

Participants' Perception and a Student Protest of Peking University in 2014

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Abstract : Student movements have persisted in mainland China, especially in elite universities since the Tiananmen Prodemocracy Movement, contrary to the lack of studies on them. However, the participants' repertoire, mobilization and mode of interaction with authorities are vastly different from their predecessors in the 1980s as well as their western counterparts. In most of the cases, agents, cognizant of the high cost of action and their vulnerability to the authorities, consciously curtailed certain repertoire and themes of resistance. Thus these movements, without appreciable organized force, were self-interested, fragmentally mobilized, lowly integrated and limited within the campus. This study documents the 2014 protest against Yanching Academy program at Peking University, a top-tier Chinese university that played the leading role in the 1989 protest. The 2014 case is different from abovementioned trend of submissive resistance in the last twenty years, insofar as it is a value-oriented and emotion-driven collective action with the resurgence of some repertoire. The participants perceived the university's contemporary ineffectiveness and clumsiness in control and administration, higher Party authorities' indifference to less-political themes, and an increasing number of potential advocates, including students, intellectuals and social media. It shows that resisters' perception of their relative strength to their opponents - in this case, the university and its system for controlling students - under specific circumstances, not merely political opportunities or institutional changes, stimulates the participants and thus contributes to the mobilization and organization of a collective action, even under severe social control.

Keywords : collective action, China, university students, resistance

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