

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Polite Politics

A Sociological Analysis of an Urban Protest
in Hong Kong

Denny Ho Kwok-Leung



POLITE POLITICS

Dedicated to my friend S.K. Lee

Polite Politics

A sociological analysis of an urban protest
in Hong Kong

DENNY HO KWOK-LEUNG

First published 2000 by Ashgate Publishing

Reissued 2018 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © Denny Ho Kwok-leung 2000

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LC control number: 00134025

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-74023-5 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-315-18376-3 (ebk)

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
1 Introduction	1
Urban Movements: Their Importance in Urban Politics	3
The Significance of the Study of Urban Protests in Hong Kong	10
Method and Data	13
Structure of this Book	17
2 Theories of Social Movements: A Review of the Literature	20
Introduction	20
The Classical Perspective on Collective Action	21
The Resource Mobilization Perspective	26
The Social Construction of Protest	45
Toward an Integrated Approach to Collective Action	51
3 The Changing Political Context in Hong Kong	59
Introduction	59
The Pre-democracy Stage: 1970-1980	60
The Stage of Transition to Democracy: 1981-1992	69
The Grassroots' Response to the Changing Political Structure in the 1980s	75
Recapitulation	79
4 Public Housing Policy and Urban Minorities	84
Introduction	84
The Housing Provision Structure in Hong Kong	84
Production and Allocation of Public Housing	88
Public Housing Policy and Urban Minorities	94
The Nature and Management of the Temporary Housing Areas	100
Summary	103

5	A Brief Account of the Trajectory of the ATHA Protest	106
	Introduction	106
	The Aged Temporary Housing Areas Issue	107
	The Rise of the ATHA Protest	109
	The Actors Involved in the ATHA Protest	118
	The ATHA Residents	122
	Summary	128
6	No Through Road: Limited Political Opportunities for ATHA Residents	134
	Introduction	134
	Two Changing Processes in the Political Structure	135
	Who Cares about the Housing Movement?	145
	The ATHA Issue and the Actors in the Political Structure	159
	Conclusion	164
7	Every Person Counts: The Political Participation of ATHA Residents	171
	Introduction	171
	Forms of Political Participation in the Two ATHAs	173
	The Social Characteristics of Residents in the Two ATHAs	175
	To Participate or Not to Participate: A Case Study in the Kowloon Bay THA	181
	Participation in the Ping Shek THA	193
	Mobilization Potential and Actual Participation	207
	Conclusion	214
8	The Mobilization Process: External Organizers, Local Leaders and the Choice of Strategies	220
	Introduction	220
	The Mobilization Agents	221
	The Creation and Maintenance of the Foundation of ATHA Protest: The Local Concern Groups	233
	Strategy Formation	246
	Success or Failure of the Local Mobilization and Protest	258
	Conclusion	263
9	Conclusion	269
	Summary of the Argument	269
	The Theoretical and Methodological Implications of this Study	289
	Future Development of the ATHA Protest	297

<i>Appendix 1</i>	<i>Methods</i>	<i>300</i>
<i>Appendix 2</i>	<i>A Personal Reflection on Methodology</i>	<i>314</i>
<i>Appendix 3</i>	<i>Survey on the Tenants' Preferences in the Temporary Housing Areas in the Kwun Tong District</i>	<i>322</i>
<i>Appendix 4</i>	<i>Survey on Kowloon Bay THA Residents' Attitudes to "Same District Rehousing" Policy</i>	<i>328</i>
<i>Appendix 5</i>	<i>Survey of the Living Conditions of the Ping Shek THA</i>	<i>335</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>		<i>348</i>

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

2.1	Causal Sequence of Collective Action	22
2.2	Political Opportunity Structure: Summary of the Components Making for Increased Access and Increased Success as Suggested by Tarrow, Kitschelt and Kriesi	42
2.3	Key Variables in Understanding Aspects of Social Movements According to Four Theoretical Perspectives	53
6.1	Summary of the Political Openness, Orientation Towards Taking up Housing Issues, and the Articulation Strategies of the Actors in Different Articulation Channels in Relation to Housing Movements in the Early 1990s	158

Tables

1.1	Frequency of Various Forms of Action Taken in Housing Conflicts, 1980-1991	12
3.1	Distribution of Working Population by Occupation (%)	62
3.2	The Performance of the Economy of Hong Kong in the 1980s	70
3.3	Representation of Five Occupational Categories on the Executive Council, Legislative Council, Urban Council and Regional Council, 1965-1986	72
4.1	Occupied Living Quarters by Type of Living Quarters, 1981, 1986, 1991 (%)	85
4.2	The Production of Public Housing Units by the Housing Authority, 1973-1991	91
4.3	Sources of Fund for Capital Expenditure of the Housing Authority, 1977-1990	93
4.4	Population and Year of Existence of the Temporary Housing Areas as at 1 April, 1991	99

5.1a	A Chronology of the Actions Organized by the Residents of the Kowloon Bay THA in Respect of the ATHA Issue, 1990-1991	115
5.1b	A Chronology of the Actions Organized by the Residents of the Ping Shek THA in Respect of the ATHA Issue, 1990-1993	116
5.2	A Chronology of the Actions Organized by the Joint Committee of the THA Residents Associations for the ATHA Issue, 1990-1993	117
5.3	General Information About Two Local THA Concern Groups	120
5.4	Years of Residency in Hong Kong, Place of Birth, Population, Number of Households, by Residents in the Two ATHAs, as of May 1991 (%)	124
5.5	Years of Residency in THAs by the Residents in Two THAs (%)	125
5.6	Occupation of the THA Residents by THA (%)	126
5.7	Monthly Household Income by THA (%)	127
5.8	Age Group of the THA Residents by THA, 1991 (%)	127
7.1	People to Whom Respondents Turn in Case of Emergency	179
7.2	Respondents' Mobilization Potential in Protest Activities in the Kowloon Bay THA	183
7.3	Characteristics of the Respondents in the Kowloon Bay THA	186
7.4	Odds Ratios for Predicting Four Measures of Participation in Protest Activities Among Kowloon Bay THA Residents, Using Two Logistic Regression Models	189
7.5	Respondents' Mobilization Potential in Protest Activities in the Ping Shek THA	195
7.6	Characteristics of the Respondents in the Ping Shek THA	196
7.7	Odds Ratios for Variables Predicting Four Measures of Participation in Protest Activities Among the Ping Shek THA Residents, Using Two Logistic Regression Models	199
7.8	Reason for Non-participation in Protest Activities by THA	205
7.9	Rate of Actual Participation in the Ping Shek THA	208
7.10	Characteristics of the Actual Participants in the Ping Shek THA	208
7.11	Models Predicting Actual Participation in the Ping Shek THA Protest Activities	210

x *Polite Politics*

8.1	Period of Involvement of the Volunteer Organizers in the Ping Shek ATHA Protest, May 1992-April 1994	224
8.2	Level of Involvement of the Indigenous Leaders in the Kowloon Bay THA and the Ping Shek THA, April 1990-April 1994	232
A1.1	Distribution of Interviewees	301

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Chris Pickvance, for his guidance and supervision on the study. He showed great patience in reading through my drafts, gave valuable suggestions on both the content and the presentation of this study, and provided scholarly advice and personal support.

Special thanks to all the community social workers and volunteer organizers who took part in the Aged Temporary Housing Area protest. Without their gracious assistance, this study could not have been conducted. I wish to extend my thanks to Ms. Samantha Chan who assisted me in finishing the fieldwork; to the postgraduate students in the Urban and Regional Studies Unit, University of Kent at Canterbury, who have helped in many ways; and to Ms. Terry McBride who spent great effort in editing my English.

This study was generously supported by the Staff Development Committee, Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Finally, I am indebted to the residents of the Kowloon Bay and Ping Shek THAs who patiently answered my questions and let me know how they dealt with the social forces impinging upon their daily lives. I acknowledge with gratitude their willingness to recount their rich experiences and reflection on their protest.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

1 Introduction

This study is concerned with an urban movement and its role in urban politics. An urban movement is conceived here as an individual organization 'which make[s] urban demands whatever their levels and effects' (Pickvance, 1985:32). Our focus will be on the origin, the character and the effects of a housing movement in Hong Kong. A housing movement is one of the sub-types of urban movement, in particular arising in relation to issues concerning the management and distribution of housing resources. An issue concerning Aged Temporary Housing Areas (ATHAs) will be taken as a case study in order to throw light on the reasons why, and how, urban minorities in Hong Kong employ collective actions to protect or advance their interests. Furthermore, we shall draw on the findings of this study to shed light on the theoretical discussion about the process of translating a social base to a social force (Pickvance, 1977).

In this chapter, we shall discuss the significance of the study of urban movements in section 1.1. Its significance to the study of urban politics in Hong Kong is presented in section 1.2. Section 1.3 will spell out the method and data used in this study. The final section is about the structure of this book.

Before going into the discussion about the significance of the study of urban movements, it is useful to place the housing movement in Hong Kong in the context of other types of political action. Based on the data collected through a study of the social conflicts in Hong Kong in the period from 1980-91 we found a number of features of the housing movement in Hong Kong.¹ Firstly, in the period from 1980-91 social action related to housing issues was the third most frequent category of conflict issues, following labour and political issues. Secondly, most of the issues were those concerning local and sectoral benefits; 60% of the housing issues were of 'local' scope, 32% of sectoral scope and only 8% of whole-territory scope. Thirdly, as regards the forms of organization involved, 44% and 34% of housing conflicts in Hong Kong in the last decade involved loose groups and community/sectoral groups respectively. However, only 4% of

housing conflicts involved federal forms of organization; in other words, organizational alliance was a very insignificant form of organization in the housing movement. Fourthly, as will be shown in detail later, most of the forms of action were confined to petitions, press conferences and sending letters to the media. By contrast, disruptive contests were less likely to be a form of action taken in housing conflicts. This indicates that the most popular form of action taken in housing disputes is 'polite protest actions' which refer to the protest activities that 'eschew or at least avoid the extensive physical damage to property and humans found in violent struggle on the one side and the restraint and decorum of staid politics on the other' (Lofland, 1991:261). These findings support Saunders' description of the nature of urban movements as 'typically fragmented, localized, limited to a narrow range of concerns, and politically isolated from broader radical movements' (1980:551).

Despite being one of the most frequent categories of social action, the housing movement has not developed into a social force with a wide scope for forming an alliance, and its concerns seldom reached issues at territory-wide level. Such features lead us to reconsider the nature of community-based movements. Boyte (1980) explained them by reference to the localism, narrowness of constituency and the dominance of paid staff in community movements. Fisher and Kling (1993) held a positive view on community movements despite the small scale of this kind of collective action. They argued that such grassroots mobilization was the result of the popular strategies of parochial and self-serving kinds.

This study attempts to shed light on these features of the housing movement in Hong Kong and to explore the factors giving rise to these features and the trajectory of working class people's collective action in pursuit of their interests. Also, we are interested in the reasons underpinning the use of 'polite protest actions' as the dominant strategy in housing movements. It will be argued that the concept 'polite protest action' is the key to understanding the nature and character of the housing movement in Hong Kong; and we shall discuss this concept further in the next section.

Urban Movements: Their Importance in Urban Politics

Why should we study urban movements?

An urban movement is an individual organization making urban demands. It is distinguished from 'urban social movements' - a sub-type of urban movement which is reserved for denoting urban movements that can achieve high-level changes (Pickvance, 1985:32). Urban social movements have been regarded as an important agent of social change by a new school of sociological approach known as new urban sociology (Zukin, 1980). The new urban sociology is in fact a critique of the classical tradition of the Chicago School. Urbanization is conceived by the Chicago School to be the result of a natural evolutionary process, and competition and population increase are the impetus for social change. Although acknowledging the hardship and suffering of the underprivileged, the Chicago School 'falls back on oddly mechanical explanations for those facts, such as the purported effects of population density, size and heterogeneity' (Walton, 1993:99). Collective actions by the underprivileged, in the eyes of the scholars of this tradition, are considered to be the result of social disorganization or the psychological imbalance of individuals (Park, 1952).

The new urban sociology approach has a different conception of urban life. It suggests that a city is a fusion of market, political authority and community (Walton, 1993). In a city, there is a regular exchange of goods, by which resources are allocated to meet the demands of people's daily necessities. The market is the location for these kinds of practice. In order to ensure the prosperity of the market in a city, the political and administrative authority develops and regulates the practices of tradesmen and merchants. This entails political control and the creation of rules (Tabb and Sawers, 1978). Community is the third essential component of a city, which refers to 'the urban citizenry united in a corporate unit administrated by authorities who they elect' (Walton, 1993:94). It is also a specific form of association among the urban citizenry who organize collectively to defend, or advance, their interests. These three components entail three kinds of interests. Agents involved in the market are oriented to the pursuit of profit, while the political and administrative institutions regulate the operation of the market and urban life. Community arises in order to protect itself from exploitation by the market and domination by the political system. Because of the involvement of these interest groups, city life is fashioned by social conflicts concerning economic competition and

political control (Goering, 1978; Walton, 1979). City life, or urban life, is understood as a process - such as residential segregation, land-use pattern, and the formation of community organizations, etc. - and as the product of the interplay of economic forces, political control and community. Studies of urban conflicts reveal the ways in which private and public agents modify the influence of economic and political forces. The suffering of the underprivileged is hence understood as the consequence of economic exploitation and political domination, and their collective actions are responses to the inherent and fundamental problems of city life.

Marxist urban sociology is one of the strands of the new urban sociology. The proponents of this perspective on urbanization anticipate the development of a new urban politics which is dominated by social conflicts arising from exploitation and domination outside the sphere of work. With the publication of his book *The Urban Question* in 1972, Castells brought the structuralist Marxist tradition into the study of urban politics. In Castells' theoretical framework, urban protests provide the clues to the identification of new social cleavages apart from class conflicts and inequality. Urban politics is seen as an arena in which urban social movements are the agents of social change, and hence the primary task of urban sociology is to examine their origins and effects.

Urban social movements are defined by Castells as 'a system of practices resulting from the articulation of the particular conjuncture, both by the insertion of the support-agents in the urban structure and in the social structure, and such that its development tends objectively towards structural transformation of the urban system or towards a substantial modification of the power relations in the class struggle, that is to say, in the last resort, in the state power' (1977:432). Castells argues that while class conflicts spring from the primary structural contradictions of capitalist relations of production, urban social movements arise as a result of another intrinsic structural contradiction of the capitalist mode of production. However, urban social movements are secondary in the sense that they cannot produce any 'effects' by their own efforts. Class movements are identified as the primary social force generating social and political changes, whilst any other forms of social movement are considered to be unable to give rise to the same effects. The effects of urban social movements are only related to their function of linking secondary structural contradictions in the urban system to the anti-capitalist struggle (Lowe, 1986). Significant as their role in linking different classes may be, the effects of non-class based urban

social movements are to be materialized through the mediation of an efficient working class organization. In other words, urban social movements can facilitate class struggle only when they are able to develop linkages with class practices.

This conceptual framework has directed academic attention to the study of whether such a new politics has developed, and about the extent to which urban social movements engender a new and significant challenge to the hegemony of capitalist societies (Saunders, 1980). In particular, the question of the relationship between class struggle and urban social movements has opened up new research directions, including many studies aimed at finding out how these two kinds of struggles are related (Della Seta, 1978; Folin, 1979; Janssen, 1978; Lagana, *et al.*, 1982; Preteceille, 1986). Lagana *et al.* (1982) argued in his study of the urban conflicts in Turin that urban social movements could be an extension of the anti-capitalist struggle from factory to society, and therefore any explanation of urban social movements without such a reference to class contexts would be misleading.

However, there are a number of shortcomings in Castells' framework. Firstly, Castells' analysis is highly functionalist, in the sense that his primary concern is the functions of urban social movements, rather than identifying and examining the actual effects of particular actions. As McKeown argued, 'the consequence of Castells's functionalism...is that he explicitly avoids any analysis which would treat urban processes (such as urban planning and urban social movements) as the outcome of the conscious and calculated decisions and actions of the actors in a capitalist society' (1987:140). Secondly, less emphasis is placed on the study of movement organizations. Castells argues that 'the genesis of an organization does not form part of the analysis of social movements, for only its effects are important' (Castells, 1976:169-70). The reason for this methodological rule is pointed out by Pickvance who says that for Castells 'concrete movement organizations are the locus of *observation*. The point is that they are not the frame of *analysis*. The focus is rather on the 'problems', 'issues' or 'stakes' the organization pursues and their structural determination. It is the structural contradictions which are the crucial level of analysis, and organizations are seen as means for their expression and articulation' (original italics, 1976:199). Castells subsequently fails to explore sociologically an important theme about how the constituency of an urban movement groups together, implements mobilization and makes

decisions in pursuit of their interests. Thirdly, since he does not give sufficient attention to the mobilization process, what has not been adequately studied is the nature and political orientations of the constituency which makes up the potential source of an urban movement (Lowe, 1985). Lastly, Castells puts so much emphasis on urban social movements which have a bearing on societal change that little attention is given to those urban movements with a purely local dimension, or to non-protest and quiescence in urban politics. However, the neglect of small-scale territory-based political actions may result in fewer insights into 'the mechanisms of ideological stabilisation which limit the development of broader political movements from organizations around urban issues' (Dunleavy, 1980:158-9). Similarly, as McKeown argued, 'any definition which wishes to exclude these neighbourhood and community-based movements from the general category of urban movement is likely to miss an important part of the politics that take place within urban areas' (1987:190).

In the mid-1980s the structuralist Marxist approach was widely under attack as overly deterministic. Subsequently Castells revised its original formulation. In his later modification, urban movements have been granted their own right to existence as they are held to be a potential link between different social classes, especially the middle class and working class (Lowe, 1985). Along with class movements and other pressure groups, they struggle to impart a particular 'meaning' to a given city against the interests of the institutionalized urban meaning and dominant classes. Castells in his new work redefines urban social movements as 'urban-orientated mobilizations that influence structural social change and transform the urban meanings' (1983:305). Put simply, he attempts to draw out the link between changes in urban meaning and urban social movements. Furthermore, urban social movements are classified by reference to three fronts that each movement works on: collective consumption, community culture and political self-management. Castells argues that only the urban social movements which interconnect these three fronts are capable of effecting social change. However, he has not gone so far as to give up his Marxist political concern about the power of urban social movements to effect social change, and hence did not shift his attention to the study of various forms of urban protest. Above all, as Lowe argued, Castells 'has still not integrated a sociological understanding of the importance of the nature and characteristics of social bases in the

mobilization process; and how a social base becomes, or fails to become, a social force' (1985:52).²

In view of the problems of Castells' theoretical framework, another strand of urban movement study developed in the late 1980s. This was more oriented to empirical research about local political actions, and focused on the conditions shaping the growth and outcomes of urban movements (Burdick, 1992; Bennett, 1992; Canel, 1992; Eckstein, 1990). This kind of research is based on case studies to illustrate the salience of contextual factors in determining the responses of poor people to grievances and the possibility of being a successful movement. Studies in the Third World illustrated how the urban poor, in the hope of improving their physical environment, united and struggled to secure access to resources, for instance, money, labour, facilities and legitimacy for their movements (Alvarez, 1990; Eckstein, 1977; Schuurman and Naerssen, 1989). Recent attempts have also pinpointed the importance of examining the bearing of state initiatives and forms of response to grassroots movements (Clarke and Mayer, 1986).

In the United States where the structuralist Marxist tradition was less influential, the organizational and mobilization aspects of urban political movements received more attention (Ambrecht, 1976; Bailis, 1974; Brill, 1971; Davis, 1991; Delgado, 1986; Henig, 1982; Jackson and Johnson, 1974; Stoecker, 1994). These studies enrich our understanding of how powerless people forge viable political means of collective action to advance their interests. In particular, the Fainsteins (1974) focused on how people of low income groups became involved in politics. They pointed out the significance of this kind of research. Firstly, urban movements are 'of additional scholarly interest because they represent a type of political phenomenon that usually goes unrecorded' (1974:xiii). Secondly, they represent a new kind of political institution and any inquiry into the experience of these organizations reveals several of the most significant aspects of American politics. Thirdly, they indicate the extent to which citizens with little power, money, or status can use the political system as a lever to increase their relative share of public goods. Lastly, we may obtain the answer as to whether social inequality is destined to perpetuate itself indefinitely, even in a pluralistic, democratic political system.

The merit of this framework lies in its wider field of interest. Unlike Castells who confines his concern to the extent to which urban social movements effect social change, it gives relatively more attention to the

character and trajectory of urban movements. Moreover, one of its aims is to illustrate that social and historical contexts are important determinants of the protest pattern of an urban social movement, and therefore the students of urban social movements must be sensitive to a range of factors unique to the social and historical contexts in which an urban movement operates, such as the nature of the class system and the configuration of political power (Friedland, 1982; Katznelson, 1981).

With the lessons learnt from the study of urban politics in the United States and the critique of Castells's analytical framework, the new urban sociology was found to be in need of reformulation and development for the study of urban movements in the mid-1980s. Subsequently two directions have been repeatedly suggested. The first is to incorporate the social movement theories into the domain of urban sociology, such as the resource mobilization theory and the political process model, for the analysis of the mobilization and organizational aspects of urban movements (Hasson, 1993; Lowe, 1985; Pickvance, 1976, 1985). The second is to rectify the overly deterministic tendency of the structuralist Marxist tradition by giving more attention to actors in the study of urban politics. As regards the importance of actors, Smith argued that 'although impersonal conditions constitute the historical context within which people act, people are not merely passive recipients of these structural economic and political conditions. They are creators of meaning, which is also a wellspring of human action and historic change' (1989:355). Flanagan asked us to shift our attention from the structural issues at the most macrological level 'toward the local level where the powerful and the less powerful face choices about how to live today and plan for tomorrow' (1993:141).

This discussion in urban sociology raises the question of how to incorporate the mobilization process, the role of actors, and social and historical contexts into the analysis of urban movements. As we shall argue in Chapter 2, the study of strategies provides us with a starting point for our analysis of the character and trajectory of urban movements. A theoretical formulation of the concept of strategy also gives us the conceptual tools to identify and analyze the interplay of actors' choices, mobilization of resources, and social and historical contexts of an urban movement. In this study, the concept of strategy refers to the types of action by which the originators of strategies expect to materialize certain effects. We shall modify the scheme of ordering types of strategy suggested by Lofland (1985) into a four-category model, in which strategies are classified as

'ordinary politics', 'polite politics', 'protest' and 'violence'. Ordinary politics refers to those actions organized through both formal and informal channels in political institutions, such as lobbying, sending representatives to government institutions, and forming connections with political parties, etc. The strategy of polite politics refers to those acts which make known or evident by visible and tangible means outside the political structure the grievances and demands of the group in question, but this kind of strategy does not lead to any disruption of the prevailing social life and political structure. Protest refers to those actions which are oriented to disrupting current social arrangements, such as rent strikes, non-cooperation, blockades, illegal occupation and system overloading (Lofland, 1985; Piven and Cloward, 1977). Violence refers to those actions which physically damage or destroy property or other humans. With this classification, we shall explore the reasons for the actors choosing the forms of strategy taken throughout the protest.

To sum up, one of the objectives of our analysis of the housing movement in Hong Kong is to develop an integrated approach which takes both actors, and social and political contexts into account in understanding urban movements. In Chapter 2, we shall give a critical evaluation of the theories of social movements and explore the ways of developing such an integrated approach. We shall argue that two social movement theories need close inspection. The first is the resource mobilization theory which stresses the importance of the availability of resources to the protest pattern, and the second is the political process model which emphasises the significance of the political opportunity structure. We shall also evaluate these theories in the light of our study of the urban movement in Hong Kong. Having recognized that neither the resource mobilization theory nor the political process model places emphasis on the active role of actors in collective action, we focus on the strategy adopted by the protest group in order to analyse the mobilization and organizational aspects of an urban movement. We shall also demonstrate how powerless people collectively construct a viable means to counter a dominant political authority and in what ways a locally-based urban movement reveals the nature of a political system.

Our study attempts to break new ground in three respects. First, an integrated approach to urban movements is constructed through a synthesis of the resource mobilization theory, the political process model and the social construction perspective. Second, whereas the forefront of research

in the field of urban movements places emphasis on the link between structural conditions and the incidence of urban movements, we aim to advance our understanding of the dynamics of urban movements through the study of actors and their interaction with the social structure. Thirdly, while many studies of urban movements are preoccupied with their social effects, we focus on their character and trajectory, a topic which has been identified as particularly important but has received scant attention, i.e. the process of translating a social base to a social force.

The Significance of the Study of Urban Protests in Hong Kong

In this section, we discuss the significance of this kind of study to the understanding of urban politics in Hong Kong. Our study attempts to fill a gap in empirical research concerning the character and development of small-scale urban movements in Hong Kong. This kind of urban movement has been largely unstudied in the field of urban sociology, and hence we know little about ordinary people's political action in relation to the control of their daily lives. It is our contention that the study of small-scale, or even unsuccessful, protests is very important. As Dunleavy argued, 'a study of urban social movements can provide important cues to the existence of latent grievances and issues, and yield insights into some fundamental but relatively intangible power relationships between state agencies and the mass of the population' (1980:161).

The fact that small-scale urban movements receive little attention is related to the difficulty of access to such kinds of protest. As West and Blumberg pointed out, 'protest politics is an everyday experience in the lives of people around the world... However, many local protest activities are crushed or lose support before they reach the level of mass movements, while others are never recorded as part of political history' (1990:6). Hong Kong differs little in this respect. But two studies are the exception. Lui (1984) studied three urban protests in Hong Kong in the light of Castells' framework and Kung (1984) was concerned with an urban movement pressing for a district hospital. Both employed a similar theoretical framework to explore how an urban movement articulated the structural contradictions of the capitalist mode of production.

These studies provide us with information about the causes and course of urban protests in Hong Kong in the early 1980s. However, there has

been little research on such urban protests in the early 1990s when a new era started in Hong Kong. Democracy was introduced into the political system and the 1997 issue had generated more conflicts between the government and the grassroots. The 1990s witnessed the rise of political parties and the dominance of the discussion about the 1997 issue, and there were changes in the configuration of power both inside and outside the political system. It is necessary to see why and how Hong Kong people adopt concerted actions outside the formal political system to fight for their interests. We are interested in the nature of the political system in transition, and how Hong Kong people seek control of their lives in this specific historical context. We will also explore whether territory-based collective action remains one possible type of political action by which Hong Kong people can advance their interests.

A further objective of this study is to contribute to an improved understanding of urban protests in Hong Kong. Although both Lui (1984) and Kung (1984) have provided us with information about how urban protests in Hong Kong developed, their studies remained deeply influenced by Castells' framework, and therefore little attention was paid to the importance of actors. It is true that Lui and Kung recognized the functionalist and overly deterministic tendency in Castells' framework and thereby highlighted the contribution of the external agents to the mobilization process, but they simply assumed that the external agents were important in the supply of resources, without giving sufficient attention to their ideologies, their influence on decisions about the choice of strategies, and the possibility that the external agents could serve as agents of social control. Recent studies in other countries have illustrated the need to examine the nature of external agents. Hasson (1993), in his study of urban social movements in Jerusalem, showed that the ideologies of community social workers influenced the course of protest. Another study, in Brussels, also illustrated how the social work profession was used by the authorities to deal with urban conflicts (Hengchen and Melis, 1980). Moreover the two Hong Kong studies attached little importance to the examination of the nature of actors, and therefore shed little light on the role of the external supportive agents in urban social movements.

The third reason for our study of urban movements in Hong Kong is the dominance of the strategy of 'polite' politics in urban conflicts. As shown in Table 1.1, petitions, press conferences and sending letters to newspapers were the dominant forms of strategy in the last decade. We

conceived these activities as polite politics since they take place outside the formal political system and aim at raising public awareness without causing any disruption of the prevailing social and political arrangement.

Form of Action	Frequency	Percentage of actions	Percentage of events*
Petition	178	38	49
Press conference	95	20	34
Sending letters to media	80	17	28
Protest	36	8	13
Action-survey	23	5	8
Meeting	18	4	6
Signing campaign	11	2	4
Civil disobedience	11	2	4
Violence	3	1	1
Total	466	100	

Table 1.1 Frequency of Various Forms of Action Taken in Housing Conflicts, 1980-1991

* The total number of events is 282. The percentage in this column is obtained by dividing 282 by the frequency.

Source: Author's analysis is based on the data provided by Chui and Lai who conducted a survey on the social conflicts in Hong Kong in 1994.

These findings lead us to ask why polite politics remains the most popular form of strategy in urban movements. Lui (1984) explained the choice of strategy by reference to the polity structure and the resources provided by community social workers. Kung (1984) added historical practices of urban struggles in Hong Kong as another factor determining the choice of action forms. The problem in both analyses is their deterministic tendency which prevents them from giving attention to how the protesters made their choice of strategy. It seems that neither study allows any space for the originator of the strategy to choose the direction

of their actions. Furthermore, these studies did not explain the lack of disruptive protest and violence. Perhaps the protesters are culturally predisposed to avoid radical action - as Lau (1982) argued that Hong Kong people were pragmatic in attitude, and their concerns about personal material advancement and social stability led to an aversion to aggression. Neither Lui nor Kung was interested in exploring whether the lack of aggressive political behaviour of Hong Kong people was culturally predisposed, or is due to some structural constraints. Therefore, their analysis paid little attention to the constituency of an urban movement. It is our contention that the analysis of the choice of strategies provides us with more clues to answer the 'culture vs. structural constraint' question.

To sum up, we address in this study four questions about the urban movements in Hong Kong. Firstly, why do some Hong Kong people stand outside the formal political system to defend or challenge the provision of urban facilities and social services in an era in which democracy has been introduced into the political system? Secondly, how does a social base in Hong Kong develop into a social force and what strategies are adopted to exert pressure on the political authorities? Thirdly, why does polite politics remain the most popular form of strategy adopted by urban movements? Lastly, what is the nature of the political system in Hong Kong as revealed by urban politics?

Method and Data

Our study focuses on the Aged Temporary Housing Area (ATHA) protest and aims to illustrate how political structure, the organizational specificity of the protest and the actors involved shape the character of a housing movement. The choice of the ATHA protest as a case for the examination of the process translating a social base to a social force is based on the idea that the validity of case study analysis lies not in its ability to verify a theory, but in its ability to shed light on our theoretical claims (Burawoy, 1991; Mitchell, 1983).

The urban movement we shall study was launched by a group of working class people living in ATHAs in Hong Kong in the early 1990s. The function of the Temporary Housing Areas, according to the Housing Authority,³ is to provide shelter for the 'homeless and people not yet

eligible for permanent public housing resulting from clearances, fires, natural disasters and other operations' (The Housing Authority, 1991:80). Although this sort of shelter was understood as 'temporary', ironically by 1990 more than 16 THAs, which had been accommodating more than 24,000 people, had been in existence for more than 10 years. In view of the poor conditions in the ATHAs, a group of organizers, comprising volunteers and community social workers, mobilized the ATHA residents to form grassroots associations and a cross-district coalition to exert pressure on the government and the Housing Authority in order to press for early clearance of the ATHAs.

The protest of the ATHA residents is an indication of their being poorly taken care of by the prevailing public housing policy. The outcry of the ATHA residents through collective actions appears to be a refutation of the story about the success of the public housing policy which the government regards as one of its most outstanding achievements. The protests of the ATHA residents draw attention to the insufficient provision of public housing, and to the fact that some people in Hong Kong have to organize themselves into a social force in order to fight against ignorance, to secure social benefits and to raise their living standards. Nevertheless, we shall argue that the ATHA residents encountered a lot of constraints on their actions. The constraints were of three types: limited political opportunity for expressing their grievances and exerting pressure on the government, difficulties in mobilizing ATHA residents, and ineffective strategies.

We decided to observe closely the activities of two local concern groups in our study, because of limited manpower and resources. Moreover, we considered that these could give us an improved understanding of the dynamics of urban protest.

Our selection of these two areas is based on the following considerations.⁴ Firstly, we obtained permission from the coordinator and the chairman of the People's Council on Public Housing Policy to work with them and to be a participant observer of the ATHA protest. Secondly, since there was no mobilization task prior to our fieldwork, we could observe the entire process of mobilization from the very beginning. Thirdly, both ATHAs were in the same district, therefore we could compare two mobilization processes within the same local environment.

In order to support our arguments, our analysis focuses on five aspects of the ATHA protest. The first aspect concerns the social and

political contexts of Hong Kong in the 1980s. We aim to draw attention to the changing relationship between the government and the grassroots. The second aspect concerns the rise and role of the THA in the public housing provision system in Hong Kong. Here, we place emphasis on how the formal bureaucratic rules and procedures create and regulate people's access to housing resources. The third, fourth and fifth aspects relate to the three strategies adopted by the ATHA protesters. The third aspect concerns the use of ordinary politics strategy, i.e. lobbying and using persuasion in dealing with government officials and politicians. The fourth aspect concerns the extent to which the internal social structure and the value orientations of the constituency of the ATHA protest influence mobilization. We shall argue that the low level of actual participation renders difficult the use of some forms of polite and disruptive politics, such as large-scale petitions and demonstrations. The final aspect concerns the dominance of polite politics.

As regards the data we employed in this study, the information for the analysis of the social and political contexts in the 1980s is mainly drawn from published articles, official documents and publications, and statistical data provided by the Census and Statistics Department. In respect of the role of the ATHAs in public housing policy, we first draw on the data from unpublished documents of the Hong Kong Housing Authority to delineate both the production and allocation of public housing, and then explore the extent to which the housing policy ignores some urban minorities.

Our analysis of the political opportunity structure relies on three sources of information. The analysis of the institutional structure relies on official government documents and the annual reports of the Housing Authority. This analysis aims to draw out the link between the restructuring of the Housing Authority and the available channels by which the housing movement can access the decision-making domain. The second source is the interviews conducted with politicians, political party members, social workers and trade unionists in relation to THA policy (see Appendix 1). Altogether twenty-four cases are used in the analysis. We also participated in a number of meetings in order to gather information on the politicians' views of the ATHA issue.

Our account of the ATHA protest is based on two sources of information. Our fieldwork was conducted in the period from April 1990 to April 1994, one part of it is an extended participant observation (details

of which will be presented later); and the other is questionnaire surveys conducted in three THAs, namely Kowloon Bay, Ping Shek, and Hong Ning Road THAs. The first questionnaire survey began in May 1991 and finished in July 1991. Questions were asked about respondents' socio-economic background, level of satisfaction with living conditions, willingness to move out of the ATHAs, preferred location of rehousing and their willingness to participate in neighbourhood associations (see Appendix 3).

Information for the analysis of the mobilization process of the two local concern groups is drawn from two questionnaire surveys conducted in October 1991 in the Kowloon Bay THA and in May 1992 in the Ping Shek THA (see Appendices 4 and 5). Questions concerned the residents' evaluation of the THA policy, their experience of involvement in the ATHA protest, their willingness to participate in the protest, and their personal evaluation of the political efficacy of ATHA residents. Findings from these surveys provide us with detailed information about the reasons for participation and non-participation. Two sets of ethnographic interviews with both participants and non-participants (16 in the Kowloon Bay THA and 30 in the Ping Shek THA) were used to solicit further information on the value orientations and social structure of the ATHA residents. Interviewees were guided by a list of questions, concerning how to evaluate the social life in Hong Kong, their social networks, evaluation of the THA policy and the performance of the Hong Kong government. All the interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Through these interviews, we gathered more information on those aspects which were not included in the questionnaire surveys (see Appendix 1).

Given that we are concerned with the dynamics of the ATHA protest relating to the process of strategy formulation, organization formation and the interaction pattern among the members of the local concern groups, we considered it to be necessary to collect information on the organizing and mobilizing processes of the ATHA protest. The analysis of the internal dynamic thus derives from extended participant observation, during the period from April 1990 to April 1994, in the concern group meetings, petitions and protest activities organized by the local concern groups. By undertaking the role of volunteer organizer, it is possible for us to follow the activities of the local concern group closely. This strategy gave rise to some methodological issues which will be discussed in

Appendix 2. During the fieldwork, we conducted more than 50 extensive, open-ended formal and informal interviews with participants, non-participants, community social workers and volunteer organizers involved in the ATHA protest. The interviews focused on these actors' changing perceptions and evaluations of the protest, and on the process of decision-making in relation to the choice of strategy.

We were also able to use the internal organizational documents of a coalition of residents associations known as the Joint Committee of THA Residents Association (JCTRA) in order to examine the relationships between local concern groups. The author also participated in a number of meetings and conducted 8 interviews with the members of this coalition in order to explore the failure of this organization to serve as a viable coalition working for the interests of the ATHA residents. The interviewees were identified as the key persons acting as informal leaders of the coalition in different periods.

Further details about questionnaires and sampling methods are presented in Appendix 1.

Structure of this Book

This thesis has nine chapters. The next chapter is a theoretical review of the literature on social movements. It includes a discussion and evaluation of the classical perspective on collective action, the resource mobilization theory, the political process model, and the social construction model.

Chapter 3 describes the social and political conditions of Hong Kong in the period 1970-90. We stress that the economic boom in this period had two major effects. First, the middle class expanded as a result of the economic growth. Second, the political structure underwent a process of change when the emergence of the 1997 issue became the dominant concern in the polity and led to the opening up of the political structure. As a result, less attention was paid to communal (or urban) issues.

Chapter 4 examines the structure of housing provision in Hong Kong and explores the reasons for the fact that housing problems got worse in the 1980s. This decade witnessed a shortfall of public rental housing, and consequently, the housing demands of various groups were not met. The housing problems of three urban minority groups, the THA residents, the

squatters and the single-person households, are identified. Chapter 5 is a brief account of the trajectory of the ATHA protest. It contains a general description of the social demographic background of the ATHA residents, the rise of the ATHA protest, and the actors involved in the protest. In Chapter 6 we detail the relationship between the political context and the ATHA protest. The aim of this chapter is to see whether the ATHA protesters can mobilize support through connections with the actors involved in the formal political system. We shall argue that much political power has been reallocated to non-governmental statutory organizations in which the democratic element is notable for its absence. Consequently, there is little opportunity for the ATHA protesters to have access to the decision-making process. We also examine the interorganizational links between the political rights movement and the housing movement. It will be shown that political rights movement activists established their political parties and paid less attention to community actions, which made it difficult for the housing movement to rally support from the political rights movement.

Having described the political context, we develop our analysis of local mobilization in Chapter 7. The objective of this chapter is to explain the absence of large-scale mobilization at local level, and to see why so few large-scale demonstrations were organized. Three aspects of mobilization will be examined: the extent to which the internal social structure facilitates mobilization; the extent of the mobilization potential of the ATHA residents; and the mobilization efforts initiated by the ATHA local concern groups. We attempt to find out which aspect determines the extent of mobilization.

In Chapter 8, we focus on the internal dynamics of the local concern groups and examine the decision-making process. Our analysis proceeds in three stages. We first identify the social relationships among the actors involved in the local concern groups, and then look at how these actors influenced the choice of strategies and why the strategy of polite politics is so frequently adopted. The third stage is to evaluate the outcomes of the ATHA protest.

Chapter 9 is a summary of our findings. Some recommendations for future research will be made. We also discuss the role and the likely development of such small-scale social movements in the post-1997 era.

Notes

- 1 The features of housing movements is identified by the author on the basis of the analysis of the raw data collected by Chui and Lai (1994) in a study of social conflicts in Hong Kong.
- 2 The typology of urban social movements has been regarded by Pickvance (1985) as problematic in the analysis of the changing incidence and militancy of urban movements. For details about the exchange between Castells and Pickvance, see Castells (1985), Lowe (1985) and Pickvance (1985, 1986).
- 3 Details about the Housing Authority will be given in Chapter 4. A brief introduction is given here. The Housing Authority is a statutory body, established under the Housing Ordinance, being responsible for coordinating all aspects of public housing. The terms of reference of the authority are stated as follows: 'The authority advises the Governor on all housing policy matters and, through its executive arm (the Housing Department), plans and builds public housing estates, Home Ownership Scheme courts and temporary housing areas for various categories of people as determined by the authority with the approval of the Governor. It also manages public housing estates, Home Ownership Scheme courts, temporary housing areas, cottage areas, transit centres, flatted factories and the ancillary commercial facilities throughout the territory, and administers the Private Sector Participation Scheme and the Home Purchase Loan Scheme. On behalf of the government, the authority clears land, prevents and controls squatting, and plans and co-ordinates improvements to squatter areas' (The Hong Kong Government, Annual Report, 1990: 177).
- 4 Initially, we planned to study Hong Ning Road THA as well. However, the ATHA protest there ended after one year of action and we had no time to prepare our involvement in this ATHA.

2 Theories of Social Movements: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

The study of social movements became popular in the 1960s, an era in which protests and direct actions outside the formal political system played an important role in social change. This led to a growth in the general sociology literature of work informed by resource mobilization theories which considered protests and social movements to be the products of the political participation of rational people. This view is contrary to that offered by the dominant classical perspective which deemed collective action to be initiated by irrational people. Resource mobilization theorists emphasize the study of the process of collective actions and their impacts on social change. In urban sociology, Pickvance (1977) suggested that it might be fruitful to adopt this perspective to study the process of translating a social base to a social force. The study of this aspect in urban sociology seems necessary since the development and dynamics of urban movements have received little attention (Hannigan, 1985). Later Pahl (1989) in his evaluation of class analysis pointed out that the analysis of urban movements often invoked a structure-consciousness-action chain to theorize its origin, but had in practice given little attention to the mechanisms by which the social group in question acquired the 'consciousness' that guided and informed its actions. Despite such awareness of the need to study the relationship between action and structure, little effort has been put into this question (Giddens, 1984).

This chapter reviews the existing literature on social movements, and in doing so brings out the main theoretical issues concerning the analysis of urban movements. Our aim is to develop a more useful and coherent theoretical framework to understand urban movements in a specific social

and political context. Another objective of this chapter is to bring out the theoretical issues pertinent to the analysis of locally based urban movements. We shall argue that the strategy of an urban movement is an adequate dependent variable, and that the analysis of the process of its formulation and implementation is the key to unravelling the complexity and dynamics of urban movements. We shall start with a brief review of the classical perspective on collective action in section 2.1. Section 2.2 discusses the resource mobilization perspective. Although there are problems in this perspective, we shall draw on the analytical classification of resource acquisition for the study in this thesis. In sections 2.3 and 2.4, we explore and examine two recent theoretical models, that is, the political process model and the social construction of protests, and try to show that these two models are complementary to the resource mobilization perspective. At the end of each section, we point out the major shortcomings of the perspectives. In section 2.5, we link up the resource mobilization perspective with the political process and social construction models, and illustrate a possible way of using their conceptual and analytical elements in our analysis of social movements.

The Classical Perspective on Collective Action

To start with, we briefly elucidate the main tenets shared by different models within the classical perspective, and then go on to argue that this perspective develops on the basis of a problematic distinction between unconventional collective behaviour and institutionalized politics.

Five models can be classified under the 'classical perspective': mass society, collective behaviour, status inconsistency, rising expectation and relative-deprivation models. Their object of study is non-institutionalized collective action and covers social unrest, riots, religious cults, crowd action, revolution, etc. Despite variations among these models, they start from the conception that collective actions can be linked to the psychological state of individuals. As McAdam *et al.* pointed out, in this perspective 'the origin of social movements tended to be explained by reference to the same dynamics that accounted for individual participation in movement activities' (1988:696). This perspective suggests that rapid social change disturbs and frustrates those who are not able to cope with tensions, breakdowns and drastic changes, and as a consequence, disturbed

individuals set in motion a series of transient and unorganized non-institutionalized activities in order to restore their psychological equilibrium.

In all these models, individual strain is the proximate cause of collective behaviour, and some macro-social factors are identified as structural causes of the strain. Participation in collective action is seen as the means of managing the psychological tensions of a stressful social situation. The logic of the collective behaviour perspective can be represented in a causal sequence, as shown in Figure 2.1. The sequence can be understood as moving 'from the specification of some underlying structural weakness in society to a discussion of the disruptive psychological effect that this structural "strain" has on society. The sequence is held to be complete when the attendant psychological disturbance reaches the aggregate threshold required to produce a social movement' (McAdam, 1982:7).



Figure 2.1 Causal Sequence of Collective Action

Source : McAdam, D. (1982:7)

The models which share the classical perspective, despite variations in concepts and methodology, adopt the above causal sequence to explain the emergence of collective actions. The mass society model suggests that social movements are the result of the experience of personal psychological anxiety and alienation which are engendered by social atomization (Kornhauser, 1959). The collective behaviour model stresses the feeling of anxiety, fantasy and hostility springing from 'normative ambiguity' (Smelser, 1962). The status inconsistency model emphasizes psychological strains generated by a loss of community and drastic social change (Arendt, 1951; Broom, 1959; Geschwender, 1967; 1971; Lenski, 1954; Selznick, 1970). The relative deprivation model suggests that discontent arising from the perception of relative deprivation during adverse socio-economic change is the basic instigating condition for participation in collective violence

(Davies, 1969; Grofman and Muller, 1973; Gurney and Tierney, 1982; Gurr, 1970).

The classical perspective makes a distinction between conventional political action and collective actions. Conventional political activities are taken as the normal, long lasting and proper institutional structure, and as able to influence social change in the long run. Collective action on the other hand does not channel discontents and political demands through the formal political structure. Since participants are psychologically disturbed and hence detached from normal social life, they tend to avoid the formal political structure which is part and parcel of the social normative integration mechanism. This perspective regards collective actions as guided by irrationality and as essentially temporary, transitory and spontaneous outbursts, and therefore are not accorded the capacity to influence political change and societal development. Based on this distinction, the collective behaviour perspective suggests that it is necessary to employ two different theoretical models for the analysis of these two kinds of activity.

This distinction is based on a pluralist assumption about political power (Mayer, 1990; McAdam, 1982). Pluralists believe that a democratic political system is effective in expressing individuals' grievances and political preferences, and involvement in such a system is the logical and reasonable response for any rational individual. Conversely, launching a social movement, i.e. non-institutionalized action, reflects the participants' rejection of rational, self-interested political action. Pluralists treat the refusal of movement participants to use the proper channels of politics as proof that the motives behind their actions are somehow distinct from those leading others to engage in ordinary politics. In this sense, participation motivation in collective behaviour must be arational, if not outright irrational, and irrational motivation is not capable of sustaining long term and persistent political activities like those of political groups in the formal political structure. Hence, social movements are seen as social problems posing a threat to the established socio-political order.

In short, all these models conceptualize collective action as emergent collections of psychologically disturbed individuals who are seeking to alleviate personal disturbance generated by social change. This conception then leads the proponents to focus on the social psychology of individuals in order to explain the origin of a social movement.

This perspective has been criticized for being oversimplistic. First, this perspective assumes that collective action is motivated by psychological strains arising from drastic social change. Participation in collective action is seen as a means for curing participants' personal psychological strain arising from feelings of isolation and anxiety. Hence movement participation is interpreted as therapeutic in nature rather than political. However, this argument is rejected on empirical grounds.¹ Empirical research has found a low statistical association between social psychological variables and participation in collective actions (Aberle, 1965; Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Bolton, 1972; Marx and Wood, 1975; Muller, 1980; Petras and Zeitlin, 1967; Portes, 1971; Snow and Phillips, 1980; Useem, 1980, 1975). In other words, the classical perspective lacks empirical support for a link between psychological strain and political participation. In contrast, recent research has found the use of rational skills in recruitment, the formulation of tactics, and negotiation with the authority (Bowen *et al.*, 1968; Muller, 1972; Synder and Tilly, 1972). As shown in these studies, the assumption of irrationality underlying collective behaviour is an ideological one.

Secondly, this perspective makes a problematic distinction between collective action and conventional political activities. McAdam (1982) has argued that this distinction was based on a questionable pluralist image of the political power structure (Mayer, 1990). The pluralists assume that democracy ensures a relatively even distribution of political power because no political force can afford the use of force and violence against their opponents. Also, a democratic political system creates equal opportunities for participation for social groups of whatever size because groups 'simply lack the power to achieve their political goals without the help of other contenders...Any attempt to exercise coercive power over other groups is seen as a tactical mistake' (McAdam, 1982:6). However, the assumption about the openness of a pluralistic political system which ensures equal access to power is not borne out. Even the major proponent of pluralism, Robert Dahl, admitted that equality in terms of participation opportunity, as often existed in the United States, did not entail equality of power, and in fact giant economic corporations could secure more power by the possession of large amounts of economic resources than could the dispossessed and deprived (Dahl, 1982). Parenti (1970) also pointed out that the democratic structure of the United States excluded and exploited working class people. In view of the limited channels in the formal political

structure for the exploited class to advance its interests, collective action appears to be the only rational reaction to express grievances and demands.

Thirdly, the classical perspective underestimates the significance of macro-political and organizational dynamics in social movements (Lipset and Wolin, 1965). It is true that this perspective gives some attention to these aspects but it is limited to analyzing the features of the macro-structure in the pre-movement period in order to find out the causes of individual psychological strain (McAdam *et al.*, 1988). Since attention is largely devoted to exploring participants' motivations, this perspective is preoccupied with the emergence stage of social movements, and little emphasis is placed on the dynamics of movements, their growth, change and demise (Zald and Ash, 1966).

Lastly, scant attention is given to the goals and effects of collective behaviour on the political structure and social change. There is a lot of historical and contemporary evidence about the impacts of social movements, for example, the civil rights movement, the feminist movements, the environmentalist movements, etc. They were found to be able to effect policy change and the restructuring of political power. It is clear that we cannot afford to neglect this aspect of collective movements (Carden, 1974; Frankland and Schoonmaker, 1992; Ferree and Hess, 1985; Gelb and Palley, 1982; Morris, 1984; Piven and Cloward, 1977).

The political struggle and social conflicts that dominated the political scene of the United States in the 1960s stimulated the revision of the classical perspective. With more academic social scientists' involvement in and sympathies with social movements such as the civil rights movement, feminist movements, and the anti-Vietnam war and ecology movements, increasing criticism was directed to the classical perspective. A new framework, known as the 'resource mobilization perspective', emerged (Freeman, 1973, 1983). With its denial of the view that movement participants are irrationally motivated, this perspective suggests that non-institutionalized collective actions are largely taken by rational actors who are marginalized to the fringe of society. In the last two decades, this perspective was regarded as more promising, and considered to be useful in the study of urban social movements (Pickvance, 1976, 1985).

The Resource Mobilization Perspective

We first present the basic assumptions and prepositions of the resource mobilization perspective, and then discuss its strengths and weaknesses.

Starting as a critique of the classical perspective, a number of proponents of the resource mobilization perspective draw on micro-economic and sociological theories so as to develop analytical tools for the study of collective actions. We know that there is no firm agreement on the main assumptions, propositions and family of concepts in this perspective. At the risk of overgeneralization, we identify two basic assumptions of the resource mobilization perspective.

Firstly, resource mobilization theorists are critical of the classical perspective which regards collective action as an irrational response to structural strains. Instead, they regard social movement participation as a behavioural reflection of rational political intentions, and members of social movements as rational actors who are able to instrumentally formulate their political goals and are committed to the idea of reforming the existing social structure (Gamson, 1975; Gerlach and Hine, 1970; Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy and Zald, 1977, 1987; Olson, 1965). Their objectives embrace improving the social positions of disadvantaged social groups, obtaining entry to the polity through political insurgency, and seeking a better distribution of resources. To the theorists of this perspective, a social movement is 'a ubiquitous form of political action and [...] constitutes a set of rational collective actions by excluded groups to advance their interests in the context of a restrictive polity' (Jenkins, 1985:1).

Secondly, resource mobilization theorists consider unconventional political actions to be an extension of institutionalized political action. Rebellious activities are the means and resources employed to achieve political aims by those who are excluded from the formal political structure (Lipsky, 1968). Therefore, there is no real difference between the nature and objectives of unconventional political actions and of political actions originated by political parties, interest groups and lobbyists inside the conventional political structure (Eisinger, 1973; Gamson, 1975; Lipsky, 1968; Lipsky and Levi, 1972; Piven and Cloward, 1977). This perspective suggests that despite the different forms of action adopted in social movements and conventional politics, it is appropriate to use the same conceptual framework and methodological tools to study both kinds of political action.