topic about the relation between scale of collective workers and the win of struggles is not stated.

The Interpretation of Collective Workers’ Struggles

In this paper, the collective struggles is belonged to worker movement, and action can be specified into various behaviors.

The struggling actors discussed in our paper are generally involved five groups of workers: the on-job workers, the migrant workers, the laid-off workers, the retirees and the veterans. The on-job workers are being employed by owners in firms. The migrant workers are mainly consisted by peasants from rural to urban who look for job and stay in city. The laid-off workers are those who were employed in firms (factories) but now unemployed. The retirees are those who have retired from active working for their old age. The veterans are soldiers who have been discharged military personnel and dispatched into firms to work for some years.

The collective worker struggles mean a group of workers which its number involves 10 or more.

Collective workers’ struggles suggest that collective workers take correspondent action to express their discontents or appeal their demands. These collective workers’ struggles in China have
some common characteristics such as spontaneity, eruption and impermanence. The spontaneity of collective struggles means that the struggle lacks in preparation and scheme but has common appeals of group workers. The eruption of collective struggle means that the outbreak of struggles are hard to be accurately predicted by owners or governors and can be sporadically triggered by occasional factors, which come from the changes of time, scale, means and actor of action. The impermanence of collective worker struggle means that the duration of action averagely lasts one day or so and then ends.

The styles of collective worker’s struggles are various. These struggles include stopping-work, walking, sleeping, sitting-in, protesting, blocking the entrance of factory or public transportation, parading, menacing to jump-off high building, sabotage, riot, surrounding the municipal administrative building, and petition to governmental dispute handling office, so on. If these struggles are taken by on-job workers, they can be generally called striking. If these struggles are done by off-job workers, they are generally named as protesting. All above struggles involved come from the results of disputes, which are not resolved in a long term, between collective workers and their owners or local administrators.

An struggle can be differed into violent or nonviolent struggle. If a strike is purely nonviolent action, it is named as peaceful or soft strike; if strike is a violent action, it is named as a conflict. So, the extension of the concept of strike is larger than the one of conflict, and conflict is one of specific expression of strike. Conflict mainly contains the following struggles: blocking factory gates, blockading public transportation, sabotaging the machine and riot, which probably has violent, armed or military action happened. The soft or peaceful strike includes sitting-in, sleeping, pretending sick, and picking litter within factory, jumping-off the building, parade, petition, and surrounding the municipal building. A soft strike will become into a conflict under the condition that the management or owners forcefully dispatch guard force to compel or repress the striking workers to restore their work without any compromises. Therefore, each collective workers’ struggles can be attributed into soft strike or conflict.

According to the context, the two groups with on-job workers and off-job workers have separately corresponding struggles. The struggles of on-job workers mainly include stopping-work, protesting and military-style conflict either within factory or outside of the factory, such as walking, sleeping, sitting-in, protesting, blocking the entrance of factory or public transportation, parading, menacing to jump-off high building, sabotage, riot, surrounding the municipal administrative building, etc.. Meanwhile, the struggles off-job workers are mainly taken by protesting in the front of gates of factory or municipal administrative building, by blocking the entrance of factory or public transportation, by parading in public place, and by petitioning etc. Some similar or common struggles are found between on-job workers and off-job workers, but the on-job workers have its exclusive style such as sitting-in to voice their grievances when compared to the off-job workers.

The intervention of government means that government takes some measures to stop the strikes or the protests taken by the on-job workers or the off-job workers. These measures include investigation, mediation, arbitration, enforcement by means of special administration force. When a strike or protest happens, government needs to know the five “W” which are when, where, why, who, how on the incidents, that is the time, place, reasons of outbreak, scale of actors, status of participants, and kind of action. In order to control and stabilize the collective worker’s action, government has to call the representatives of disputing parties together and persuade them to negotiate and compromise each other. If the disputers can’t reach to agreement still, government will use its authority to compel the disputers to accept the arbitration of labor dispute disposal department abiding by the national or local laws and regulations. If the arbitration result can’t be accepted by disputers, they can appeal to the local court or upper-level court. Once the final court judgment is done and can’t be abided by, government will take administrative force to punish the violator. In China, government is regarded as a father to settle down the disputes when his citizens, no matter who are firms or citizens, have contradictions each other. The authority of government is the really final dominator of the nation.
Data and Descriptive Analysis

As the interpretations above, the data come from the website exploring and interviews. The data provided by the non-profit organization CLB are based on its yearly organizational survey and collections. Its data are also cited by other researchers who have published their academic papers. Our interviews are done by ourselves. Each case is tested by various ways. In the end, we get 567 cases about the collective workers’ struggles happened in China during 2011-2012.

Argument and Logic:

In an incomplete institution which is lack of law or contract to protect the group of disadvantages, this group is less likely to take dominant power in a bargaining process. Compared with the firms’ owners, the workers are lack of power to argue for their rights.

In this imbalance situation, the role of a third organization (e.g. government) becomes very important. With the intervention from the government, it becomes easier for them to stand firmly and obtain their deserved merits. However, the outcome turns out to be an equilibrium achieved by the way that both sides step back a little bit: Second-Best Agreement.

Whether the workers can win or not turns out to be the questions that whether the firms concede or not and how much they would like to step aside. Therefore, the following determinant analysis orients from the role of the firms and the position of protesting workers. The determinants of the firms to concede: 1. a third organization: Governments’ Intervention; 2. the cost of production: If workers involved are the current workers, the production will be affected; 3. the social influence and potential cost for the reputation of the firms: the intensity of the struggles(violence or nonviolence) as well as numbers of the involved workers. Meanwhile, the determinants of the workers struggles to win: 1. the government intervention: if workers’ struggles are involved in government, workers probably get help from government; 2. the extent of violence from workers struggles: the violent struggles can draw official and social attention to protesting workers’ issues; 3. the status of protesting workers: the strikes from on-job workers bring about direct loss to firms.

However, the following tables are interpreted from the position of workers—How can they win their merits?

The Government Intervention and the Merits of Workers’ Win

Table 1. Roles of government intervention in winning their merits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>Partially Win</th>
<th>Full Win</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8(9.6%)</td>
<td>180(56.8%)</td>
<td>61(36.5%)</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Here "them" refers to the workers of different firms involved.

From Table 1 we can obtain the following information:

1. Among 567 cases, 56.1% of all struggles lacks of the intervention from government and 43.9% of them is intervened by government; 14.6% of all struggles failed, 55.9% of them partially won and 29.5% of them fully won.

2. Among the lack of government’s intervention, 24% of worker struggles failed, 43% partly won and 33% fully won. Meanwhile, among the government’s interventions, 56% of worker struggles partly won, 29% fully won, and only 15% failed.

Based on above information, we can find:

1. The impact of government’s intervention stands to reason on the results of collective workers struggles. Lack of government’s intervention, the probability of failure is 14.6%; but once government intervenes workers protesting cases, the one of failure is 9.6%. There are 90.4% of the
protesting workers partially or fully obtaining their demands. These mean that government’s intervention plays an active role on the result of collective workers struggles.

2. Most of collective workers struggles were held by workers themselves. Workers had very seldom peaceful and legal channels to express their discontents and voice their demands. Without the support of government, workers can get 85% wins among 56.1% of all struggles.

Conclusions:
1. With government interventions, the campaigns are more likely to succeed.
2. With government intervention, the workers have higher probability to partially accomplish their expectations

The Extent of Violence and the Merits of Workers’ Win

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>Partially Win</th>
<th>Full Win</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68(82%)</td>
<td>270(85.2%)</td>
<td>151(90.4%)</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 2 we can obtain the following information:
1. Violent struggles take a heavy proportion of 86.2% among the all collective workers struggles.
2. Among the result of total collective struggles, most violent struggles attach to partial win or full win. There are 15% of violent struggles to fail, and 56% is partial win and 29% is full win. Comparing with the result of violent struggles, the number of the full-win issues with 151 is more than the fail ones with 68.
3. Among the violent struggles, the proportion of failure, partial-win and full-win is big. Among the failed struggles, the proportion of violent issues is 82%; among the partial-win struggles, the one is 85.2%; among the full-win struggles, the one is 90.4%.

Based on this information, we can find:
1. The workers are seemly apt to take violent struggles in their collective strikes. Because the lack of formal or legal way to solve their problems or fulfill their rights, workers have to resort to a series of extreme behaviors.
2. The violence method seems bring them more likelihood to obtain what they want. Violent struggles is an effective way to show the massive power and to deterrent force to firm’s managers and government administrators.
3. The probability of win by means of violent struggles is more than by non-violent struggles. Striking workers can more easily win their merits by taking informal or illegal protesting ways than by taking non-violence striking ways.

The Job Status of Protesting Workers and Their Wining Merits

Workers status refers to the state of employment in workers. The on-job workers are those who are being employed by managers and the off-job workers are those who have retired or lost jobs. The on-job workers directly determine the efficiency of enterprise production.
Table 3. Worker status and winning their merits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>worker status</th>
<th>outcomes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fail</td>
<td>partial win</td>
<td>full win</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>proportion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on-job workers</td>
<td>77 14%</td>
<td>297 55%</td>
<td>162 30%</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off-job workers</td>
<td>6 19%</td>
<td>20 65%</td>
<td>5 16%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 3 we can get the following direct information:

1. Among the protesting struggles, the struggles held by on-job workers dominate the most part of total struggles. The issues held by on-job workers are 536 with 95% of all statistic massive struggles. Meanwhile, the proportion of struggles held by off-job workers is a little with 5%.

2. Whether the ratio of win or the ratio of failure, the one of on-job workers is better than the off-job workers. Among the outcome of protesting struggles, the probability of win with on-job workers is far more than off-job workers. The proportion of full win got by on-job workers is 30% which is nearly two times to the one by off-job workers, 16%. The proportion of full win with 30% is more than two times to the one of failure with 14% among the total issues which are held by on-job workers. Contrarily, among the fail proportion of struggles, the number of the on-job workers with 14% is less than the one of the off-job workers with 19%.

Based on above information, we can infer these conclusions:

1. The power of on-job workers is far more than the off-job workers. Whether the social influence or the economic loss to enterprises and government brought by the on-job workers exceeds the one which produced by the off-job workers.

2. The protesting struggles are easier organized and launched by the on-job workers than the off-job workers. The enterprises provide the fundamental conditions with organization to on-job workers. The on-job workers are collected and work together by the same management and the same benefits, which can be easily organized and summoned. It can be imaged that the future worker movement in China will be easily produced in on-job workers, but not in off-job workers.

The Regressive Analysis on Workers’ Merits

We take the results of collective struggles such as win as a dependent variable in a functional relation, make the government intervention, the intensity of struggles, and the status of workers as three independent variables of this function. Then we try to find out the regression results about these dependent variable and independent variables by means of Stata software.

Table 4. Regression results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Linear Probability</th>
<th>Probit Probability</th>
<th>Logit Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Invention</td>
<td>0.206*</td>
<td>1.156***</td>
<td>2.285***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.153)</td>
<td>(0.364)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Intensity of Struggles</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.267**</td>
<td>0.468***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
<td>(0.138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the status of workers’ employment</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.212***</td>
<td>0.479***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obs.</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. the regression is adjusted to cluster for types of firms controlling heterogeneity; 2. other control includes the scales of struggles and characteristics of the requirements of the involved workers. The estimates are not insignificant although the sign is consistent with our propositions. 3. *** represents significance at the level of 1%, ** represents significance at the level of 5%, and represents significance at the level of 10%. The t-values for estimates in the first column are all above 2.5.
The table 4 shows these finds counted by Stata soft that the logit probability on the government intervention, the intensity of struggles, and the status of workers’ employment is respectively significant. Among the influencing factors on the result of worker struggles, the government intervention is the most one, the intensity of struggles is the second one, and the status of workers’ employment is the third one, which testifies that government is the initial factor determining protesting workers’ outcomes. In considering the issues of China worker struggles, the role of government should be paid heavy attention.

**Findings**

Our principle findings are that collective workers need to have some necessary conditions to get their struggling benefits with big odds. These conditions are: firstly, they should be on-job workers; second, they probably take violent struggles; thirdly, the struggles taken by collective workers should be tolerated by local governments and the administrative officials should intervene into the labor-capital conflicts.

These findings are based on the following opinions: (1) Struggles with scale of hundreds of workers can produce an effective deterrence to opponents and obtain what they want. (2) The on-job striking workers more successfully obtain their demands from managers and governments than do the retirees or laid-off workers. (3) Some abrupt or violent behaviors are popularly committed by protesting workers because they are more effective to attain to a higher probability of winning than non-violent struggles. (4) Without the support and coordination from local governments, protesting workers are less likely to get their demands met.

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**References**


