THE MOUNTAINS ARE HIGH, AND THE EMPEROR IS FAR AWAY

Spaces for Dissent in China’s Environmental Movement

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Introduction

Like many other, industrializing countries, China has been confronted with the ecological costs of rapid economic development. The difference, however, is the sheer magnitude of China’s environmental problems. Domestically, Chinese citizens live in six out of the ten most polluted cities in the world. Foul, atmospheric conditions have led to respiratory problems, while 70% of China’s rivers are so polluted that it has led to soaring rates of cancer among rural villagers who don’t have the resources to relocate or draw their water from alternative sources. Internationally, China’s neighbors are also suffering. In the fall of 2005, the CCP experienced a diplomatic crisis when a Harbin factory in exploded, releasing deadly amounts of Benzene into the air and rivers. The chemicals became trapped underneath the ice as temperatures dropped for winter, but when it begins to melt in the spring, the Benzene will slowly travel down the river into Russia.

While high-profile disasters like the Benzene spill receive international publicity, there are thousands of cases like this across China that go unreported. The CCP lacks both the manpower and the money to tackle its enormous environmental problems alone. It has increasingly begun to rely on non-governmental organizations to lead the effort in “greening” China, and have unwittingly facilitated the emergence of an active, popular social movement.

China’s environmental movement is considered the most successful non-governmentally led movement in recent Chinese history. The ambiguous relationship that exists between the authoritarian government and NGO actors represents political boundaries that are constantly being redefined as China continues to integrate itself into the world’s economy and community. This thesis seeks to elucidate how this space of uncertainty has given rise to a number of contentious voices and groups. Participants been increasingly willing to confront the CCP over projects that could adversely affect the environment: they have vocalized their concerns and shaped policy with an unprecedented amount of freedom in a country known for its repressive political climate.
Yet there is a dearth of scholarly literature regarding the growth of environmentalism in China. Often activists and environmental NGOs are dismissed as co-opted branches of the CCP. I believe this charge is not unrelated to the confusion over to how classify the movement: it holds the contradictory “in-between” status of non-governmental, while operating with the tacit approval of central authorities. However, dismissing the movement as co-opted glosses over the subtle ways in which activists are the driving force behind environmental education and rights discourse in China today.

The environmental movement has evolved separately on national and local levels. Both have distinct characteristics and tactics of their own. Using two cases of recent environmental protest, the Three Gorges project and the Dachuan fertilizer factory protest, this thesis seeks to explore the various strategies that environmental leaders are able to use on each level. My goal is to compare how contentious social movement participants are “permitted” to be as the protest moves further away from political centers of power. In the methodology section, I hypothesize that distance, in its various forms, is the most important variable in determining the behavior of social movement participants and their vulnerability to repression.

To address why China’s environmental movement has emerged and flourished under an authoritarian regime, it is first necessary to review the body of literature that will give readers the theoretical background needed to engage the stated objectives. In the next section I will review various schools of thought in social movement theory, specifically resource mobilization, frame theory, and political opportunity theory.

**Literature Review**

**Resource Mobilization Theory**

Resource Mobilization Theory remains among the most important paradigms for social movement analysis. John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977) are two of the leading scholars
of one school of resource mobilization theory which centers on the tactics aggrieved populations use to draw outside support for their cause. According to McCarthy and Zald, the crucial determinants of social movement growth are external funding and external involvement, i.e. the participation of members of the mainstream polity who are sympathetic to the movement’s demands. Since an aggrieved population, or what the authors term “potential beneficiaries,” have a resource pool consisting only of their own time and labor, they must rely on external support to bolster their own limited means in order to organize a social movement effective enough to challenge targeted institutions. Jenkins and Perrow (1977) agree with this assessment. Since widespread discontent is considered the status quo within deprived communities, Jenkins and Perrow argue that new, external actors must enter the political landscape to alter the population’s organizational capabilities. Otherwise, collective action would not be a viable option for populations with few resources and the high costs of commitment.

The successful conversion of mass and elite publics into sympathizers allows potential beneficiaries to tap into populations that have access to larger resource pools. Their support can confer legitimacy to potential beneficiaries’ claims, as well as provide money, facilities, and expertise. However, dependence on outside actors also makes communities extremely vulnerable to external opposition as well. The ability of authorities or “agents of social control” to frustrate a social movement organization’s (SMO) resource mobilization will “affect the readiness of bystanders, adherents, and constituents to alter their own status and commitment.” ¹This once again emphasizes the position that SMOs have little, if any, resources of their own to control the trajectory of their group beyond aligning themselves with elites who can act as a buffer against powerful opponents. However, the potential mobilization of elites holds important implications. It

suggests that important divisions exist between actors and within power structures that aggrieved populations can discern and exploit.

Kevin J. O’Brien (1996, 2003) is a proponent of the McCarthy-Zald school of thought. In his study of rural protest in China, he observes the tactics peasants use when local officials refuse to return unlawful fines and levies or to correct village level corruption. Peasants will reject the authority of village-level political actors by appealing to even more powerful political officials and Party members, and to the larger state apparatus as a whole. Rather than use contentious language designed to confront the bureaucratic, dictatorial methods of local governance, peasants depend on preexisting commitments the central government has made to clean up corruption and on the channels of the nascent legal system: it affords them as a means of demanding county-level enforcement of Beijing’s official promises. Aggrieved communities are not using methods that attack the entrenched system from outside, but rather influential elites’ help in navigating an official system in order to catch “disloyal” local officials contradicting anti-corruption edicts sent from the capital. By using the language of central government propaganda, the peasants’ actions “[affirm] and indeed rely upon other authorities and established values to pursue their ends.” (1996:31) O’Brien stresses the utter dependence rural peasants have on the dominant political system; quite often, rural residents only succeed by appealing to the elites or lifting government language. Whereas violent demonstrations demanding reform at the local level would be used by opponents as anti-government challenges and a justification for suppression, exploiting the dissenting factions within various government bureaus and the differing degrees of commitment these elites feel toward the lower classes, has enabled peasants to confront power on village or township levels. O’Brien refers to this phenomenon as “weapons of the weak”: this type of pressure brought to bear on powerful institutions is unique to the weaker, unorganized populations
in China. Given the all-encompassing nature of China’s political system, it is nearly impossible for forces to assail the bureaucracy successfully from outside. Indeed, resisters are becoming extraordinarily adept at finding advocates among elites within the system to investigate and legitimate their claims.

O’Brien chronicles a group of Hubei villagers’ attempts to dismiss several village cadres for not holding village-level elections, which was a violation of the Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees (2003). When their request from the township government was denied, the villagers increased their leverage by dividing into three units: two went to the township compound and the county civil affairs bureau. The third group, comprised of village Party members, traveled to the county organization department to demand the enforcement of the Organic Law. After a series of confrontations, and facing pressure from the county level above them, the township government conceded and began implementing village elections. Finding sympathetic allies on the county level to pressure their subordinates was the crucial component to the aggrieved populations’ success. Without their political clout as well as the legitimacy their support transferred to the peasants’ grievances, the township officials would have remained unresponsive.

While O’Brien generally aligns himself with McCarthy and Zald, he deviates from classical RMT theory in an important way. In McCarthy and Zald’s theory, sympathetic elites typically take the initiative in mobilization efforts. In the Hubei case, however, the peasants sought officials out. By shedding light on a deeply entrenched political philosophy, however, this ‘irregularity’ can be readily accounted for.

In Thomas Metzger’s analysis of China’s political system and civil society, he explains that China’s rigid top-down political structure and “assumptions about…the relationships between knowledge, morality, [and] political power,” will often inform how polity and non-polity members
will interact (1998: 9). Because there exists a strongly Confucian belief that through ‘expert knowledge’ comes ‘perfect morality,’ intellectuals/bureaucrats are looked to for moral guidance. This often means that local or grassroots opinion is dismissed as amateurish. Given these conceptions of polity members (educated/moral) and non-polity members (uneducated/immoral), and their unequal, vertical relationship, it is easy to understand why officials would refrain from offering assistance to a local group, but would more likely be responsive to petitions that requested their aid and influence to help villagers lead a successful campaign. Conversely, when local groups collectivize, they are sure to presume that their grievances will not be heard or legitimized unless someone within the bureaucracy can act as their channel.

Today, while the emphasis on the “enlightened elites’” moral infallibility, especially on lower levels, is received with increased skepticism, there is still considerable respect for figures high within the polity. More importantly, O’Brien’s point is that success would not be attainable to the aggrieved population without the aid from elites. Chinese citizens, especially the rural ones, understand that they must perform the work necessary to find an official willing to help them, as the likelihood of a polity member traveling to them is unlikely, however sympathetic they are to the their plight.

Thus, O’Brien still stays within the boundaries of classic, McCarthy and Zald resource mobilization theory. However, in doing do, O’Brien and this school of resource mobilization fail to answer a number of questions that critics (McAdam 1982; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Kuumba 2001) level at the center of their theory. By placing the contingency for a successful campaign on the elite intermediary, resource mobilization theory neglects the proven ability of aggrieved populations to contest centers of power using their own indigenous resource (Freeman, 1973), which include kinship and social networks, schools, and community leaders. Furthermore,
O’Brien does not adequately respond to how and why peasants are beginning to challenge the status quo, or what structural shifts have afforded opportunities to aggrieved populations.

Many resource mobilization theorists also fail to address the likelihood of co-optation. In their simultaneous quest for powerful protectors and attempts to avoid the repressive mechanisms of opponents, the goals of a movement are susceptible to compromise. Activists within the population will align themselves with the mainstream political body in an attempt to be more palatable to targeted donors and safer to the overarching political structure. As a result, their more radical ideas will be discarded in the process.

There have been some attempts by resource mobilization theories, however, to address the deficiencies in the McCarthy-Zald school of thought (Oberschall, 1973; Morris, 1984). Oberschall, for instance, has posited an alternative branch of RMT that acknowledges the essential position elites can occupy as a movement’s benefactor, but the impossibility of mobilization if preexisting grassroots activities are not present in a community. These organizations ensure a communications networks, partially mobilized resources, and indigenous leadership (1973: 125). Though external resources can certainly aid in the rapid mobilization of a community, their claims and activities are exponentially stronger when founded on traditional social relationships. This is especially true in a movement’s nascent stages. Even when external assistance has not been assured, an aggrieved population can sustain a certain level of activity by depending on the mobilizing effects of indigenous resources.

Similarly, Aldon Morris (1984) has written extensively on the role that black churches had during the civil rights movement as indigenous mobilizing structures and the cultural framers of the Montgomery bus boycott of the 1950s. Mobilization structures are the formal or informal networks through which people mobilize for potential actions. As the nexus for southern social
life, churches had the resources to facilitate bloc recruiting of movement participants, which is why, according to Morris, it was able to provide the African-American struggle with a “disproportionate amount of its leaders, meeting spaces, financial resources, and moral legitimization” (2000; 447). Morris characterizes the southern black churches as possessing a ‘transcendent’ belief system of egalitarianism that was “ingrained in the cultural fabric of the church.” (447) Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. proceeded to draw upon this philosophy of equality and brotherhood under God, and linked it to the nonviolent boycott tactic. He framed it in the context of good (the faithful congregation) confronting evil (segregation, the Jim Crow laws, etc). The boycott, in King’s words, was an “‘attack [directed] against forces of evil rather than against person who happen to be doing the evil.’” (449) This nonviolent strategy gave the insurgents the higher moral ground and a higher moral cause. It successfully resonated with the movement’s participants and epitomizes Morris’ belief that a productive marriage between tactic choice, pre-existing organizations, and cultural frames can prove eminently ‘tap-able,’ and defy McCarthy and Zald’s assertion that indigenous resources are simply not enough to wage a victorious campaign against the status quo.

In the same vein as Obserschall and Morris, recent entries by resource mobilization scholars (Pfaff and Yang, 2001) introduce the concept of cultural resources. Though Pfaff and Yang’s study of resistance in authoritarian regimes concentrates primarily on large-scale rituals, like commemorative events that can be used as mobilized stages for protest, the most relevant and fascinating aspect of their research is found in the conclusions drawn from their research of smaller rituals. As in most authoritarian countries, China’s government monopolizes the resources of collective action and propagates a single, collective identity among its people. However, for the Chinese, the arena of folk ritual constitutes a space where “all relations of power (and of
powerlessness) are up for grabs” (542). Small, personal rituals become increasingly important as people retreat into the ‘apolitical’ private sphere. In this arena, people honor symbols and objects that do not reinforce regime authority, but foster dissent by defining themselves separately from a pre-approved state sponsored identity (544). These “subcultures of opposition” are far more difficult for regimes to repress.

**Frame Alignment Theory**

Frame alignment allows the individual to be linked to a social movement organization’s goals so that a potential insurgent’s interests, values, and beliefs and an SMO’s tactics and ideology are complementary to each other. Frame alignment theorists (Snow et al., 1986; Benford, 1993; Skillington, 1997; Jasper, 1999) attribute movement participation to frame alignment resonance.

While the FA school of thought builds on resource mobilization theory by examining the way social movements seek to persuade elites to contribute resources for mobilization campaigns and neutralize opponents (Benford, 1993), frame alignment scholars problematize the way resource mobilization theorists approach grievances (Snow et al., 1986). RM tends to ignore questions concerning the interpretation of experiences and grievances by assuming that grievances are ubiquitous and constant. How these grievances affect communities and their mobilization are glossed over. As a result, inconsistencies in social movement outcomes, i.e. open political structures/high levels of elite support and failed movements, are not addressed properly.

Snow et al. identify four frame alignment ‘processes’ which include frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation. The latter three processes will be examined briefly, while frame bridging will remain this paper’s primary, and most pertinent, process. This is because the act of frame bridging, which involves linking SMO goals with “unmobilized sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters” (467) remains the biggest
obstacle for Chinese insurgents. On both national and local levels, it is necessary for activists to express their wants within a politically closed environment. Challenge or alienating authority figures outright tends to scare off these individuals who fear they might get caught in the political windfall. Therefore, the ways in which Chinese activists bridge their grievances often must appeal to universal sensibilities.

Frame amplification is meant to clarify how a social problem is pertinent to a constituent’s own life. It often relies on identifying and reinterpreting values or beliefs as shared goods that are under attack and need to be protected. Frame extension is necessary when the values that SMOs promote appear to have little relevance to the interests of potential constituents. An SMO “may have to extend the boundaries of its primary framework [to] encompass interests…that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents” (472). The point is to align the frame with a constituent’s desires. Lastly, when frames do not resonate with the lifestyles of the potential insurgents, ‘misframes’ need to be transformed. Frame transformation does not entail a radical change of goals or objectives, but rather how a situation is defined. This, for example could be a change in the degree of seriousness.

A perfect example of frame alignment and frame bridging is the *madres* of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. Originally atomized housewives individually searching for their missing children, many began to recognize each other during their incessant trips to prisons and government offices. They began to congregate regularly, and a common identity was forged by their grievances against government violence. Their nonviolent tactics not only reinforced their sense of higher purpose but also began to symbolize resistance to the government, particularly because the *madres’* opponents used violent tactics in an attempt to dissuade their marches. The women used baby
shawls as their insignia to represent a stark contrast to the violence of the Argentinean regime (Bouvard, 1993).

The *madres* position was strengthened by a number of human rights and peace organizations like Amnesty International and UNCHR that provided the women with legitimacy and a network of domestic and international contacts. What began with ‘unmobilized pools’ of individual grieving mothers ended with a full-fledged social movement organization that utilized events like the Argentine World Cup to gain press coverage. They framed the ‘Dirty War’ the government waged against political dissidents (‘communists’) as a violation of family. The goals they espoused were not overtly political, but rather pleas from grieving mothers who had lost their children to a dishonest regime. As Bouvard writes, by ‘socializing motherhood,’ the *madres* use an un-taintable image of purity to raise support for their struggle.

An important sub-group of Frame Alignment is identity politics. Theorists (Whittier, Taylor, Freeman) have written convincingly about radical-feminist leaders who establish a common identity among participants using shared experiences like discrimination to unite them. With the *madres* it was the shared experience of political brutality and the disappearance of their children that forged the base of their movement. The tactic of creating an “us versus them,” otherwise known as oppositional consciousness, strengthens the bonds between participants by distinguishing a common enemy, and the group’s existence as a fight for a higher purpose.\(^2\)

As the *madres* demonstrated, it is essential, particularly for this thesis, to acknowledge how frame-identity politics are constructed and can challenge- or be challenged by- regimes in authoritarian settings. Steven Pfaff (1996) writes further on this subject in his account of the 1989 protests in Eastern Germany. He concludes that “ordinarily East Germans” were able to

\[\text{For the sake of brevity, further elaboration on identity politics can be found in the article: Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, 1992. “Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization” in } \textit{Frontiers in Social Movement Theory,} \textit{ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol M. Mueller}\]
collectivize in a repressive regime using informal networks as a means to interpret grievances and construct a community separate from a repressive government. These groups are often the only spaces where an individual’s interests and needs, usually ignored or prohibited by the regime, can be defined (1996: 100). Because these informal organizations are “socially embedded within a community [they are] therefore often opaque to the authorities…a chasm exists between the official…and the offstage world of private life” (ibid).

Since the importance a resonating frame has in an insurgency’s success is rather intuitive, few social movement theorists can critique the frame alignment school of thought. Furthermore, though a minute number of theorists would suggest that a social movement’s success is determined only by the strength of a constructed common identity, concerns have been voiced and acknowledged (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Snow et al, 1986; Benford, 1993) that reliance on identity can prove detrimental to a movement. For instance, Pfaff narrates how the informal networks that banded together to challenge the East German government split apart into dissenting factions once they were given formal recognition. Although the loose coalitions of ‘ordinary citizens’ had organized behind a singular identity, that identity lacked a unified voice or leader (1996: 100) to be effective once it had garnered an official response.

Settlement on an effective frame can be an exhaustive struggle. In Benford’s study of the nuclear disarmament movement’s intra-SMO squabbles (1993), he writes about the detrimental effects that frame disputes had on collective action. He raises the question of whether frame strategies are a wise tactic, as varying ideologies prevent a unified insurgency. Frame disputes can leave a movement vulnerable to attacks from opponents and counter-movements.

Lastly, frames used to expand membership can possibly alienate the movement’s core base by diluting the SMO’s original objectives. By attempting to gain influence by appealing to the
mainstream, modifying one’s goals and tactics to make them more palatable for new supporters is inevitable. Along similar lines, grievances and tactics may be manipulated by self-interested elites in an attempt to gain control of possible outcomes (McCarthy and Zald, 1997).

Political Opportunity Theory
Political Opportunity Theory, like RMT, holds a number of variables within protesting communities constant. Both claim that levels of discontent are sustained and unchanging. Therefore, although strain and relative deprivation are important, they have very little effect on mobilization (Kitschelt, 1986). Additionally, in some versions of political opportunity theory, POT and resource mobilization theorists believe that communities have access to only low-level pools of resources (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977), and without external support they are unable to effect change. However, instead of focusing solely on the necessity of mainstream elites’ division and sympathy, opportunity theorists have turned to shifts within the larger political apparatus to explain the emergence and success of social movements. Political opportunity structures have the ability to either constrain or facilitate protest movements, depending on “specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization.” (Kitschelt, 1986: 58)

Shifts in political opportunities not only develop after internal changes and political turnovers, but also can arise from changing international structures and relations (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001). McAdam (1982) in particular attributes part of the civil rights movement’s success on the political apparatus’ self-conscious effort to distinguish itself from the Soviet Union. McAdam cites a brief written by the attorney general in connection to public school desegregation: “It is in the context of the present world struggle…the problem of racial discrimination must be viewed…[it] furnishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills.” (1982: 83) As this memo
demonstrates, pressure from international political tensions transformed domestic political opportunities from above. When regimes, like the US during the Cold War-era and modern China, are attempting to gain international legitimacy, sensitivity to global paradigm shifts becomes extraordinarily important. Social movement actors must capitalize on these trends if they wish to effect positive change for themselves.

The *perception* of these trends can mean the success or death of a movement, and many political opportunity theorists (Kurzman, 1996; Tarrow, 1994; Tilly, 1978) have highlighted this aspect of the framework. Perceiving how the changes in international relations can raise or lower domestic opportunities and threats heavily influences what tactics the movement will use. Kitschelt goes so far as to write that a movement’s mobilization strategies “can be explained by the general characteristics of domestic political opportunity structure.” (84) He maps out four anti-nuclear movements in the US, Germany, France, and Sweden hypothesis that countries with open political input structures and strong political output structures are receptive (open to input) to the demands of social movements and will often implement (strong output) policy to accommodate a community’s grievances. A closed, weak political system is the opposite (68). With each variation, movement strategies also change.

Thus far three tenets of political opportunity theory have been identified: 1) the inability of the aggrieved population to enact change without structural shift; 2) the capacity for international pressure to open domestic spaces for activists’ agitation; and 3) the crucial ability for insurgents to recognize the opportunity and the feasibility of protest in the political landscape.

Jenkins and Perrow test the political opportunity framework in their analysis of the migrant farmworkers’ movement in two periods of US history. The first, unsuccessful, attempt by the National Farm Labor Union to secure union contracts was during a period between 1946-1952.
The authors cite a number of reasons for the NFLU’s failure to capture support from the
government or public, which coincides with the dimensions of the political opportunity paradigm
listed above. Foremost was the oversupply of farm labor (240), which depreciated wages and
made strikes costly: there would always be another laborer willing to cross the picket lines and
few farm workers were willing to risk losing their jobs. The international climate also frustrated
the NFLU’s efforts to mobilize. 1946-1952 was the height of the red scare. Any sympathy the
farm workers accrued was “easily dissipated by ‘red scare’ charges by growers and their political
allies” (275). Clearly, the political opportunity structure was not conducive to farm labor rights,
and it is evident from Jenkin and Perrow’s statistics that workers were cognizant of this fact.
Activity among farm workers was very low and until 1964, farm worker insurgency dropped to
11% of all pro-worker activity.

The second, successful, attempt by the labor movement to agitate for change came between
1965-1972. The activists managed to sustain the movement with a recorded total of 143 actions
conducted by farm worker insurgents. Over one hundred contracts were signed, unions were
flourishing, and wages were raised significantly. The key, according to the authors, was the
“turnabout in the political environment [originating] in economic trends and political
realignments” independent from activist action (281). Conflicts within the political elite pushed
the government from steadfastly anti-labor to a ‘balanced’ neutral position on farm worker rights.
Liberal pressure groups formed within the spaces elite divisions left, and elections eroded the
power-base of conservative rural interests. Furthermore, the grassroots movement, which now
revolved around the United Farm Workers (UFW) was given a push by Cesar Chavez, who lent
his expertise and ties to civil rights groups, liberal churches and foundations to secure funding and
support (279). However, as valuable an elite ally like Chavez was to the movement, it was the
political environment, which had become extremely favorable to protest movements, that facilitated positive change. As Perrow and Jenkin conclude, the success of the farm worker movement in the late 1960s had less to do with the internal changes it experienced, but rather by the new political climate it confronted.

Political Opportunity Theory is not without its critics, the most coherent of the opposition being Marshall Ganz (2000). Ganz revisits the farm worker movement and challenges the political opportunity theorists: the “difference in the outcomes…can be explained by differences in their strategy.” (283, emphasis mine) Ganz attributes the success of the second farm worker insurgency to internal alterations, a process of learning and improving on failed techniques. A great deal of emphasis is placed on a leader’s “strategic capacity.” (Ganz 2000; McAdam 1982) Even if an environment generates opportunities for insurgents, an organization’s success rests on its ability to adopt a greater strategic capacity, regardless of political climate. A leader’s creativity, connections, and charisma can even make up for a movement’s small resource pool.

To support his argument, Ganz compares the leadership experience and strategies of the unsuccessful Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) and the victorious UFW. The AWOC’s Norman Smith failed to connect with the growing cohort of Mexican immigrants and clung to the dying breed of conservative white “dust bowlers,” as a way to capture the attention of growers and elites. Resources flowed only from top-down and only from the AFL-CIO, which stifled diverse opinions. In contrast the UFW’s leader, Cezar Chavez drew on resources from multiple sources, including participants; because a single person wasn’t in sole control of the UFW, diverse voices could contribute to decision-making. Regular meetings and strategy sessions were held and the UFW used a number of tactics which included the famous grape boycott of the 1960s, as well as framing strategies that drew on the civil rights movement to garner urban
supporters. Chavez’s creativity and charisma, according to Ganz, changed the landscape of rural protest and also changed the way the government had to respond to labor demands.

A leader’s strategy is often difficult to discern which is why frameworks like resource mobilization and political opportunity frequently reduce movement outcomes to “‘objective’ configurations of resources and opportunities.” (285) Ganz accuses both schools of ignoring complex resource such as strategic leadership and human agency in favor of simplistic causal relationships. By doing this, these theorists fail to understand the nuances of a movement’s victory. Leaders like Cesar Chavez make their decisions based on a number of resources at their disposal- for instance, strong and weak network ties, access to diverse repertoires of collective action, and claims on different organizations. Equally important is the way they develop a movement, how they approach leadership accountability and transparency. (284) The ties and contributions leaders garner both within and out of the support base raises participant and supporter commitment. Instead of being a puppet of structural changes, leaders have a much more interactive relationship with power, and can influence it in turn.

**POLITICAL PROCESS THEORY**

One variant of the political opportunity framework is the political process theory. It places less emphasis on the importance of domestic structural changes while paying most of its attention to the ‘essential’ role of individual actors.

The political process model is based on the assumption that the established polity is abidingly conservative. Therefore, any action taken by polity members will resist changes that potentially threaten their supremacy within the established political mainstream (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978). This emphasizes two important points: that successful insurgency must take place outside elite involvement lest aggrieved populations want to risk likely co-optation. Secondly, if successful
insurgents avoid elite participation and still manage to collectivize, then that proves social movements are able to generate and sustain organized mass action through indigenous resources. One should not assume, however, that social movements are ‘autonomous forces’ driven only by aggrieved populations and unhindered by environmental factors. Rather, social movements emerge out of the ‘favorable interplay’ between aggrieved populations and the larger sociopolitical environment (McAdam 1982). The result of these interactions can be synthesized into political process’ basic components.

Doug McAdam’s groundbreaking work on the civil rights movement (1982) connects two essential components of the political process theory. First is the importance of indigenous resources in creating favorable opportunities for insurgents within the polity. The second is perceiving these favorable opportunities and acting upon them. McAdam calls this cognitive liberation. It is a process referred to earlier by Tilly who called it the analysis of threat/opportunity (1978: 133), but more fully elucidated by McAdam. Cognitive liberation entails correctly interpreting a complex set of cues that signal a favorable shift in political opportunities and vulnerability of the status quo. The mainstream system loses its legitimacy to populations that fully see themselves now as “wronged” by power centers. Established, interpersonal networks remain incredibly pertinent, as cognitive liberation, as well as the experience that led up to this epiphany, is rapidly disseminated through these channels (48-51).

To draw his theory together, McAdam uses the example of the black exodus to the North that began with the slow collapse of the cotton market from 1910-1960. The migration was the end-point of an unmistakable chain of events. It started with the erosion of the “elaborate set of oppressive controls needed to insure the system’s labor requirement” and the simultaneous pull of employment opportunities in the industrial North (77). Black resettlement in northern cities was
important in two distinctive ways: first, the community was geographically closer together, so networks and the dissemination of ideas was stronger, faster, and more cohesive. Second, voting coercion was not as prevalent as it was in the South. McAdam outlines a broad shift in both social and economic circumstances that began to shape the polity and eventually fostered the changes in the black community’s collective perception of the prospects of insurgency.

The black community’s heightened electoral power in key states led to an increasingly favorable response towards the black community’s needs by the government. The polity’s gestures - albeit symbolic at times-gave them a growing sense of political efficacy, and according to McAdam “was responsible for nothing less than a cognitive revolution within the black population” (108) In other words, by taking their cues from the change in the political environment- government’s growing responsiveness to the aggrieved community- the black population was able to realize the electoral power they represented. As a result, they used this weapon to demand more remedial action on their behalf. This is the second half of McAdam’s theory where, after socioeconomic processes has left the polity vulnerable to change, the insurgency realizes their growing influence n the current alignment of political bodies.

In recent years, political process theory has maintained a somewhat hegemonic grip on social movement analysis (Goodwin, Jasper, and Jaswin, 1999). However, there seems to be a handful of theorists who have recently voiced critiques of the political process theory (O’Brien 1996, 2003; Goodwin, Jasper, and Jaswin 1999), for its imprecision. While political process theorists claim that PPT is universally applicable because of its fluidity, critics respond that this strength is only the result of ‘murky definitions’, which should not be mistaken for adaptability. For instance, Goodwin, Jasper, and Jaswin critique PPT’s bias for metaphors of structure- not actual structures-which leaves the political process school unable to pinpoint their theory’s basic
principles. Their definition of ‘mobilizing structures’ is so overly broad, that it serves to trivialize the concept (29). Theorists extend ‘mobilizing structures’ to literally encompass all corners of everyday life. It becomes impossible to posit a concrete definition when, in fact, the theory lists any formal or informal interaction a person has in their daily life, as possible contributors to mobilization. With this vast array of causal mechanisms at a scholar’s disposal, it would be incredible if he could fail to uncover two or three mobilizing structures at the root of a social movement (44). It also begs specificity from political process theorists- what kind of mobilizing structures are necessary for movement recruitment, which ones are most effective, and what exactly is ‘structural’ about them? (ibid)

Among the most compelling criticisms of the political process model is aimed at the vast amount it neglects. Movements that do not target the state as its primary opponent are not represented effectively by PP theorists. O’Brien’s work in rural China proves that simplifying contention and resistance in terms of two parties, as political process theorists often do, can be misleading. It can “obscure how people actually go about warding off appropriation and political control” (1996: 31) For Chinese peasants, ‘warding off political control’ often entails involving the state as a potential actor and ally. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly often overlook this important aspect of social movement activity, as well as other cultural movements that do not target the state, while inflating only combative forms of opposition between excluded claim makers and a government. Goodwin, Jasper, and Jaswin ask rhetorically: “must the state be target, audience, and ultimately judge for a movement’s demands?” (1999: 35)

**Political Opportunities in Authoritarian Regimes**
The conditions under which a regime becomes vulnerable to political change have been examined and analyzed thoroughly by the wide range of political opportunity scholars reviewed above. However, the variables that have been elucidated within the social movement frameworks, including the existence of allies, the stability of regimes, divisions among elites, and the degree of openness and effectiveness of the polity have “been used almost exclusively in Western democracies…[and] sometimes obscure…the political processes associated with…authoritarian regimes” (Noonan, 1995; 84). Thus, attention must be refocused to include not only the power of indigenous resources, which McAdam clearly articulated, but also how indigenous populations make use of their resources within an environment that is seemingly closed to protest and possesses a sustained capacity-and propensity- to crush popular mobilization.

Authors (Chen and Deng, 1995; Friedman, 1998; Zhao, 2000; Vladisavljevic, 2002) have written extensively on political opportunity in authoritarian environments. Despite being faced with regimes unfriendly to challenger groups, scholars often note the ‘unexpected’ or ‘paradoxical’ emergence of powerful insurgencies. Noonan also notes this puzzling phenomenon and claims that “even when structural conditions do not seem otherwise ripe,” cultural-frames can be created to make space for dissent (83, emphasis mine). By using a ‘maternal collective action frame’ to protest against the government-sponsored disappearances of Chilean males, Chilean women, among the weakest, most subservient population under Pinochet’s military regime, claimed to be following the government’s directive to hold the needs of the family as center of their lives (95). Their purported weakness and inferiority actually opened opportunities for them because the government was preoccupied in crushing what it assumed was the more threatening insurgents, male operated organizations. In other words, at different points, political opportunities will exist for specific populations.
In Noonan’s case study, she examines the protests that began on May 11, 1983. The demonstrations were organized in part by the Copper Workers Union and joined by Chileans of every class. The response from the government came swiftly after the first day of protest. The Chilean military regime began a series of highly repressive measures including arrests and curfews. By the third day, “it was clear that neither the Copper Workers Union nor any other organized body of workers could take a leading roles in the demonstration” (101). Strikes were ineffective and 1800 workers were fired after the second day of protest; in a climate of high unemployment, the risks of participation were simply too high. The “containment” of traditionally liberal bodies left opportunities for other aggrieved groups to continue protesting, which the women’s human rights, feminists, and survival coalitions did. They called for democracy by linking it to familial survival (101-103).

In this case, Pinochet’s military regime was intensely preoccupied with repressing organized challengers, while a Chilean woman’s power “resides in ‘informal,’ electoral arenas. When the state’s form changed,” women were able to mobilize under the pretext of the ‘motherhood frame’ and manipulate the dominant cultural rhetoric to “justify their nontraditional behavior” (104). One can draw strong similarities between Noonan’s characterization of the Chilean movement and RM theorist Kevin J. O’Brien’s description of the “weapons of the weak.” Under the guise of strengthening state or society, Chinese protestors and the Chilean women were able to make demands upon the polity.

However, unlike O’Brien or mainstream political opportunity scholars, Noonan relies on a gender conscious political opportunity model. Previous political opportunity models cannot explain the Chilean social movement. Scholars such as Goldstone and Tilly (2001), offer typical hypotheses that do not explore expanding opportunities for specific populations. Their equations
and scenarios resonate only with large-scale, formalized challenges. Indeed, if the Chilean protests ended after Pinochet cracked down on the unions, Goldstone and Tilly’s model would not be challenged. However, despite Pinochet’s successful, repressive measures and high capacity for political violence, Chilean women were consistently able to challenge the regime.

There has been a dearth of literature regarding cultural opportunities, the “availability of a resonate frame,” to certain members of an aggrieved population (105). A resonate frame allows these groups to access an otherwise closed polity. According to Noonan, the political opportunity school has remained overwhelmingly gender-blind. She writes: “until we have culturally sensitive, gendered analyses of state and political processes, nontraditional sources of power will be overlooked” (ibid).

Noonan describes a type of protest that is difficult to locate in China. While Latin America and more generally, the West, has had a vibrant history of feminist collectivization and agitation for democracy or political change, China has traditionally been constrained by its political and social philosophies. In addition to the prejudice towards grassroots activity that I described above, Chinese citizens have retained a Confucian suspicion for non-kin. Noonan illustrated the transformation among the Chilean women’s community in the mid-1980s and the groups that formed with the “central priority” of combating the dictatorship (103). In China, an emphasis on blood-ties makes collectivization difficult; most of the environmental protests manifesting on the rural, grassroots level are by individual villages where the majority of men are related to each other.

The centrality of kin must be remembered; clan and family commitment is the primary teaching of Confucius. Connections (guanxi) should not be sought outside the family, with the

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exception of loyalty to the emperor and very carefully chosen friends. This is because once connections are made, people essentially became part of one’s clan. Family is an entity one can unconditionally trust because of shared blood. This conception of *guan xi* has led to a very socially isolated society, with attention focused inward to sustain kin relationships rather than outside to form potentially dangerous *guan xi*. The ability to collectivize for a “greater good” has therefore been retarded in important ways because many do not see the direct ‘good’ that their kin will receive.

Even during the June 4th Tiananmen protests, which some scholars (He, 1998) regard as an exception to the cultural rule, is refuted by Zhao (2000), who writes that students exclusively aligned themselves by class and major- de facto “clans.” They took an elitist attitude by barring workers and peasants from their activities (Zhao, 2000). Additionally, the political memory stemming from the massacre as well as other violent, government-sponsored upheavals in China’s 20th century history, has only served to confirm, for many, the dire, Confucian predictions of risk and punishment that accompanies allying oneself with ‘strangers.’

**METHODOLOGY**
My objective is to analyze China’s environmental movement on both the national and local level. Using Pfaff and Yang, and Noonan’s theories of ‘space,’ I theorize that *distance* is the crucial variable that determines social movement emergence and behavior. For the purposes of this thesis, *distance* has a three-fold definition. The first aspect is *physical distance* from centers of political power, namely Beijing. The second aspect is *political distance*. This refers to the level of the political hierarchy that a social movement or government official operates on compared to the highest state levels that the most powerful polity members operate on. For instance, a provincial-level official works much closer in conjunction to state-level bodies than a township-level official.
Lastly is \textit{psychological distance}, which is largely determined by the first two parts of my definition. Psychological distance allows a Chinese official or citizen to deviate from official Party mandates by shielding them, through bureaucracy (political distance) and remoteness (physical distance) from the center’s scrutiny. Understanding the psychology of protest movement participants is essential when analyzing the way they frame their grievances.

To explicate these assumptions further, one must look back to the vertical nature of the Chinese political system reviewed earlier: the central government wields an inordinate amount of power over polity and non-polity actors alike. However, Beijing’s relationships are largely determined by the location and tier at which its operatives function. Therefore, to generalize, a provincial level official from Shanghai is much more likely to interact with Beijing than a village-level Party member from Heilongjiang province. This also means that while the official from Shanghai exercises far more influence within the Party, he also has far less room for dissent. The village-level cadre has more leeway to stray from the Party line, but less of a voice within the center. To conclude, the power that the two officials have or do not have is determined by their physical and political \textit{distance} from the center in the political hierarchy. Psychologically, their views about their power, and therefore about the Party’s edicts, are also determined by the distance from Beijing’s surveillance.

Distance has clearly affected how national and local environmental movements interact with officials. Nationally, the movement can easily respond to international political events and opportunities. Because of the movement’s closeness to the central government, layers of bureaucracy do not shield or distort information to or from NGOs the way it does on the grassroots level. Therefore, the national environmental movement maintains a relationship with the center that is relatively unobstructed. Furthermore, although CCP surveillance remains heavy-handed, the
advantage of such transparency is that Chinese NGOs’ activities can also be monitored-and supported-by international NGOs. International bodies can act to check the CCP’s more authoritarian impulses. However, nationally, environmental NGOs walk a very tenuous line between the importance of their state-designated tasks and their desire to venture into shakier political waters. For example, a number of pro-democracy groups have branched out of environmental NGOs, claiming that environmental protection is impossible without democracy. The goals of these “off-shoots,” as well as their proximity to the national government both physically (most of these movements traditionally begin in larger cities) and politically (a goal that challenges the CCP itself), leaves activists very little room to evade state repression.

I propose a combination of frameworks that can be used to explain how and why the Chinese environmental movement has sustained itself within an authoritarian political setting on the national level. I combine aspects of Doug McAdam’s political opportunity theory that cites international pressure as a key determinant in the structure of domestic political opportunity. China has increased its participation in global environmental conferences since the early 1990s; it created China’s first government department that specifically monitors environmental issues in 1998; lastly, China signed onto Kyoto in 2002. Activists have clearly taken their cues from the successful pressure the international community has applied to China to address its environmental problems; the number of green NGOs has multiplied in the past years.

I also include elements of Jenkins and Perrow’s resource mobilization theory in my framework. Insurgents have consistently turned to powerful members of the political elite to add credibility and legality to their activists. By taking advantage of the divisions that pressure from international bodies have created among the polity, the national environmental movement has been able to use the divisions among them to find powerful allies to support their “green” agenda.
National Level Framework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Economic → International Pressure → + Cognitive → Social</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development</td>
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CCP surveillance ultimately benefits the national environmental NGOs, because it is able to be exponentially more responsive when national NGOs uncover cases of illegal logging or dangerous waste disposal practices. In many cases, national NGOs have acted as the CCP’s eyes and ears: they make sure environmental laws are being followed. However, an NGO’s status as a ‘legal’ NGO plus essential support from the polity is often contingent on the NGOs’ cooperation with officials. Furthermore, recent laws have tightened restrictions on non-governmental organizations, hindering the growth of NGOs overall. Critics like Saich (2000) claim that Chinese NGOs often only become an augmentation of state power. Yet, the ways in which environmental leaders are pursuing their goals can, in the future, enhance accountability on higher levels of the hierarchy and increased political awareness and civic activism among the people.

The international community’s influence over the polity’s environmental practices has far less of an impact on local levels. Industrial output remains more important than environmental protection. Environmental laws are willfully ignored by local elites as they compete to keep up with urban growth. The central government’s preoccupation with the larger cities and national NGOs has allowed lower-level officials to easily evade regime orders and keep polluting factories running. Their actions are unsurprising given the pressure local officials feel from their superiors to offer proof of economic growth. Similarly, the prestige of a lower-level official is wrapped up in his economic successes. These factors have contributed to a rather closed political opportunity
structure for aggrieved villagers, and the prospects for a successful insurgency are decidedly low, especially when the bureaucracy is able to distort information coming from protestors. Often lower-level officials will justify repression, charging that villagers were acting in ways that threaten the stability of the CCP.

Though it is difficult for villagers to effect positive, environmental change, the distance from Beijing has allowed them to be far more vocal when voicing their grievances than their national counterparts. The dual pressure from above to clean up the environment and the more disruptive measures local villagers have taken, has made the environment an increasingly divisive issue among the lower half of the hierarchy (county, township, and rural cadres). Furthermore, Beijing’s drive to become a nation ‘ruled by law’ has encouraged villagers to take legal steps against corrupt, polluting officials. Combined with the rising sense of local injustice over the corrupt practices of their officials, there has been a jump in the number of legal cases concerning land use and the environment.

It is evident that villagers have begun taking advantage of China’s nascent legal system to challenge these practices, often with bureaucratic sympathy. This falls under McAdam’s theory of cognitive liberation, wherein citizens start to interpret the political opportunity structure as favorable for dissent and political centers (in this case, local bureaucracy) begin to lose legitimacy among the people. Also incredibly important to the grassroots environmental movement is Pfaff and Yang’s school of resource mobilization theory. Cultural resources, like local temples, have created a space and psychological distance from local authority that is used to articulate and heighten villagers’ grievances. Because most of the villagers are related along the male line, cultural resources combined with the extensive web of networks, have created an alternative identity expressed in the way villagers have framed their grievances.
Local Level Framework:

Rapid Economic Development → National Policies + Distance → Cognitive Liberation → Social Movement (high)

Though Beijing supports the grassroots demands for clean water and air, local economic interests and corruption makes it difficult for villagers to see concrete change and it is challenging for the national government to penetrate below the township level. The distance from the central government and lack of surveillance on the local level have therefore harmed the grassroots’ demands, but allowed for more disruptive tactics.

I will primarily use qualitative measurements to analyze the emergence of environmental agitation in China. Speeches and articles by members of the CCP and Party scientists and scholars will be used to indicate divisions within the central government as well as represent changes in political opportunity structure. Additionally, newspaper and journal articles, interviews, and memoirs will be used. These will track changes in national opportunities, policy initiatives, and the perception of these changes among national and local activists. Statistical data analyzing Provincial-level GDP, and foreign and domestic investment by locality will also be employed in my second case study to give readers an example of the huge inequalities that exist between large, coastal cities and the rural, inland provinces. These numbers will also be used as an explanation for widespread grievances among the peasantry.

To test this altered framework, I will use one national case and one rural protest movement. Nationally, I will examine the Three Gorges Dam protest. Jun Jing’s prototypical study of environmental protest in rural Dachuan will serve as my local case. As an indicator of my main variable, distance, I will also pay particular attention to the type of response these protest movements have garnered from the Chinese government. I believe that both these cases effectively
demonstrate the ways that aggrieved populations have adapted their tactics and strategies in a closed political structure. For national activists, this has meant cultivating close links to the polity in an attempt to avoid repression; for local protestors, they have relied on indigenous resources to sustain high-levels of activity.

The difficult in obtaining first-hand sources must be mentioned. Much of the information pertaining to the Three Gorges Dam is classified not only by the Chinese Communist Party, but by Western governments as well. Only a handful of think tanks, like Canada’s Probe International, have been able to access these documents under the Freedom of Information Act. Furthermore, they have not been able to publish or release government-sponsored studies, like the Canadian Feasibility Study, under threat of legal action. Therefore, it has been necessary for me to rely on various NGOs and think tanks’ interpretation of various documents, officials’ interviews, government minutes, and closed meetings.

This analysis of Chinese social movements will provide a new perspective as to how these social movements emerged and why they have continued to exist under an authoritarian regime with traditionally strict control over political association. It is an investigation that strikes at the paradoxical core of the modern Chinese state. Despite the purported omnipresent specter of the Chinese government, “free” spaces are -at safe distances- emerging for certain issues to be vigorously debated and for contentious politics to flourish.

A Historical Overview: Environmentalism in China 1950-2006

This section aims to delineate the course of China’s environmental policy and more importantly, the dominant attitudes towards the environment within the larger political landscape. The goal of this overview is to give readers insight into the costly environmental degradation that has occurred
alongside massive human losses and political repression from the latter half of the twentieth century until present, and how repression and environmental degradation are not mutually exclusive phenomena in China. It is essential to understand the grip the communist regime has had over its people. The political campaigns and upheavals that Mao and post-Mao regimes unleashed upon the Chinese citizenry have done much to inform the peoples’ political behavior today, and we will see patterns emerge in the techniques they have used to express dissent. I will focus on five different periods between 1950 and 2006. This includes the government-sponsored mass campaigns, The Great Leap Forward, and The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution; grassroots dissent and insurgency including the Democracy Wall Movement and the pro-Democracy Movement; and finally, the domestic uncertainty that has accompanied China’s economic ascent, post-Tiananmen Square Incident.

**The Great Leap Forward 1958-1962**

The atmosphere following the Anti-Rightist Campaign\(^4\) of 1957 was one of apprehension and repression. Mao had ruthlessly silenced the freedom to critique and engage the communist regime; he turned more than half a million intellectuals and students into political pariahs, ending their education and careers by sending them down to the countryside to do hard labor. In this environment of fear, Mao was able to pursue his plans for The Great Leap Forward virtually unopposed.

Mao was convinced that China could overcome the conventional steps of development by harnessing the Chinese peoples’ patriotism, large population, and enthusiasm. Despite China’s lack of

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\(^4\) The Anti-Rightist Campaign was a crackdown on intellectuals who were initially invited to offer their critiques of the regime (in the 100 Flowers Campaign). The depth and scope of their criticism shocked and worried Mao, who then repressed the campaign and punished the participants. Very early on, the CCP proved itself unable to create an environment conducive to critical discussion. See Marc Blecher *China Against the Tides, 2nd Edition*. London; Washington: Pinter, 1997.
infrastructure and industry, his goal was to overtake Great Britain in steel production within fifteen years, raise agricultural yields, and achieve socialist transformation in the countryside. This ambitious timetable was reduced even further until Mao declared that China’s goals could be realized within the highly unrealistic span of three years. He found a ready response from peasants who yearned for better lives after years of civil strife and war had reduced them to extreme poverty, and from local leaders who were eager for capital investment in their regions.

Though lower-level polity members and the Chinese citizenry were mesmerized by both Mao’s charisma and the hope of attaining super-power status, moderates like Zhou Enlai cautioned against the reckless speed of the Great Leap Forward. However, he was quickly intimidated by Mao’s accusations of right-leaning sympathy and was forced to perform public self-criticisms and acknowledge his “disgrace” along with other Party members. Mao relied on a style of leadership, *Yundong*, which encouraged mass collective action with a heavy emphasis on the ‘correct’ ideology. With this style of campaign, stability was a temporary condition; Mao brought the people, and the government, in line with his plans by stifling dissent and pitting people against each other.

In the summer of 1958, Mao’s grain goal was realized. Grain output skyrocketed: localities sought to outdo each other and curry Mao’s favor. The fields, however, were completely overburdened by the close planting and deep plowing that was used to force yields higher than the land could handle. The deep desire for China’s improvement and fear of punishment drove agricultural scholars, experts, and even local farmers to bury their skepticism and employ Mao’s dubious ‘red’ farming techniques. Doctored photos of fields of grain so thick that children were able to sit atop them were circulated and competition for highest grain outputs increased. Local leaders pushed their communes more harshly. Meanwhile, grain choked and failed to grow under the new farming conditions as officials submitted absurdly high, false figures. Afterwards, many of the fields
were unable to yield anything at all for years because of the high levels of hydrogen sulfate produced by the rotting grain.\(^5\)

In September of 1958 the population was ordered to redirect its energies to smelting iron and steel: millions of Chinese peasants constructed primitive “backyard furnaces” to meet Mao’s impossibly high goals. That autumn, 10,700,00 tons of worthless “steel,” comprised primarily of essential household items and farming tools, had been melted down. The harvest had been completely neglected.\(^6\) This portion of The Great Leap Forward also represents the first of what is known as the Great Three Cuts. At least 10% of China’s forests were cut down within the first months of the campaign to fuel the makeshift furnaces; vast forests were decimated to clear the land for more grain planting. However, the Leap’s most direct, military assault on nature was directed at sparrows, which were accused of eating the grain. Mao directed the people to stand near trees or on rooftops during the Leap; the citizenry, schoolchildren in particular, would devote their days to overturning nests and banging pots, startling the birds so they had no place to rest. Millions of sparrows died from exhaustion during the campaign.\(^7\) Furthermore, with the sharp drop in sparrow population, insects began attacking and spoiling the grain.

Grain reserves were quickly exhausted and political leaders simultaneously encouraged peasants to gorge themselves in the communes while redirecting their efforts from agriculture to steel-smelting.\(^8\) These problems were only exacerbated when drought ruined the harvest during the Leap’s second summer. Starvation had begun in many parts of the countryside but even as the famine worsened, no one stepped forward to challenge Mao; political leaders were too frightened to protest,

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\(^7\) Judith Shapiro
\(^8\) *ibid.*
especially after watching the brutal purge and punishment of Peng Dehau, who had protested the excesses of the Leap. Local Party members continued to fake high output numbers while desperately seizing grain from their people to prove how loyal they were to Mao’s cause.

Becker reports on the ‘holocaust’ that took place in Henan province between 1958-1961 when local leaders declared war on its peasantry for hiding grain. ‘Struggle sessions’ took place all over the province with peasants and ‘rightist’ leaders being beaten and tortured for supposedly hiding grain. Peasants were forbidden to leave their villages to beg even as cadres smashed their cooking pots so they couldn’t boil grass or bark for food. All communication with the outside world was barred so peasants could not appeal to relatives for aid. The “most extraordinary aspect of these events is that throughout the famine, the state granaries in the prefecture were full of grain…sufficient to keep everyone alive.” Leaders were under such pressure to produce positive results and numbers for their superiors (who themselves were under immense pressure from their superiors), because they feared that admitting decreasing grain output would lead to political retaliation. They left grain rotting in storage while their people starved to death and turned to cannibalism. “Liang Dezhen, the First Secretary of Huang Chuan country, turned back relief grain because he suspected that it was a ruse to trap him into making a political mistake.”

Ultimately, a reported 8 million people in Henan Province died during the Great Leap Forward and approximately 30 million people throughout China died, in the most extensive man-made famine in human history.

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9 Jasper Becker, pg. 118
10 Ibid. pg. 120
11 Shapiro
The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 1966-1976

While The Great Leap’s policies had never been openly repudiated, Mao’s official status in the central government was downgraded and between 1962-1966, he stepped away from political life. Despite Mao’s removal from the helm of Party politics, he still “harbored a number of concerns and obsessions which led to the Cultural Revolution.”¹² First was the matter of his personal power and legacy. Moderates like Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Chen Yun had forced him to halt the Leap against his will; he wanted to reduce their influence and raise his own once again. Second, Mao genuinely believed that there was a slackening in revolutionary devotion. Despite the Great Leap’s disastrous outcome, he continued to assert that a stable bureaucracy could not bring about positive political and social transformation the way that collective mass action under his guidance could. In 1966 he publicly announced that too many Party bureaucrats were taking the ‘capitalist road,’ and had let the revolution towards socialism lose momentum. He proposed a Great Cultural revolution that would ‘purify’ and rejuvenate the Party.

Mao found a ready response in China’s youth. His political and economic blunders aside, he retained a fanatical following; his cult status quickly mobilized a large base of high school and college students against elitism and inequality.¹³ China’s youth was drawn to Mao’s revolutionary plans for a number of reasons. Aside from the new sense of independence and prestige that Mao granted them, many wished to overcome their class backgrounds through displays of Maoist devotion and revolutionary zeal. Educational opportunities in the 1960s were determined by class background and political behavior, and less by academic credentials. Children of good, ‘red’ backgrounds were

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peasants, workers, and CCP cadres. Children of ‘black’ class backgrounds were intellectuals and capitalists. Class became a hereditary attribute: one’s parents’ class determined the educational opportunities their children received. These were among many of the “collective resentments [that] formed the emotional fuel for the Red Guard movement.”

Violence and paranoia were the most defining characteristics of the movement as well as tremendous psychological oppression. The Cultural Revolution used language as a tool for violence. During this time period, the power of labels became particularly important. Being given the ‘wrong’ label like ‘capitalist-roader’ or ‘white’ instead of ‘red,’ lead to persecution, suicide, or murder. Rana Mitter writes “if a meaning is infinitely flexible and reversible, then its only determinant is whether the person using it is powerful or not,” and during the Cultural Revolution’s uncertain times, power itself was also transformed under Mao in an attempt to ‘smash’ all that was traditional and ‘feudal’ about Chinese society. Students and citizens were encouraged to ‘struggle’ against their professors and persecute government leaders. Top officials including State President, Liu Shaoqi and Politburo member, Deng Xiaoping, were purged from the Party and subject to humiliating and violent treatment during struggle sessions. Deng was sent to do hard labor while Liu died under house arrest without proper medical care. At Peking University alone, one hundred faculty and staff members’ homes were searched for ‘bourgeoisie’ contraband. Books and papers were seized and used as ‘evidence’ of their ‘disloyalty’ to Mao and the revolution. Many were forced to work with placards hanging on their necks listing their crimes. The brutality of this campaign cannot be overstated. With the exception of Mao Zedong, no one was safe, particularly the intellectuals, from criticism and violence.

15 Rana Mitter, pg. 209
After three years of wanton destruction and the defacement of some of China’s most ancient temples and relics, Mao was finally convinced that his Red Guards needed to be reined in. Mao confronted them himself, declaring that they had ‘disappointed’ him. The youth militias were sent down to the countryside to learn what ‘revolutionary spirit’ was from the peasants in 1969. Most would not be allowed to return until the end of the campaign, or Mao’s death, in 1976.

Like the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution also had a negative, long-term impact on the environment. ‘Red Scientists’ had denounced the very few environmental regulations that had been in place at the beginning of the Revolution as revisionist restrictions, and they were promptly ignored. Writes Elizabeth Economy: “Industrial production stressed quantity…with little concern for using appropriate technologies. There was significant waste in raw materials and energy…substantial increases in air and water pollution along with significant loss of biodiversity.”

The Cultural Revolution was also the second of the Great Three Cuts. Grain was propagated to be the “link” of success and only grain was allowed to be planted. Forests were destroyed and entire mountains were stripped to cultivate grain growing. To the peasants’ horror, officials ordered all their beloved fruit trees cut down, and acres of alternative food sources were destroyed.

Lastly, Mao’s fear of foreign attack on production plants led to his “third front” policy. It called for factories to be moved from coastal regions, to protective areas near mountains and in caves. As a result, factories “[spewed] toxic discharge in the mountains, polluting the atmosphere and water.”

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution limped to a halt through a series of political maneuvers and an attempted coup among the elite echelons of the central government: the Revolution and Mao were both tarnished by the September 13 Incident, an assassination attempt on Mao by his

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17 Judith Shapiro
18 *ibid*
19 Elizabeth Economy, pg. 58
chosen successor, Lin Biao. Lin had concocted an elaborate plot to secure his leadership by having Mao killed on his way home from a country tour. When his plan was foiled, Lin fled with his wife and son to the USSR, but was killed when his plane crashed in Mongolia. The attempted coup was seen as a blemish on Mao’s stature as an infallible hero. If Mao had erred so badly in his judgment of a successor, it was also possible that he had erred in initiating the Revolution. “Was the Chairman unable to detect traitors and sham Marxists among men who had been close to him for decades?”

Lin Biao’s defection allowed Mao and Zhou Enlai to purge the Politburo of his radical allies. Zhou embarked on an “anti-leftist” offensive that began to rein in the excessive practices of the Revolution. However, he was soon faced with a personal crisis: terminal cancer. His illness was a blow to the government: as a moderate, he was seen as a “[symbol] of rationality and restraint, a guarantee that…somewhere someone was attempting to restore order and protect people from the worst effects of the Cultural Revolution.”

Zhou’s illness forced Mao to choose a figure that would signal his willingness to compromise with more centralist politician. On October 4, 1974, he suggested that Deng Xiaoping be rehabilitated as the first vice-premier.

Zhou’s death, around the time of the Wing Ming Festival, brought the people to rally in Tiananmen bearing wreaths and poems commemorating Zhou and attacking the CCP’s radical factions like the Gang of Four. The overwhelming, unexpected support for Zhou was an explicit rejection of Mao’s guidance and the radical policies that had lead China into such tumult. “The

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21 MacFarquhar, pg. 297
22 *ibid*, pg. 290
23 The Wing Ming Festival remembers and honors one’s ancestors. In an effort to stamp out superstition, the CCP had transformed the festival into a time to honor revolutionary heroes.
implication of their homage to Zhou was that they wanted Deng Xiaoping as [Zhou’s] rightful heir.”

It was Mao’s death in 1976 that truly brought an end to the Cultural Revolution. By this time, the government and Party had been decimated and many of its members purged or dismissed. The country was nearly bankrupt; most industry leaders had been ‘struggled against,’ and uneducated or inexperienced cadres took their positions at the head of factories or businesses, and then ran them ineptly. While the level of environmental degradation was shocking, and the economic and political setbacks severe, it was truly China’s people that were left the most traumatized by the Cultural Revolution. The people had been purged out of the safety of their households and sent to live in communes with the promise of something better. Their new lifestyles, however, lacked the security that traditional relationships and blood relatives offered and was replaced by paranoia and the constant fear of misstep. Furthermore, two generations were permanently altered by their dislocation into the countryside: younger students were deprived of their education during these ten years by being ‘sent down’ to live with peasants. A great deal of middle-aged and senior scholars and scientists were also sent to the countryside to do menial chores, denying them opportunities to research. Deng would inherit a cohort of disillusioned youth- 4 million high school and university students- with their futures and careers prospects changed for the worse. “The fact that so calamitous an event was launched in the name of Marxism” deeply undermined their faith in ideology and the political system. Many of these youths have been referred to as China’s Lost Generation.

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24 MacFarquhar, pg. 304  
25 ibid, pg. 322
China Joins the World & The Democracy Wall Movement

Deng ushered in increasingly rational policies, stressing the need for stability, higher educational standards, and expert leadership in industry. The Gang of Four stood trial for “ultra-leftist” crimes and imprisoned, while their fellow radicals were carefully removed from office.

Deng increased China’s attendance and participation in international conferences and forums, including the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCED).²⁶ Events like these, combined with economic reforms that lent the Chinese people greater financial autonomy, built the hope that China would quickly “modernize” into a democracy. This was only reinforced by President Nixon’s official visit in 1972 and Jimmy Carter’s diplomatic recognition of China in 1979.

The events at the end of the 1970s set the stage for the explosive political showdown between the Chinese people and the government in the 1980s. Perhaps a harbinger for things to come was the Democracy Wall Movement of 1979, when ordinary Chinese citizens pasted big character posters (dazibao) along Xidan road demanding reform and denouncing the Cultural Revolution.

Deng originally found the Democracy Wall a convenient symbol of China’s modernization and liberal policies. However, when Wall activists, like Wei Jingsheng,²⁷ began questioning socialism and the very foundations of China’s Communist Party, arrests were quickly made and the Wall was closed. Deng claimed that the widespread political debate was quickly devolving into chaos and could undermine the economic advances that had recently been made. His reasons certainly struck a cord with many of the citizenry who feared another ’10 Years of Great Catastrophe,’ but the decision left the Chinese people dissatisfied and even more disillusioned than before. Once again, the Party seemed unable to engage people’s concerns.

²⁶ Elizabeth Economy
²⁷ See: Wei Jingsheng *The Fifth Modernization.*
The Pro-Democracy Movement 1989

The rapid growth of foreign trade following the 1978 adoption of a new open-door policy at the Third Plenum, Eleventh Central Committee, brought revenue and increasing credibility to China. However, though Deng and his supporters understood that modernization demanded an end to isolationism and the importation of foreign science, capital, skills, and ideas, they feared that “spiritual pollution” from abroad would bring about instability. The initial leniency towards the Xidan Democracy Wall, then abrupt closure and issuance of Deng Xiaoping’s “four cardinal principles” exemplifies how they dealt with these issues in contradictory ways. Richard Baum calls this policy fang-shao; fang means letting go while shao means tightening. It was a reflection of the struggle within the CCP between reformers calling for tolerance and the conservatives stressing the need to maintain their grip on political and social expression.

Deng began carefully ‘demystifying Mao.’ Mao’s assertion, for instance, that cultural revolutions were necessary every seven years to purify the Party, was no longer appropriate or wanted in an age of purported stability. To this end, earlier speeches in which Mao admitted his fallibility were republished and circulated and his quotations and pictures were removed from street signs. Ironically, in negotiating these uncertain political waters between reformers like himself and Party conservatives, Deng was frequently forced to rely on his own personal prestige to preserve some semblance of political stability. Indeed, “his personal authority became…critical

28 The Four Cardinal Principles were: adherence to the socialist road, the people’s democratic dictatorship, Communist Party leadership, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.
to the very survival of the regime...therein lay the supreme paradox of Deng’s political stewardship;” as Deng desperately tried to pull China out of the ‘feudal autocracy’ of the Maoist era and into the modern age, he increasingly relied on similar ‘feudal’ methods of personalized control himself.32

The battle amongst political elites translated into rather “schizophrenic” policies and the uncertainty of the early 1980s is reflected in the citizenry’s reactions to new opportunities. The last of the Three Great Cuts took place between 1980-1982 when the state began contracting farmland to families. Peasants were terrified that this new “blessing” was really a temporary political maneuver in disguise. They feared that they wouldn’t have the right to use the land for long. As a result, they exploited the land quickly and devastatingly, clearing acres of forestry to plant as much food as possible before the next, inevitable, political disaster struck.

Intellectuals, especially the newly rehabilitated ones, had remained largely silent during the Democracy Wall Movement. However, they became emboldened by what they saw as China’s liberalization. Literature and media critiquing China’s approach to Marxism flourished: senior party theoretician Su Shaozhir wrote that a “crises of Marxism” existed, which was “punishment for [treating] Marxism in a dogmatic fashion...only by creatively developing Marxism can we truly uphold it.”33 The television documentary Heshang used “various symbols of Chinese identity...and suggested that far from being symbols of a proud civilization, they were emblems of a culture that had remained inward-looking and violent.”34 Heshang’s suggestion that China

31 Richard Baum
32 Ibid, pg. 342
33 Ibid, pg. 352
34 Rana Mitter, pg. 265
instead look to the west as an open, ‘forward-thinking’ example caused enormous controversy throughout the country and especially among the elite.

The leadership's sporadic attempts to reign in the intellectuals with movements to eliminate “spiritual pollution” only seemed to inflame the unrest over surging inflation. The economy was stalled between plan and market, just as the government seemed frozen between the conservatives and reformists. This was combined with increasing resentment over political corruption: “in some rural districts…village officials, resentful of the newfound prosperity of local entrepreneurs… [would impose] a variety of discriminatory taxes…on newly affluent ‘specialized households.’” 35

Hu Yaobang’s death on April 16, 1989 provided the catalyst that students needed to express their frustrations. Hu was considered a major political reformer post-1976, and one of his greatest political achievements is believed to be his advocacy for those persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. After expressing his support for student protests in 1986, Hu was purged from the Party in 1987.

Hundreds of students and mourners poured into Tiananmen Square to place wreaths at the foot of the Revolutionary Heroes’ Monument. Within three days over 10,000 people demanded entry into Zhongnanhai 36 to discuss a seven-point agenda that included the rehabilitation of all people wrongly targeted in the anti-spiritual pollution campaigns, the financial records and salaries of top leaders and their children, legislation promoting free press and expression, and higher stipends, salaries, and budgets for students and teachers. 37 By early May, there were approximately 150,000 demonstrators in Tiananmen Square each day. On May 13, two days before USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in Beijing, 3,000 students declared a hunger strike. “The image of noble students starving themselves…before an…unpopular, corrupt government elicited deep sympathy from hundreds of

35 Richard Baum, pg. 360
36 Zhongnanhai is the residential compound of China’s elite Communist Party members.
37 Richard Baum, pg. 438
thousands of urbanites of all backgrounds, who now flocked to Tiananmen…[and] put China on the
centre stage of international media attention.”  

The student demonstrators became pawns in the bitter political struggle within the Party. CCP
hardliners saw the student demonstrations as an opportunity to finally put an end to pesky questions
about democracy and to derail economic reform, which they believed was moving too quickly for
them to control. “The psychology of the party elders played a key role in the decisions to declare
martial law and then to crush the protests.” The dominant voices in government were older Party
cadres who had fallen victim to the forces Mao unleashed upon them and their families. Decades of
sabotage, betrayal, and mass campaigns had heightened their sensitivity to questions of survival and
stability. On May 20th, Premier Li Peng declared martial law.

The role that Deng Xiaoping played in orchestrating the use of military force against the
students is in dispute. While some historians (Blecher), claim Deng was as much a hardliner as the
Party hawks, Hsu and Grasso, Korin, and Kort assert that Li Peng was the most strident advocate of
violent retaliation, and that he manipulated information to lead Deng to believe the demonstrations
were designed to overthrow Communist rule.

Determining the exact number of demonstrators that died on June 4th and in the subsequent
manhunt that followed is virtually impossible. Soldiers quickly bulldozed corpses into piles and
burned them in the streets, or packed them into plastic bags for hurried cremations outside the city.
Western sources estimated 600-1000 dead in the immediate massacre. The Chinese government,
however, claimed that there were no casualties except for soldiers that were wounded and killed by
renegade student attacks and twenty-three accidental student deaths. In the days following June 4th,
out of town workers and student leaders were hunted down. Workers were given the harshest

38 Marc Blecher, pg. 101
39 Hsu, pg. 932
40 Grasso, Korin, and Kort, pg. 257-8
sentences, most likely because their establishment of autonomous worker unions during the movement horrified CCP conservatives, who envisioned the Chinese workers rising into a Solidarity-like entity that would overthrow the leadership.41 Hundreds of workers were tried quickly and found guilty. They were publicly executed to be ‘examples’ for the rest of China.

China’s image as an active and respected member of the international community was irreparably damaged. Trade and military sanctions quickly followed in the wake of universal condemnation. Perhaps even more importantly, the CCP lost its legitimacy in the eyes of its people.42 “The spirit of the Chinese people had been mortally wounded, and the painful experience of the crackdown would not be forgotten or forgiven for a long time.”43

**China Post-Tiananmen-Present**

In the years following the Tiananmen Square crackdown, Deng Xiaoping renewed the frenetic pace of economic reform. Though conservatives believed that economic liberalization left China vulnerable to social and political threats like democracy movements, Deng “realized that such progressive economic policies had to be continued if the party were to survive.”44 With the Party’s credibility severely damaged at home and abroad, he believed that a rise in living standards and quality of life would quell discontent.45 Deng’s push for privatization and capitalism “might have saved Communism in China from collapse…but it also swept away many of the economic underpinnings of Communism…what was left was an empty shell, propped up by the military and secret police.” 46

Technocrats less concerned with revolution and instead interested in maintaining power and finding

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41 Grasso, Korin, and Kort
42 Hsu
43 *Ibid*, pg. 940
44 Grasso, Corrin, and Kort, pg. 263
45 It is possible to find a comprehensive summary of China’s economic reforms in Willy Wo-Lap Lam’s *China After Deng Xiaoping: the Power Struggle in Beijing After Tiananmen*. 1995
46 Hsu, pg. 950
positions for their families, began taking the place of the older, ideological cadres. As a result, corruption continues to flourish to this day. It is common to find politicians with strong positions in business and industry and using those connections to keep their factories and businesses running.

With its attention occupied with market growth and maintaining stability, the Chinese government has slowly retreated from the social sector, shedding the Maoist tendency to fill every crevice of private, non-governmental life. Though the end to such exhausting surveillance is certainly welcome, the neglect of the citizenry’s welfare, particularly in the countryside has resulted in a host of problems for the CCP. The enormous inequality between urban and rural dwellers has created a surge in China’s “floating population,” or illegal Chinese migrants, that have entered the cities in large numbers. Migrant children are often denied or can’t afford an education, and there has been an upswing in urban crime. The lack of healthcare and poor conditions in the countryside has led to a shocking AIDS epidemic that the government has not only neglected, but has done its best of hide until recently. Under “extraordinary international pressure…[China] finally admitted [it] had a problem…yet it is questionable whether the Chinese government has learned anything since the AIDS scandal…fear of punishment was one of the reasons that had compelled [local] officials to cover up. Tight control of the media further stymied reports.”47 The AIDS scandal is also representative of the way local officials approach environmental disasters; even with toxic spills and factory explosions, there is usually an initial attempt by lower level elites to cover it up.

However, international pressure combined with its ever-present fear of political and social instability has compelled Beijing to allow controlled, non-governmental organizations to fill the leadership vacuum it left when it retreated from the social welfare sector. Women’s organizations, orphanages, and environmental watch-groups have all stepped in to aid the government in its quest for social stability. In terms of NGO growth, the CCP seems to have approached this uncharted

47 ibid, pg. 317
territory with the same fang-shao policies of the 1980s. On one hand, Chinese NGO growth has garnered international praise. They have fulfilled societal needs that the CCP is unable- or unwilling- to take on. On the other hand, there are misgivings among the leadership that NGOs will sow seeds of discontent and non-state sponsored activity among the citizenry. To allay these concerns, the State Council issued “a set of restrictive Regulations for Registration and Management of Social Organizations” in 1998. Among these exhaustive regulations, NGOs are required to receive approval from a government organization with no chance for appeal if rejected. There also cannot be more than one organization with the same purpose in one district (to prevent them from banding together). Moreover, “anyone who has ever been deprived of political rights, such as a former political prisoner, would be barred from participating in an NGO.”

Beijing has increasingly begun to view the environment as a factor in stability, especially the availability, or lack thereof, of water in the countryside. 1972 marked the beginning of environmental discourse on the policy level and since then, a sprawling environmental apparatus has developed. In 1984, after the Second National Environmental Protection Conference took place, the Environmental Protection Commission was established under the State Council, and the Environmental Protection Bureau serving as its secretariat. During this year, the EPC’s authority was increased and its name changed to the National Environmental Protection Bureau (NEPB). The name altered the status of the organization and it gained the ability to issue orders directly to provincial EPBs. NEPB was later changed to the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and granted autonomy from the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection.

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48 Elizabeth Economy, pg. 133
49 ibid
In 1998 NEPA was promoted to ministerial status and officially renamed the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA). Practically, this solved NEPA’s dilemma of being lower in the institutional hierarchy than the ministries that it was supposed to monitor. Symbolically, the move was even more momentous because it “signified a new level of understanding among China’s leaders with regard to [China’s] serious environmental situation.”51

The CCP has begun to view China’s growing ecological degradation and water shortage as serious threats to social stability. As such, since 1989 they have become more receptive to financial and international assistance that addresses these environmental problems. In 2001 China joined the WTO, and in 2002 Beijing signed the Kyoto Protocols. China has also begun to open the door to greater public participation in environmental protection and has been fairly progressive in allowing citizens to express their concerns regarding the environment. This is primarily because the CCP simply does not have the man-power to enforce its environmental regulations on the local level and citizen watchdog groups can often fulfill these duties. Unofficially, serious problems remain, the primary one being the supremacy of economic development over environmental concerns. Provincial and local officials are rewarded for fulfilling economic growth quotas and “severely penalized for not doing so,” creating tensions when they are also responsible for environmental protection. Economy inevitably trumps the environment.52 Similarly, outdated equipment, spotty ‘green’ regulation enforcement, and ignored SEPA recommendations persist.

China’s 20th century history has overwhelmingly affected the behavior of Chinese non-governmental organizations and protestors. Mao’s mass-campaigns and Deng’s 1989 ‘betrayal’ deeply traumatized the Chinese citizenry. Environmentalism has created a ‘safe’ space for activists to make claims upon the government and as such, activists with a variety of agendas have flocked under

51 ibid, pg. 142
52 Economy, pg. 225
the umbrella of environmental causes. The CCP’s response to these NGOs is as ‘schizophrenic’ as it was during the post-Mao era and evidence of its fang-shao policy clearly lingers.

**The Three Gorges Dam**

For over 80 years, the Three Gorges Dam has been a symbol of modernity and power to the Chinese government. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, considered the father of modern China, first conceived of damming the Yangtze River in 1919. However, ongoing civil war prevented the proposal from reaching reality under the Guomingdang. After Liberation in 1949, the CCP renewed discussion about the project. The reasons behind the Dam have been to provide 15,000 to 20,000 megawatts of electrical power, improve navigation of the Yangtze river, and to mitigate the effects of floods that have devastated the countryside. In 1954, for instance, “one of the worst floods in the last century took the lives of more than thirty thousand people and left millions homeless.”

China’s energy crises along with these frequent catastrophic floods led to the controversial approval of the Three Gorges project in 1992.

The Dam has been extremely divisive for a number of reasons. Ancient cultural relics along with ancestral homes will be inundated and more than 1.5 million rural Chinese residents are being relocated as a result. The dam will create extensive ecological damage, including the extinction of marine life and fisheries. Additionally, relocation to new areas will strain local environments.

Dissent, albeit delicately voiced, has appeared in a number of Chinese scholarly journals, scientific reviews, books, and sometimes in national newspapers. The critiques have come in waves that correspond to the political environment: the open atmosphere in the 1980s, pre-

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53 Gorild Heggelund, pg. 22
The Dam presents an ideal study of a national environmental issue that is too “close” to the government to allow strong organized criticism and protest of its choices or decision-making. One of the only remaining bodies that has safely been able to express its skepticism of the project is the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). Individual scholars and journalists, like Dai Qing, remain vulnerable to government oppression and censorship. Many avenues of resistance have been cut off. During the 1980s, activists openly allied themselves with various anti-dam factions within the Chinese Communist Party and exploited the divisions among elites. This however, is no longer feasible since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown.

The framework that I introduced in the Methodology section will be used to analyze the Three Gorges Dam opposition movement. I will study the period between 1982 and 1995 in order to clearly demonstrate China’s shifting political opportunity structure, which has favored either dam proponents or opponents at different points.

National Level model:

Rapid Economic Development → International Pressure → Political Opportunities
Distances + Cognitive Liberation → Social Movement (low)

Rapid Economic Development & International Pressure
In the 1980s, Deng’s open economic policy resulted in rapid industrial development, political liberalization, and growing polarization between conservative and reformist factions within the polity. As previously mentioned, halting steps the CCP took towards reform spurred progressively bolder opposition to government undertakings, particularly the Three Gorges Dam. Although the project overwhelmingly affected poor, rural areas, elites vocally opposed the project. Scientists,
journalists, and officials were all engaged in the divisive debate over environmental protection, resettlement, and transparent policy-making. Heggelund echoes Thomas Metzger’s studies of China’s political culture when he explains the lack of peasant participation: “it would have been difficult for grassroots activists to take part in the discussions, as a common belief is that scientific issues should be debated among scientific experts, and one does not question the [leaders’ expertise].”

The international community was also divided on the project. Investment and engineering companies encouraged the CCP’s plans and clamored for a role in the construction of the world’s largest dam. In the United States, a high-powered consortium of government, investment and consulting businesses called the U.S. Three Gorges Working Group was formed. Representatives from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Merrill Lynch Capital Markets, Morgan Bank, and Stone and Webster Engineering Corporation were only some of the businesses included in drafting a proposal in 1985 to the Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power. “It recommended…that the dam be built by a joint venture between the Chinese government and the U.S. Three Gorges Working Group, with funding from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.” Canada also offered its assistance. From 1986 to 1989, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) undertook an extensive feasibility study. Based on its findings, CIDA enthusiastically endorsed the project, concluding that it was technically, environmentally, and economically feasible. Other foreign enterprises with direct involvement in the Three Gorges project included

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54 Gorild Heggelund, pg 224
56 ibid
The Zhengda Group of Thailand, Taiwan’s Nippon Heavy Machinery Corporation, and Sanhuan Enterprises of South Korea.\(^57\)

Though international businesses might have actively supported dam construction, the proposal appalled numerous organizations worldwide. This group was comprised of scientists, environmentalists, and anti-dam activists: “the project began to stir fierce opposition from hundreds of citizens’ groups around the world who [had] seen the tragic legacy of large dams elsewhere in the world [and] condemned the proponents’ secrecy and rosy assessment of the project.”\(^58\) International newspapers and magazines were joined by politicians in calling for a halt to the construction plans and a reassessment of the project. A member of Canada’s Parliament, Christine Stewart, in a letter to the Minister of External Relations, wrote:

> While I realize the building of this dam would provide Canada with substantial business opportunities…the dam will impoverish and dislocate millions of people…endanger rare species…ruin a magnificent canyon, and in the end, may not even fulfill its main objective of providing hydroelectricity for China.\(^59\)

International non-governmental organizations including the well-known U.S.-based International Rivers Network (IRN) and the Canadian think-tank Probe International campaigned tirelessly against the dam and the western organizations that had supported “so-called development projects that adversely affect [Third World] environments” and “[foist]…pesticides and technologies [onto Third World peoples] that are banned in the affluent countries.”\(^60\) Both groups contributed to the dissemination of information about the negative impact of dams and

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\(^58\) Ryder and Barber, pg. 13
\(^59\) www.nextcity.com/ProbeInternational/ThreeGorges
criticized the closed-door negotiations between western interest groups and the Chinese government. In 1988, for instance, the International Rivers Network held a conference in San Francisco where more than 30 experts from around the world signed a letter requesting that the Chinese government publish CIDA’s feasibility study for an open discussion.\textsuperscript{61} Established by a group of volunteers in 1985, IRN seeks alternatives to damming by “[fostering] greater understanding, awareness and respect for rivers [and supporting] the worldwide struggle for environmental integrity, social justice, and human rights.”\textsuperscript{62}

Anti-dam activists had powerful allies. John W. Morris, the Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers voiced his concerns for the project during a U.S. delegation fact-finding tour in 1980: “the Chinese talked about comprehensive base planning, project planning. They had all the right words but I had the feeling that they maximized the power productivity and then stuffed flood control, transportation, et cetera, into the project. That bothered me.”\textsuperscript{63} At a Congressional hearing in July, 1985, Dr. Baruch Boxer, an expert on Chinese environmental policy, accused Chinese bureaucrats of understating or misrepresenting the scope of ecological, health, and social impacts the Three Gorges project would have.\textsuperscript{64}

The split in international support emboldened both dam advocates and opponents in China and exacerbated pre-existing divisions between CCP conservatives and reformers over the pace of development. Rapid development and increased interaction with the world left China open to competing, unfamiliar pressures including the push for social and political liberalization. Additionally, Deng had self-consciously departed from the Maoist emphasis on ideology and


\textsuperscript{62} International Rivers Network. “Mission Statement.” www.irn.org


instead directed both government and society to “Seek Truth From Facts.” Science and reason had gained a preeminent place during the Dengist era; experts and intellectuals took this as encouragement to disagree with what they saw as a violation of these principles. These factors contributed to making the 1980s a relatively open period for China.

The official media remained an instrument for the powerful pro-construction officials to publish favorable dam editorials. The government offices that were most involved with dam preparations, and would reap the most benefits if construction began, reported enthusiastically about the project to Beijing. For example, in the third feasibility study conducted by the Ministries of Water Resources and Electric Power’s, they once again concluded that the project would have a far-reaching, advantageous impact on the environment by reducing floods and silt deposits. They reached these conclusions by “making ecological surveys uncoordinated and confused, vaguely defining the aim of reports and under-funding…the environmental bureau.”

However, other government organs were resolutely opposed to dam construction. The opposition gained attention when in 1986 the prestigious Economic Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference released its report, “Why the Three Gorges Dam Should Not Go Ahead in the Short Term,” after its 38-day field trip to the dam site. In it, they recommended to the State Council and the Central Committee of the Communist Party that project planning should halt due to questionable evidence provided by the feasibility report. Sun Yueqi, deputy director of the Economic Commission of the CPPCC separately released an article entitled

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65 An early Maoist slogan that was revived by Deng. It has come to symbolize the break between Mao, who had abandoned seeking truth from fact by seeking truth from ideology, and Deng, who directed post-Cultural Revolution China to look for economic and political solutions that had practical applications.
68 The CPPCC is extremely prestigious, but largely ceremonial. Its official function is to act as a political consultative/supervisory group.
69 Heggelund
“Why I am Against the Project.”\textsuperscript{70} It reiterated the concerns of the CPPCC’s report by negating the long-standing claims of dam-proponents. Specifically, Sun asserted that the dam would not prevent floods in the middle and lower reaches of the dam as promised, and that the reservoir would actually \textit{increase} flooding in Sichuan. Sun also focused upon the environmental problems the dam would bring to the area, writing: “[the] losses incurred by inundation of the Three Gorges reservoir would win a world record in the history of water resource construction.”\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{Political Opportunity: Factionalism in the Polity & Officials as Resources}

This type of relatively open, political debate between influential bodies in the central government was unprecedented. Though the center, particularly Premier Li Peng, looked favorably upon dam construction, those who voiced objections to the project did not face the threat of public humiliation or harassment, a fear that scientists who spoke out against the project had in earlier years. That Beijing did not force all of its bureaucrats under a pro-dam agenda with threats of dismissal was even more remarkable. It is indicative of the influence that the international community had in China, considering that memories of the Cultural Revolution had served prominently in the late 1970s and informed how the CCP regarded dissent and “chaos.”

The submission of the CPPCC’s 1986 report to the State Council and CCP is indicative of the relatively “open” political opportunity structure that was present in late-1980s China. Among the three, primary factors that contributed to this liberal opportunity structure, was rapid economic development, international pressure, and divisions among elites.

Between 1978-1990 China’s GDP grew from 358 billion yuan to 1.7 trillion yuan with a growth rate of 14.9\%\textsuperscript{72}. The implementation of a market-style economy followed by this type of

\textsuperscript{70} Featured in \textit{Beijing Review} vol. 32 issue 27.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Ibid}, pg. 32
growth undoubtedly left it vulnerable to so-called “western influences.” In particular, China’s leadership and experts were privy to the international community’s debate over the dam’s environmental implications. Access to these divergent viewpoints, expressed in international media and conferences like the International River’s Networks’ San Francisco symposium, placed pressure on China’s leadership to allow debate on the national level as well. Beijing’s desire to gain acceptance as a legitimate global figure, as well as its new emphasis on scientific reasoning, made it difficult for the leadership to unequivocally approve a project as massive as the Three Gorges Dam.73

Divisions among the Party conservatives and reformers, as well as the general preoccupation with the economy, also led to a more permissive political atmosphere. Soviet-trained Prime Minister Li Peng and Communist party Chief Zhao Ziyang were engaged in a bitter political battle that pitted what critics charged was Li’s pursuit of a grandiose, Soviet-style monument with Zhao’s calls for transparency. Li Peng’s efforts to curb anti-dam media and literature, including the suppression of any media outlets reporting on CPPCC’s report, were often subverted by Zhao who, if not explicitly anti-dam, believed that the government should “make known the important matters to the people and let the people discuss them.”74

Rapid economic development and international pressure deepened the factionalism within the CCP. It created a political atmosphere where officials within the CPPCC, after analyzing potential threats/opportunities, perceived the current political structure as “open” enough to submit a strongly worded dissenting report. Furthermore, personal alliances and guanxi (connections) between the intellectual community and government officials allowed for the exchange of information and frustrations. For instance, Li Hua, deputy leader of the CPPCC was an honorary

73 Heggelund
74 Quoted by Dai Qing in Yangtze! Yangtze!
uncle of journalist Dai Qing, and encouraged her to pursue the “truth” about the Three Gorges Dam.

Cognitive Liberation

The CPPCC’s submission of “Why the Three Gorges Dam Should Not Go Ahead in the Short Term,” to the State Council, and reaching out to the dam opponents held a great deal of symbolic importance for the Chinese intellectual community. Open defiance was a rare occurrence during this time, and it instigated corresponding wave of anti-dam activity that united Chinese journalists and scientists behind environmentalism and government accountability. I argue this phenomenon can only be ascribed to a widespread cognitive liberation among dam opponents. The unmistakable discrepancies that the CPPCC found in the Ministries of Water and Electricity assessment report as well as the suppression of this material by Li Peng and other dam advocates mobilized angry journalists to find ways to publish divergent viewpoints, declaring that they “will not keep silent…they don’t want to see an endless repetition of foolish policies.”

Indeed, after the CPCC’s report between 1987-1989, opposition to the dam was considered particularly “heated.” In one subsequent act of protest, Dai Qing, a newspaper columnist for the *Guangming Daily* published a collection of interviews she and fellow reporters had conducted with renowned engineers, scientists, and scholars who all professed their opposition to the dam.

The book, *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, was released in February 1989 to coincide with the beginning of March-April deliberations by the CPPCC and the NPC, where the project was expected to receive their approval. The interviewees were openly critical of the dam: in one, Sun Yueqi, et al. accused the Ministry of Water and Electricity of “playing politics” to slant its feasibility report by using inappropriate methods in gathering information.

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75 Ryder and Barber pg. 13
76 Heggelund
Only those favoring the project could speak freely, while opposition views were immediately suppressed. The assessment has been carried out by the department responsible for the project, and by no means is it an objective and comprehensive one. We suggest that more experts and specialists be invited...in a real and earnest atmosphere that respects democratic and scientific procedures. 78

The project’s dire environmental consequences were mentioned throughout the book, with botanist Hou Xueyu asserting bluntly: “The question concerning the Three Gorges project is not the timing of the project,79 nor the height…but the advisability of the dam’s very construction. Our generation will have made an irrevocable mistake [if the gorge is dammed].”80

Dai Qing and the participants’ activities, including book talks and news conferences, were heralded by international newspapers and magazines as “China’s first environmental lobby group.”81 The Far Eastern Economic Review echoed this sentiment, calling it “a watershed event in post-1949 Chinese politics...[representing] the first use of large-scale public lobbying by intellectuals and public figures to influence the governmental decision-making process.”82

It is clear that Yangtze! Yangtze! had an electrifying effect on the nature of the dam debate. It was rumored that a number of officials, who were often denied anything other than official documents regarding the project from the State Council, snuck out of their meetings to observe

79 Many of the dam’s critics believed that completely shutting down the project was not possible and advocated instead for a long delay of construction.
82 Quoted in Yangtze! Yangtze!
Dai Qing’s press conferences. During both NPC and CPCC meetings, opposition to the dam was pronounced. Delegate Xu Caidong presented a petition from 272 of his fellow officials titled “[We suggest that] the Three Gorges Project be Postponed Until the 21st Century.”

The allied network of anti-dam activists within the intellectual community and polity are credited with successfully ending the bid to begin immediate construction. Bowing to unusually strong opposition, the State Council held a press conference on April 3, 1989. Vice Premier Yao Yilin stated that, “there is no way the project can be launched in the next five years. No large-scale projects related to the Three Gorges will be submitted in…the present…nor in the upcoming Eighth Five Year Plan [1991-1995].”

Distance

Physical Distance
Physical, political and psychological closeness to the center was a crucial determinant in the anti-dam movement’s 1989 victory but also hindered a number of anti-dam activities. For instance, most dam opponents were educated elite located in the larger cities like Beijing or Shanghai. Their physical location made them more vulnerable to oppression and government threats because they were simply easier to find and silence. Activists were forced to negotiate around a stronger government presence. When Dai Qing was looking for newspapers to publish articles critical of the dam, she was refused in all of the larger cities. *The Shanghai Economic Herald*, any *Xinhua News* outlet, and the Beijing-based *Chinese World* all refused her or claimed they didn’t have room in their newspapers. Though a magazine in a relatively close (300 miles

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83 Ryder and Barber
84 Shi He and Ji Si in *Yangtze! Yangtze!*
south of Beijing) province, Shandong, was interested in Dai Qing’s pieces, the Beijing correspondent of the *Shandong Province Science and Technology Entrepreneur* insisted on trying to obtain permission from the National Association of Sciences and Technology (NAST) to print the articles. The chairman, described as a “patriotic statesman” predictably refused and ordered the magazine to “pay no attention to things in which [Dai Qing] pokes her nose.”

With very little chance of getting her research and interviews printed in newspapers, Dai Qing turned to book publishers, but once again, no one in the large cities would take the potential risk. The CCP’s authoritarian presence was too strong in the cities: “the Communist Party’s control was so pervasive that it leaked nothing; not even a drop of water.” Finally, a small, maverick publishing house in remote Guizhou Province offered to publish the book.

Physical proximity to the center played a large role in shaping anti-dam activities because it created a political environment that was closed to anti-dam publications. Potential allies like Beijing newspaper editors or publishing houses, refused to accept any of Dai Qing’s articles because of their fear of retribution from the government. The magnitude of government surveillance in cities like Beijing pressured them into compliance with the center. In this way, physical distance affected the psychological distance of Dai Qing’s potential allies, and worked against the activists’ efforts. Guizhou Province, which is over 1200 miles south of Beijing, was home to the only publishing house willing to aid Dai Qing. Guizhou’s physical distance from Beijing worked in Dai Qing’s favor by alleviating fears of retribution.

Political Distance

Political closeness facilitated alliances and collaborations between the intellectual community and high-ranking CCP members in a highly symbiotic relationship: for instance, in a country

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86 Dai Qing “The Struggle to Publish *Yangtze! Yangtze!* in China.” *Yangtze! Yangtze!* pg. 2
87 *ibid*, pg. 10
88 *ibid*
known for its media censorship, journalists-turned-environmental activists during the 1980s had access to information that was not concealed or distorted by layers of bureaucracy. Unlike the majority of the citizenry who only received their news from government-approved sources, these dam opponents were privy to the contentious international debate on the gorge and participated in conferences as close as Hong Kong that harshly criticized the “scientific” veracity of the government’s feasibility studies. For example, even when Li Peng’s pro-dam center imposed a media blackout on the subject of the CPPCC’s independent study in 1986, connections between CPPCC members and activists allowed the report to circulate among the intellectual network, and drove dam opponents to actively find ways to distribute the study among the Chinese citizenry.

Similarly, officials who strongly opposed the dam, but felt it too dangerous to speak out individually, would contact journalists like Dai Qing to help generate discussion about their views, particularly after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. In interviews about the Three Gorges exposés she has initiated, like *Yangtze! Yangtze!* or *The River Dragon Has Come!* Dai Qing has revealed that her anonymous sources are frequently members of the NPC or scientists working on the Three Gorges Project. “On the surface they work for the Communist Party and the government, even within the Ministry of Water Resources…some are even in key position so they can get information about the project. Then they tell me and practically write an article for me.”

**Psychological Distance**

Intellectual elites’ closeness to the upper levels of the political hierarchy made it exponentially easier for them to read the divisions among the polity as well as cues and shifts in political opportunity. In other words, the aggrieved community was able to receive these “complex” sets of signals, without dilution or distortion. Prior to 1986, I would argue that the activists’ lack of activity was related to their fear of government retribution, similar to that of

newspaper editors. However, when a large contingent of the CPPCC, in one of the “only occasions [that] the Chinese people have openly voiced opposition to the Three Gorges project,”\(^{90}\) broke from the Party line and submitted their project critique to the State Council and Communist Party, it signaled a huge split in the Party and the vulnerability of the status quo. It was an incentive for dam opponents to mobilize further and increase the pressure of their lobby to turn more against the project.

The CPPCC, as well as other allies within the polity, was an invaluable asset for the activists. The disagreement with the center by another government body not only justified and elevated activists’ claims in the eyes of the polity, but also personally validated their efforts, which is why one sees an increase in activity post-1986. Additionally, the CPPCC became a protector of sorts for the movement- by closely tying itself with the views of the CPPCC, which included environmental concerns and dam efficiency, activists were able to avoid the dangerous issue of “socially disruptive” behavior. This is reminiscent of Kevin J. O’Brien’s research on rightful resistance. Though it is a tactic used more frequently and effectively at the rural level, one sees a type of this of protest in the speeches Dai Qing and other scientists would give about “educating” the Chinese. Their protest is framed as an act of civic duty: “The people have not been given the facts about the project. [If they were] they would speak out against it.”\(^{91}\) This critique of the government’s secrecy and control over the press is then softened by Dai Qing when she states that the publication of *Yangtze! Yangtze!* was “based on conscience.”\(^{92}\) This importantly underlines the “apolitical” motivations behind the protests- just “patriotic” concern for the environment and the people.

\(^{90}\) Dai Qing. “The Struggle to Publish *Yangtze! Yangtze!* in Beijing.” *Yangtze! Yangtze!* pg. 3
Three Gorges Dam 1989-1998: Revival of the Three Gorges Project

Despite professing an apolitical agenda, Dai Qing’s book was considered far too critical of a government-backed project by members of the polity. The excuse to ban *Yangtze! Yangtze!* from further circulation and arrest Dai Qing for “counter-revolutionary” activities and attempts to spread “bourgeoisie propaganda” came very quickly after the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989. Furthermore, *any* “[dam] opposition was silenced after [June 4th] by branding opponents as unpatriotic conspirators trying to infiltrate Chinese culture with Western values.” \(^93\) The dam reached a politically unassailable level when Li Peng declared soon after the repression that the project “‘is a symbol of self-reliance and diplomatic defiance.’” \(^94\) Furthermore, some officials view the dam as the salve that would rid the citizenry of their disillusionment with the Party after Tiananmen. It is a desperate attempt to harness the citizenry’s enthusiasm and loyalty with spectacular works of infrastructure like Mao did in the days of mass campaigns. The regime’s validation has now been tied up with the dam’s construction. In interviews, many senior Chinese engineers or scientists reveal, “Our leaders are worried that if it did [admit the failure of the project], the regime could fall.” \(^95\)

It is difficult to find any media articles critiquing the dam between 1989 and 1991; the debate that took place between 1990-1992 was kept within scientific circles and the highest levels of government. Opposition was marginalized further in 1991 after floods in the Yangtze basin devastated China’s infrastructure and killed thousands. It was a catastrophe that brought the Three Gorges project back into discussion; China’s leadership had halted dam talks ostensibly to pursue a period of economic austerity from 1988-1990. During this time, they concentrated on smaller

\(^93\) James Beattie, pg. 147
\(^94\) ibid, pg. 144
\(^95\) ibid, pg. 153. Also see: Heggelund (2004)
projects, including roads, bridges and power lines. The floods destroyed nearly all of this work. Its
damage extended to eighteen provinces, including Shanghai and Beijing. The floods occurred
during a time of renewed concern about sources of energy; during the first five months of 1991,
industrial output grew by 13.4% while its energy production remained the same.96

The disaster lent a new attractiveness to the Three Gorges project. Proponents continued to
claim that it could prevent the economically and socially destabilizing floods. In a political system
that was “increasingly difficult to come forward with criticism, be it environmental or
otherwise,”97 dam proponents launched a campaign that would push the project ahead. The
political climate was undeniably more favorable for pro-dam officials than it was for dam
opponents; for them, the system remained extremely harsh and dissent continued to be impossible.

In 1990-1991, the CCP approved an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) project carried
out by The Yangtze River Water Resource Commission (YRWRC) and the Environmental Impact
Assessment Department of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. There were numerous conflicts and
disagreements between the pro-dam Resource Commission and the CAS: this “was the first time a
report included differing opinions.”98 It concluded that environmental damage was likely to occur,
and listed numerous countermeasures that must be carried out to minimize the ecological damage.

However, in the summary report that was made public, the EI Statement was positive about
the project and made no mention of the contradictory viewpoints. In interviews with CAS experts,
it is strongly implied the Academy was only invited to participate to lend a semblance of neutrality
to the study.99 Additionally, a handful of experts who participated in the EIA refused to sign their
names to endorse the EIS citing their deep-seated environmental concerns, including temperature

97 Heggelund, pg. 175
98 Heggelund, pg. 174
99 ibid
changes and increased reservoir pollution. Though this refusal to attach one’s name to the EIS seems like an ineffectual form of protest, it represents the continued conflict over the dam and the refusal of experts to compromise science with ideology. Furthermore, “knowing the history of this controversial dam project where it has been difficult to voice diverging views, one may conclude that the significance lies in the mere airing of these different beliefs.”

During the initial stages of the YRWRC-CAS Environmental Impact Assessment, CAS separately published the results of an independent research project, Sanxia Gongcheng yu Shengtai Huanjing in 1991 (Three Gorges Project and the Ecology/Environment). The conclusions indicate the experts’ misgivings about construction; they found that the negative environmental impacts far outweighed the alleged benefits of the dam. Their central argument pointed to the ecological fragility of the Three Gorges area. Construction would increase the rate of environmental and ecological deterioration in all areas (middle reaches, lake areas, river mouth). Furthermore, the inundation of arable farmland and the gorge walls would result in the decomposition of vegetation, releasing high levels of sulphur into the atmosphere. Lastly, the study predicted that the relocation of 1.5+ million Chinese peasants to new rural areas would put an immense strain on these environments, and erode land incapable of supporting such an influx of people.

Despite the CAS' findings and two weeks before the National Environmental Protection Agency even approved the EI Statement, the State Council agreed to begin construction on the Three Gorges dam. “In late 1991, following a government order, every newspaper began ‘guiding public opinion’ by filling entire pages” on the Three Gorges project. “The scale of the propaganda effort…was even greater than the campaigns during the Great Leap Forward.”

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100 ibid, pg. 176
101 ibid, pg. 172
General Overseas News Service, for instance, published frequent one-sided articles quoting anyone—from CCP engineers to peasants in the area—able to endorse the project. In one article:

Thousands of Chinese scientists have been [engaged] in tackling key technical problems and some even gave their lives...for the sake of making the project a success. Thanks to their devoted efforts, they have proved that many of the difficult problems...can be solved.¹⁰³

In others, the newspaper claimed that the people from Sichuan urged construction at the soonest possible date, even when their officials acknowledged publicly that the Sichuanese were strongly opposed to the dam because they would receive the least amount of electricity (about 10%) while gaining the majority (85%) of relocated peasants¹⁰⁴: “people in Sichuan and Hubei provinces, which have a direct relation with the project, strongly urged the country to start the project at the soonest possible date to lift the poverty in the area.”¹⁰⁵

**International Pressure**

The environment had become an increasingly important issue in international relations and politics during the early 1990s. This “green focus” gave rise to a number of interesting developments in the international community’s relationship with the construction project. In the same year as the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the US Congress passed a series of guidelines that required the Export-Import Bank to adopt environmental reviews for applicants in 1992. In Part I of the “Overview of Ex-Im Bank’s Environmental Procedures,” applicants are informed that organizations/companies “for which the Ex-Im Bank financial exposure is greater than $10.0 million” and whose transactions “pertaining to a physical project which has potential for adverse environmental effects,” are subject to a

¹⁰⁴ Shi and Ji
formal screening and environmental review.\textsuperscript{106} During the course of this environmental review, “The Ex-Im Bank may also make use of information provided by other sources, including non-governmental organizations.”\textsuperscript{107} Additionally, projects must comply with the environmental standards of the host country unless international environmental guidelines are stronger, in which case, those guidelines should apply.\textsuperscript{108}

These stringent Export-Import Bank environmental regulations combined with pressure from the Clinton administration made it difficult for companies to apply for loans to support their bids for Three Gorges contracts. A September 22, 1995 memo from the White House to the Ex-Im Bank cautioned, “it would be unwise for the US Government to align itself with a project that raises environmental and human rights concerns on [this] scale.”\textsuperscript{109} As a result, Caterpillar Inc., Rotec Industries, and U.S. Voith Hydro were all denied loans in May, 1996. The Bank reasoned, “the information received…fails to establish the project’s consistency with the bank’s environmental guidelines.”\textsuperscript{110}

In 1993, Defenders of Wildlife was the head of an environmental coalition\textsuperscript{111} that filed a lawsuit against the US Bureau of Reclamation and the US Army Corps of Engineers. The suit asserted that the agencies would be violating the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by assisting with the dam, because construction would harm or jeopardize several species that the US lists as endangered. The Defenders of Wildlife and their co-plaintiffs challenged “two official positions: an agreement for the US agencies to help design the dam and a regulation that waives Endangered

\textsuperscript{107} ibid, Part I no. VI
\textsuperscript{108} ibid, Part I no. XII
\textsuperscript{110} Probe International. “Who’s Behind China’s Three Gorges Dam.” www.nextcity.com
\textsuperscript{111} Joined by the Center for International Environmental Law, Friends of Animals and Their Environment, Friends of the Earth, the Human Society of the United States, the International Three Gorges Coalition, and the International Rivers Network.
Species Act reviews for U.S. agency projects overseas.”¹¹² The goal was to force the bureaus to comply with the ESA, which would be nearly impossible given the scope of ecological disaster the dam would bring to China, or withdraw from the project. “In June 1993, the Bureau of Reclamation officially terminated its Three Gorges contract. In a statement it said ‘further involvement in this project is not consistent with Reclamation’s missions.’”¹¹³ When interviewed by Probe International, the bureau’s spokesperson elaborated, “dam projects are not environmentally or economically feasible. We wouldn’t support such a project in the US now so it would be incongruous for us to support such a project like this in another country.”¹¹⁴

International bodies and other western governments distanced themselves from the Three Gorges dam as well. In the mid-1990s the World Bank refused to fund the project, citing the troubling environmental and human rights allegations associated with it; by 1992, CIDA had withdrawn from the plans, “admitting that the project was too controversial.”¹¹⁵

One sees a clear shift in the international community’s attitude about environmental issues during the 1990s. Earlier, opinion on the dam was decidedly mixed, with governments moderately favorable and businesses expressing a strongly favorable position towards the project. Post-1989, opinion swung against the dam, as environmental protection and human rights became increasingly significant in the international arena. Though private investors still had the freedom to pursue Three Gorges contracts independent from government approval, companies like Bechtel Enterprises, the largest engineering company in the US, increasingly chose not to because of the

¹¹³ Probe International
¹¹⁴ ibid
¹¹⁵ ibid
environmental risks involved and the negative publicity that would accompany their association with the dam.\footnote{ibid}

The new attitude among governments and businesses put enormous pressure on the CCP, which despite its anti-western rhetoric was eager to rejoin the world and “make up” after the Tiananmen crackdown.\footnote{Heggelund} Though the CCP had a virtual stranglehold on the official media, it could not prevent anti-dam polity members from accessing international news and communicating with overseas sources. The dam remained incredibly controversial-albeit quietly-among the Chinese.

**Political Opportunity: The NPC Vote on the Dam Reveals Dissension Among Elites**

On April 3, 1992, the National People’s Congresses voted on the dam. Dam proponents allegedly prevented delegates from exchanging information that expressed viewpoints differing from the State Council’s pro-dam materials. According to foreign press, “the vote was nearly disrupted when a deputy, Huang Shunxing, rose from his seat yelling to demand that the proposal be treated as an ‘important bill’ requiring a two-thirds majority.”\footnote{Agence France Presse. “China’s Parliament Approves Huge Dam Despite Protest.” *Agence France Presse*. April 3, 1992.} However, debate was forbidden and the resolution passed with 1,767 legislators voting in favor, 177 against, and 664 abstentions. Most scholars (Heggelund, Beattie) consider the number of abstentions representative of the large number of officials who possessed strong reservations about the project but voted to abstain because they feared that voting would lead to political retribution. They are often counted along with the ‘nay’ votes in a significant display of opposition by the normally docile NPC, which usually ‘rubber stamps’ projects that the State Council backs.
Failure to Launch: Silence During the early-mid 1990s

However, this remarkable vote did not have the same effect upon activists that the CPPCC’s dissenting report did in 1986. Why wouldn’t this display of opposition from a government body (much more powerful than the CPPCC) not prompt a similar outpouring of protest? This dilemma seems to challenge the proposed theory, especially when activists would have possessed ready allies in the international community: the early-mid 1990s was the height of the international “green” movement and external pressure from foreign governments, banks, and NGOs was at its peak.

The answer is two-fold. First was the dearth of leadership within the “typical” activist community (scholars, scientists, journalists). Many dam opponents were in exile or jailed for their participation in the Tiananmen protests. Others, like journalists, lost their positions in their newspapers and therefore their access to officials because of their contributions to Yangtze!

Secondly was physical, political, and psychological distance. The majority activists were still based in larger cities119 where surveillance and the oppressive police presence still made it physically unsafe to speak out against the government. Indicative of this is the news articles that ran during the government’s push of the project. News articles lauding the Three Gorges ran in People’s Daily, most of them signed by party leaders and specialists. The one, small exception, according to Beattie, was a lone, anonymous letter written from a remote province where the chances of swift retaliation were slim.120

120 Beattie
The dam, as mentioned before, had reached an epic level of political and economic significance. In terms of the economy, it would ostensibly solve the country’s energy crises and provide close to 20,000 watts of electricity. Politically, grand-scale construction was seen by Li Peng as the means to secure his legacy, and by many in the Party as the way to re-cement their power after the Tiananmen incident. Three Gorges by this point was simply too “close” to the government for opponents to question or attack it openly. Only 177 officials felt safe to unequivocally vote against the project, despite the widespread discontent among NPC delegates with the way the Party was had proceeded with it. Dam proponents were able to take advantage of the hostility towards dissent post-Tiananmen, and the floods in 1991, to frame the dam as a cure-all for the country’s economic, social, and political ills. Then using this frame of necessity, proponents pushed the Three Gorges approval through the NPC despite their dubious “red” science endorsements.

Political memory and physical location had a huge role in sustaining a high level of fear during the early 1990s. Though Beijing was the site of earlier anti-dam victories, these triumphs were shadowed by the 1989 massacre. Remaining activists and potential activists were invariably reminded of the consequences of dissent in China, reinforced by their physical nearness to the site of the massacre and the CCP’s seat of power. Guobin Yang, in observing the relationship that NGOs/activists and the state have had, ascribes to the CCP’s presence, “a specific gravity which it imposes on all the objects and agents that encounter it.” Post-1989, the CCP took pains to emphasize its “field” and reach of power by pursuing physical “omnipresence” with symbols of its power, i.e. PLA exercises in the streets, news blackouts, and a noticeable police presence throughout Beijing. Even if the CCP could not achieve literal omnipresence, it did reduce both the

physical- and therefore psychological- space that potential activists could have used to reorganize and protest once more. In this atmosphere of fear, it would have been difficult to accurately analyze the “cues” from favorable international shifts and polity factionalism.

The New Shape of the National Environmental Movement

“Despite the challenges they face, environmental NGOs (ENGOs) have carved out a field of existence in China’s changing social terrain.”\textsuperscript{122} However, for most national-level urban-based NGOs, this existence has been limited to a non-confrontational, cooperative relationship with the Chinese government. The CCP has encouraged environmental organizations to act as intermediaries for marginalized groups, but restricted the scope of NGOs’ power. In no uncertain terms are national NGOs completely autonomous from government oversight. In the Historical Overview, regulations for non-governmental organizations were mentioned. These restrictions- i.e. finding a sponsoring institution for registration as well as limiting only one organization per specific area of work (i.e. environmentalism) to each district has made it difficult for NGOs to enact far-reaching changes because it is so difficult to organize. The tricky business of finding “sponsors” is not only an obstacle for registration purposes, but it also binds NGOs to a more conservative, pro-government organizations. Physical and political distance, therefore, have checked radical protests.

At the same time, the ENGOs in China typically promote environmental consciousness by encouraging learning, co-operation and participation. They are “closer to institutionalized than non-institutionalized politics…[aiming] more at publicity and participation than at protest and disruption.”\textsuperscript{123} Yet despite the non-contentious character of the national environmental movement,

\textsuperscript{122} ibid, pg. 46
\textsuperscript{123} ibid, pg. 53
they still have managed to significantly raise the level of environmental consciousness among the Chinese citizenry. This is in part due to technology, like the internet, that allows them to reach more people along with international ENGOs and, paradoxically, because of their proximity to the government. The CCP has become strongly committed to environmental protection as well as international environmental accords.\textsuperscript{124} The polity has encouraged the media and ENGOs to publicize any violations of “green” laws, which has resulted in a measure of success for the movement. For instance, in the mid-1990s, Friends of Nature helped galvanize a national campaign to prevent a county government in Deqin, Yunnan, from threatening the snub-nosed monkey. Using the alliances between the environmental movement and the media, Liang and a filmmaker recorded the logging with the support of sixteen high-level officials. Their film was aired on CCTV’s investigative program \textit{Focus}. This was the “first time China’s environmentalists had coordinated their activities and affected policy at the most senior levels of the Chinese government.”\textsuperscript{125}

In the Yunnan illegal logging case, it is easier to see why and how the movement was able to gain support on the higher levels of the political hierarchy. The issues of threatened species and extinction are not politically forbidden or “close” to the center even while environmental policy is a politically important topic. In essence, ENGOs “enforced” CCP laws that forbade illegal logging by bringing people who had defied, or in a sense “protested,” against a politically close topic, to their attention and back in line with the center’s policies. The CCP and NPC are naturally more enthusiastic about this type of relationship: they often lack the resources or manpower to force local officials to obey “green” regulations themselves and the movement often acts as a “third force” to help the CCP achieve its environmental aims.

\textsuperscript{124} Beattie
\textsuperscript{125} Elizabeth Economy, pg. 151.
Tony Saich acerbically comments that Chinese NGOs are often nothing more than co-opted appendages of the central government.\textsuperscript{126} It indeed may be difficult to see the meritorious qualities of \textit{any} movement, be it environmental or other, that “deliberately [shies] away from associating [itself] with controversial issues.”\textsuperscript{127} Very few ENGOs today, for instance, will openly attack the Three Gorges project, which continues to be built. Yet it is necessary for one to analyze the costs/benefits of radical insurgency in a political system that is closed to this type of behavior. “Those who openly oppose the central government or stage protest demonstrations are treading a fine line.”\textsuperscript{128} For national activists to remain a viable force in “greening” China, it is understood among them that mixing political protest with their environmental activism so “close” under government institutions, will be answered with swift and brutal repression from the CCP. To achieve their \textit{own} strategic ends, national activists will make the choice to compromise with the center while employing methods to escape total government control. Their goal is that they “may gradually push back political boundaries and induce changes in the relationship between state and [NGOs].” \textsuperscript{129}For instance, the “intertwined relationships” that ENGOs have, with media and technology personnel as well as international NGOs, “may put some limits on the power of the political field by adding to the complexity of political control.”\textsuperscript{130} Particularly important are submerged networks: although Friends of Nature is not allowed to establish FON branches in other provinces, members and former volunteers have left FON to begin separate organizations of their own, while still trading ideas and tactics with each other. Similarly, people will avoid registering and set up an informal ‘club’ or ‘salon.’\textsuperscript{131} The important ties between groups have

\textsuperscript{127} Beattie, pg.156
\textsuperscript{128} Peter Ho
\textsuperscript{129} Guobin Yang, pg. 66
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{ibid}
\textsuperscript{131} Ho
opened informal channels of communication that the government has little control of and can be used to coordinate agendas, spread information, and tactics.

Ho makes a provocative argument when he compares the scope and dynamics of China’s environmental movement with those of Eastern and Central Europe. He points specifically to the state’s increase in environmental sensitivity, “depriving [the movement] of a cause to rebel against” it. Ho asserts this is what is responsible for the collaborative nature of the movement. However, he does not deny the vulnerability for either repression or co-optation. Instead, he observes that that government connections and resources plays “crucial, positive roles in the environmentalist scene.” In the snub-nosed monkey campaign, it was largely through FON founder, Liang Conjie’s guanxi that affords him political protection and a political platform.

These political developments have unfortunately come too late for the Three Gorges dam. It remains too politically volatile and sensitive a subject for the environmental movement to broach without fear of repression. Activists are unable to address a certain level of issues. These are rigidly controlled by the CCP and are perceived by the polity as vital for their continued power. The brand of environmentalism that has begun to flourish in China is one that tackles conservation and pollution control. There remains a CCP-dictated distance between the movement and the polity. It is physically close, politically distant, and psychologically controlled.

**Rural Protests**

Urban environmentalists have the proximity, and therefore access, to government agencies that will support their efforts to reform China’s environmental practices. Although repression

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132 ibid, pg. 916
133 ibid, pg. 915
134 Elizabeth Economy
remains a very “real” threat, the central government has been receptive to national ENGO activity.

In contrast, the Chinese government and the economy seem to have left behind their rural residents, who total up to 70% or more of China’s population. Development has been extraordinarily skewed in favor of the coastal cities. “Almost all the investment that has come to China has gone to the eastern region.” In 2001, for instance, 50% of all Foreign Direct Investment was split between Guangdong province, Shanghai, and Jiangsu. Barely any foreign investment made its way to the poorer, inland provinces. A UN report published in 2005 ranked China as one of the most inequitable societies in the world- 90th out of 131 countries, based on income, access to education, and medical facilities.

Industrialism in cities like Beijing has resulted in increased concern by both educated city-dwellers and governments for the environment; factories have been moved to city outskirts to lessen the smog in the capital and propaganda posters advocate eco-friendly lifestyles. However, the CCP’s strategies to “revive” the countryside’s economy in order to bridge the standard of living gap through industry has thus far rested on heavy resource exploitation and a processed material industry, leading to severe degradation of China’s rivers and soil.

To express their many, unaddressed grievances, China’s peasantry has increasingly turned to mass mobilization and protest. According to China’s official estimates, in 2003 there were approximately 53,000 protests. This swelled grew to 74,000 protests in 2004. In 2005 alone, China’s official estimates indicate that there were approximately 87,000 incidents of “serious and
often violent unrest.” In the countryside, these protests often use local corruption, land seizures, and environmental degradation as their platforms.

I will be using the research that Jun Jing has carried out in Dachuan, a village of 3,600 people in Gansu province. His work, “Environmental Protests in Rural China,” provides evidence for the claims I make about protest in more remote areas of China. Parts of Gansu Province are more than 1000 miles west of the capital. In villages like Dachuan, the local officials’ presence is exponentially stronger than the national government. Township, county, and prefecture bureaucrats, many with ties to local industries, will interpret or ignore national and provincial environmental laws to suit their own agendas.

In the case of Dachuan’s environmental protests, which began in the 1970s and have gradually become more extreme against the local fertilizer factory that pollutes their water supply, there is a clear correlation between rapid economic development and national policies that attempt to intervene in rural areas, and protest progression. The increased pressure from national and provincial governments to respect peasant rights, illustrated clearly in Premier Wen Jiabao’s pointed warnings to local officials in his December 2005 speech at the National Rural Work Conference, has created divisions among local elites and galvanized the peasantry further. Along with physical distance, the Dachuan community’s indigenous resources, including local religion and clan connections, have fostered increased psychological distance. In the literature review, the idea of “cultural resources” was explored. Pfaff and Yang’s claim that rituals constitute spaces where people honor symbols that foster dissent by allowing individuals to define themselves separately from the Party line. These “subcultures of opposition,” combined with gradual

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139 ibid
knowledge about environmental health hazards have led to the peasants’ cognitive liberation—or what Jing refers to as their cognitive “revolution.”

Local Level Model:

Rapid Economic Development → National Policies → Political Opportunity + Cognitive Liberation → Social Movement
Distance (high)

Rapid Economic Development:

China’s has experienced a phenomenal rate of economic growth over the past 10 years. However, the rural areas of China have not seen nearly as much progress as their urban counterparts since Deng Xiaoping began pushing the country to a market economy in 1978. The situation looked hopeful at the beginning to Deng’s reforms: in 1985, those with incomes below 200 rmb had fallen from 250 million in 1978, to 125 million people.\textsuperscript{141} This figure has unfortunately climbed since.

The root of this rural-urban disparity lies in the CCP’s strategy to extract resources from the countryside “largely for urban capital accumulation” by controlling agricultural production, forcing food-staple prices low, and strictly upholding the \textit{hukou}, or household registration system, which makes migration into the cities unaffordable and risky.\textsuperscript{142} Though the inland provinces have consistently requested increased investment from the center to their regions, the CCP only conceded to their demands in 1994 when the leadership became worried that regional inequality would become a source of instability. Even after this, however, in 2002 9 provinces and 1 municipality in northwest and southwest China received 3% of all FDI while coastal areas like Guangdong alone snared 25.7% FDI.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{141} Tony Saich
\textsuperscript{143} Saich, pg. 164
The favoritism displayed by the center for certain “high-profit” regions has exacerbated both income disparities and resentment. The CCP’s new poverty alleviation proposal—the “new socialist countryside,” has uncovered long-standing bitterness among even officials. Hebei province, which surrounds the rich cities of Beijing and Tianjin, had closed many of their factories in order to devote that land to tree-planting. The purpose of this was to fight desertification and protect Beijing and Tianjin from sandstorms. Officials there are convinced that Hebei is poor “because Beijing and Tianjin have taken too much from us. To protect the environment, we have sacrificed many opportunities for economic development.”

Hebei’s CPPCC vice-chairman remarked angrily at a recent meeting that “[Hebei] has supplied [Beijing and Tianjin] with clean water and shielded them from sandstorms. What do we get in return? Pollution and garbage. Beijing and Tianjin take a lot from us, but give very little back. The central government should support us. They should give us compensation.”

To underscore the vice-chairman’s point, the GDP/person in 2002 for a Hebei resident was 9,115 yuan, while in Beijing and Tianjin it reached 28,449Y and 22,380Y respectively.

The less money that makes its way to rural areas means that the disparity between the countryside and cities’ quality of life only grows more severe. “Healthcare and universal education have vanished for the most vulnerable populations.” Saich compares the infant mortality rate and school enrollment in wealthy provinces and poor provinces: in 1993, Zhejiang’s infant mortality rate was 20/1,000 and over 60% were enrolled in secondary education. In the same year, one of the poorest provinces, Guizhou, had an infant mortality rate that was three times

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145 ibid
147 Saich, pg. 292
Zhejiang’s, and only about 20% of eligible Guizhou students were enrolled in secondary education. This stems from the decreasing investment in rural healthcare even while costs have climbed. Proper prenatal care is difficult to find and too costly for many rural families. Around two-thirds of rural residents needing to be hospitalized cannot afford it; despite universal education decrees from the center, many rural schools must charge their students fees to stay open. As a result, school enrollment in the countryside is far lower than enrollment in urban areas.

The neglect of inland and rural areas has spawned unchecked corruption problems all along the CCP hierarchy, particularly the county and township levels. Investment originally earmarked by Beijing for rural areas is often embezzled by lower officials. Additionally, unfair taxing, land grabs without compensation, and pollution in particular, “have nurtured a deep resentment among an inland population that has been eagerly waiting its turn under the economic reform policies,”¹⁴⁸ but have instead borne the burdens of rapid industrialization alone. For instance, in the 2002, SEPA reported that over 70% of the water in 5 of the 7 major river systems was grade IV or worse, which means that the water is not suitable for human contact.¹⁴⁹ While the water system is more regulated in the cities, local factories and officials ignore environmental laws in order to catch up with the wealthy urban areas. An official’s job performance is often judged by his economic output. These numbers will be used to rate his progress—or lack thereof—in his locality. It is a system that went horribly awry during the Great Leap Forward, when officials were under such pressure to produce grain that they began deceiving their superiors and faking high output numbers. In this case, Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs), which are among the main water polluting industries in China, often operate unchecked.¹⁵⁰ This is because they are further away

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Economy
¹⁵⁰ Heggelund
from the center’s direct surveillance and also because they are considered an important source of economic growth in rural areas. In some cases, local residents are forced to accept these conditions because they depend on the TVEs for jobs. However, “factories and municipalities dump their untreated waste directly into streams and rivers. The proliferation of tanners, chemical, fertilizer, and paper factories have all contributed to a dramatic increase in pollution.”

National Policies

Peasants’ grievances are felt even more acutely because national policies that have been introduced in recent years to address their needs have largely been ignored on the grassroots level. For the past decade, the CCP has attempted to close the widening gap between urban and rural areas with a variety of policy initiatives and campaigns. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) as well as the National Poverty Reduction Plan for 2001-2010 seeks to mitigate the central causes of rural unrest by focusing on social development and ecological conservation. Yet “no matter how good their [the central government’s] intentions, [they] sit atop a deeply flawed structure hobbled by inertia, incompetence and corruption. Central government initiatives can founder at the hands of lower-level officials twisting its provisions to line their own pockets.”

The central leadership, particularly Premier Wen Jiabao, has become increasingly vocal about Party corruption, blaming local officials for the protests and incidences of civil disobedience that have created unrest in the countryside. In his speech, “On a number of questions in current agricultural and rural work,” given on December 29, 2005, Wen proposed an ambitious development program that looked to create a “socialist countryside.” The plan would funnel government money into educational and healthcare programs in the countryside in order to

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151 Economy, pg. 70
152 Sabyasachi Mitra
balance some of the basic inequities between urban and rural areas. Wen makes frequent allusions to local corruption throughout his speech, calling for Party members to “earnestly implement a series of party guidelines and policies for the rural areas…and persist in ‘giving more, taking less, and enlivening things,’ making particular efforts to ‘give more.’”\textsuperscript{154} Later in his speech, Wen pointedly referenced local officials’ deviance from Party regulations when he discusses township and village politics and economics: “officials’ should propagate and implement well party and state policies and laws, regulate their own behavior, ensure the peasants; legitimate rights…and consolidate the party’s governing basis in the rural areas.”\textsuperscript{155}

Wen’s chastisement of local officials is significant for many reasons. First, Wen unequivocally lays much of the responsibility on the lower levels of the political hierarchy (county, township, and village governments). In his speech, he cites the willful seizure of the peasants’ land, poor treatment of rural workers, and heedless pollution as “conspicuous problems” that affect social stability. By separating “those to blame,” or lower-level officials, from “those not to blame,” the CCP and central government, Wen is able to deflect blame from the CCP and retain his own careful image as a “man of the people.” Secondly, his open critique of rural governance places enormous pressure on localities to start aligning themselves with central Party dictates; Wen has wedged local officials’ in the middle of the CCP’s displeasure and the peasants’ discontent. Wen’s speech relieves the peasants of much of the blame for disrupting the social order by asking what choice they have after corrupt local officials have deprived them of land and water.

\textsuperscript{154} BBC Monitoring International Reports. “Excerpts from Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao’s Speech on Rural Issues.” \textit{BBC Financial Times Information Limited}. January 20\textsuperscript{th} 2006.

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{ibid}
Political Opportunity

Though there are a number of instances on the local level where grassroots protestors are able to exploit the divisions among township, county, or provincial-level officials in order to find sympathetic elites to assist them,156 this has not been the case in Dachuan. According to Jing, the local county government EPA has not taken legal action against the fertilizer factory that has been contaminating the villagers’ water supply with urea because the factory is a provincial-level enterprise. The county government/EPA has limited power in imposing penalties against environmental lawbreakers unless it is a factory operating under its administrative jurisdiction—this means county-level or below. Furthermore, county and township officials have discouraged the Dachuan villagers from even attempting to press charges against the factory because of the large amount of money it would cost to pursue the issue in court and the low chances that Dachuan has to win its case against an enterprise with “powerful connections [that] extend from the provincial government to the court system.” 157 Only village leaders who share the Dachuan residents’ concerns as effected members of the community have allied with them, and have lent their organizing abilities to the protest movement. However, potential allies among higher elites have been scarce for the aggrieved population. Dachuan’s protests remain fairly “grassroots”—completely planned, controlled, and executed using indigenous resources, which I will explore in sections below. The one powerful link that the peasants have to the center is the first environmental law (1979), which is widely disseminated among Dachuan’s rural residents. This law provides them with concrete justification for their protests. The passage of this law has “enhanced the public’s sense of basic rights in favor of justifying forceful environmental

156 See David Zweig, “To the courts or to the barricades: can new political institutions manage rural conflict?” or Peter Ho, “Contesting rural spaces: land disputes, customary tenure and the state.”
157 Jun Jing, pg. 207
protests.” Even though the CCP is not an ally that they can access, the 1979 law acts as Dachuan’s connection to the center.

Cognitive Liberation

The villagers’ cognitive “revolution” was the product of several years of abuse from the factory as well as government campaigns and edicts that directly impinged on childbirth and healthcare in the village. The time frame of this protest movement encapsulates four separate “phases,” in which peasants began perceiving external intrusions into their community as harmful and unjust. This eventually culminated in their cognitive liberation. Here I will outline each of Jing’s four phases while in later sections I will devote space to how and why cognitive liberation was possible.

At the very beginning, the villagers had very little concept of how harmful the waste that the fertilizer factory dumped into their drinking water was. The Dachuan residents would simply wait for the carbon black that floated on top of the water’s surface to move downstream before collecting water. However, in the mid-1970s, a number of animals went blind. This was the first phase of the villagers’ cognitive liberation. They “began to realize that drinking water from the river could be hazardous to human health too.” Their complaints were met with empty, conciliatory gestures from the factory, including discounts on fertilizer. It did nothing to address the health issues that were confronting Dachuan.

According to Jing, the second phase of the villager’s cognitive liberation was the break-up of agricultural communes in 1980-1981. Farmland was distributed to individual households along with the land that bordered the river. However, the stream severely damaged the crops from excess ammonia and the stream-lined crops were unsuccessful.

158 ibid, pg. 204
159 Jun Jing, pg. 208
The third, and I argue the most fundamental phase, coincided with the beginning of the CCP’s one-child policy. “Human reproduction became a dominant subject of anxious conversation among the villages.”\textsuperscript{160} With childbirth becoming a main focus for Dachuan peasants, speculation about the unusually high number of stillbirths, miscarriages, and birth defects once again prompted the village to bring complaints to the factory.

Lastly, China’s economic liberalization intensified the villagers’ grievances and anger. During the early 1990s, the village began digging ponds in order to raise and sell Yellow River carp. “These ponds multiplied from a handful to more than 300.”\textsuperscript{161} However, the village ponds depended on the river. The pollution from the river damaged Dachuan’s ponds and threatened a new source of income and economic development for the village.

Human health was undoubtedly the most contentious issue for the villagers, especially after the central government introduced the one-child policy. Part of a local official’s success was evaluated on how low the birth rate was in his county. Political elites were much more willing to comply with this particular government edict and they strictly enforced the policy with “task forces” of county policemen and doctors that performed sterilization and abortions. During this time, Beijing also began a government-funded campaign to promote “scientific childcare.” A round of doctors would make yearly stops at Dachuan to vaccinate the children. During this time, they emphasized the dangers that drinking from the river posed, especially for pregnant women.

All of these factors resulted in a gradual awakening among village leaders and residents. As the CCP began to withdraw its administrative powers from the countryside, local governments would often allow local factories and enterprises to ignore official regulations. The central government’s abandonment of its rural citizens, combined with Dachuan’s new anxiety about

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{ibid}, pg. 208
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{ibid}, pg. 209
childbirth and their threatened livelihoods intensified their indignation over the factory’s unwillingness to respond to their requests. This complex interplay of political policies and events from 1970-1990 fully revealed to the villagers the harmful effects that the contaminated environment had on their village. “The village’s initial appeals to the factory had not been antagonist. They only evolved into fierce protests as the local people came to appreciate the threat that the polluted water posed to human health and agricultural production.”

Indigenous Resources

Dachuan’s realizations about the factory’s threat to the community coincided with shifts in the political and economic landscape. For instance, the central government’s decision to disband the agricultural communes further exposed the factory’s negative actions to the community by having a tangible effect on a sub-group of Dachuan residents once new farmland was distributed. Similarly, as mentioned above, the government’s one-child policy made a deep impression on the community and heightened their suspicion of the fertilizer factory’s part in the number of miscarriages and children with birth defects.

However, indigenous resources intensified, focused, and framed the community’s grievances in ways that facilitated their cognitive liberation and their decision to collectively act against the factory. Specifically, religion and clan networks became two key resources for Dachuan residents. They were used to express the community’s anxiety over the CCP’s family planning laws and how this, along with the fertilizer factory’s pollution, would affect the future of Dachuan’s children.

In the mid-1980s four fertility temples were reconstructed behind Dachuan village. Each of the recreated six goddesses and one male deity are believed to help women give birth, protect young children, and cure diseases. It is not a coincidence that these temples were rebuilt during the

\[162 \text{ibid, pg. 208}\]
same time that the one-child policy was being circulated by the CCP. According Jing there was a “growing number of worshippers drawn to the fertility temples,” around this time. It is a reflection of the villagers’ apprehension about the policy and the high number of prenatal problems that Dachuan women were experiencing.163

As a component of the cognitive realization process, the temple stands as an autonomous space in which a villager can foster his/her dissent. The literal act of going to the temples serves as the villager’s first attempt to change the outcome of the factory’s pollution (prenatal problems). Here, temple worshippers can be compared to Argentina’s madres, whose grievances were initially expressed by standing outside government offices demanding to hear news about their missing children.

For Dachuan residents, their grievances became part of a ritual. The repeated miscarriages, stillborns, etc. informed how they would interact with the fertility temple. Entering and worshipping at the temples served to focus their attention on problems associated with birth and less on the imposed rituals of public life, which includes a “correct” political attitude regarding dissent and social stability. The temple is a space that disassociates the individual from the Party because he is engaged in rituals that are not under the Party’s direct control. In this space, he is able to define himself as an “aggrieved parent/child/resident” rather than “citizen under the CCP.” This leaves the worshipper with the ability to form associations that revolve around this new identity— one of grievances. Similarly, after sharing their stories and experiences with fellow mothers outside officials’ offices, the madres formed a community that heightened their sense of injustice and also bolstered their collective will. The community allowed them to coherently link their grievances with a cause, and demand reparation from it.

163 ibid, pg. 208
Folk religion certainly played a pivotal role in shaping the identities of the Dachuan insurgents. The temples created communities that encouraged an “awakening” among worshippers; it helped residents realize that they were not atomized victims but members of an aggrieved collective. Also essential in this cognitive process was indigenous networks and clan loyalties. Lineage had an “indelible influence in the village’s organized struggle for safe drinking water.” In particular, the dominant Kong clan presence in the village made it unnecessary to create competing frameworks among protest participants. Instead, a universally resonating frame was found in the struggle to have healthy children and fears about the continuation of family.164

According to Jing, 85% of Dachuan’s household were surnamed Kong and were able to trace their lineage to a single ancestor. This practice as well as the interrelated character of the village is a common feature in the Chinese countryside. Men will often remain in their childhood villages to strengthen their clans, while women traditionally “marry out” into their husband’s village.

The Kong’s dominated social and political life in Dachuan: the village chief, the local Communist Party head, and the accountant general were all surnamed Kong.165 Therefore, Dachuan already had a deeply embedded indigenous network based on traditional social relationships that, as Oberschall pointed out, is essential for sustained grassroots protest activity. The Kong lineage enabled movement leaders to frame the struggle against the fertilizer factory in ways that resonated very deeply with the majority of Dachuan residents. Family and bloodlines have always held central roles in Chinese culture. This is especially true with the Kongs, who claimed to trace their ancestors back more than a thousand years. Traditionally, it has been essential to give birth to a child (male) that could carry on the family’s name, continue to worship the family’s ancestors, and look after his parents in their old age. The factory was framed as a

164 ibid, pg. 212
165 ibid
threat to the Kongs’ ability to have healthy offspring capable of continuing the family line. The clan’s anxiety and suspicion about the factory’s part in their problems were refocused by the CCP’s limiting one-child policy; it wasn’t enough anymore to simply “try again” for another boy, especially when county officials and policy were strictly enforcing the policy. The Kong family, as well as every other villager in Dachuan, became even more absorbed in having healthy children in the face of what they perceived as threats to the family’s survival.

Subsequently, the language that the village has used when confronting the factory is often couched in ways would appeal to the traditional Chinese concern for families. Accusing questions such as “are the lives of the village’s children worth less than those of factory children?” 166 are often asked by the protestors.

Both village religion and clan networks greatly facilitated the villagers’ cognitive liberation process. Indigenous resources were used to create a community for the specific purpose of sharing their concerns regarding the factory’s abuses. This was accomplished even under the watchful eyes of county and township officials. Because these were informal relationships that were seemingly based on family ties, there was little suspicion among the authorities that the networks were actually fostering dissent and anger.

**Distance**

**Physical Distance**

Dachuan’s physical distance from Beijing was a determining factor in the insurgents’ tactical choices. Generally, “rural residents are more likely to resort to collective protest and other direct or even violent means of defiance than urban residents.”167 The Dachuan peasants’ strategies have included attempts to sabotage the fertilizer factory, disrupt traffic, and publicly challenge

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166 *ibid.*, pg. 207
167 Minxin Pei, pg. 28
economic elites. On a few occasions, protestors would bring ten bottles of water drawn from the stream to the factory. They would invite the facility’s Communist Party secretary, general manager, and their families to drink the polluted water in front of the crowd. If they did so, the villagers promised never to return. These were accompanied by provocative questions that were meant to embarrass the factory’s bosses, and make them “lose face.” In addition to demanding whether the factory believed their children were more valuable than the village’s children, protestors also would ask:

“If factory employees and their families dare not drink water from the stream, how can management not expect local villagers to demand safe drinking water? Aren’t the rural people as human as the factory workers?”

Unsurprisingly, the factory’s party secretary and general manager refused to even meet the villagers. Jun Jing records that after one of these confrontations, a group of young Dachuan residents drove ten tractors filled with foul stream water to the factory. Protestors used rubber pipes to shoot the water over the factory walls, bombarding its workers for three days. After this, the factory agreed to provide Dachuan with money to build a new bridge and repair a tap-water pump for the 600 residents still drawing their drinking water from the polluted stream.

It is important to analyze why Dachuan’s population—or any rural community—has been able to engage in such disruptive protests when the central government is generally intolerant of actions that could generate social instability. Two important factors in these cases are the closed political structure that rural residents have to contend with, and physical distance. For Dachuan, legal options were unavailable because the fertilizer factory had strong connections to provincial-level officials and courts. Because they were barred from contesting the factory within official channels, it was necessary for Dachuan peasants to “resort” to less diplomatic measures, including week-long blockades and mass demonstrations, to elicit any positive response from the factory. The

168 Jun Jing, pg. 207
peasants’ physical distance from the center might make it difficult to enforce environmental laws, but it also frees them from the constraints that Beijing is able to exert over potential dissidents in its immediate surroundings.

Political Distance

The peasants’ justification for their unruly conduct is political closeness to the center, and it is perhaps even more of a factor than physical distance in the types of protest the Dachuan social movement has utilized. The 1979 environmental law not only “justified forceful environmental protests,” but also gave rural residents a measure of protection by erasing the “counter-revolutionary” stigma previously attached to protestors. The Dachuan residents have used the central government’s environmental priorities to justify their tactics as well as the language of “rights” and “equality” that Beijing uses in its anti-corruption campaigns, in order to make demands on the fertilizer factory. Because the industry is denying the peasants their “right” to clean water and a standard of living through corrupt practices, Dachuan residents are “forced” to use disruptive means to effect positive change. Kevin J. O’Brien’s analysis here is absolutely correct; the Dachuan peasants’ language reveals a desire to establish the factory’s leaders as the true instigators of social instability. As such, the Dachuan residents have no choice but to expose the their “disloyalty” to the center, even if it is through noisy protests.

Even though Dachuan’s physical distance works against the residents by making change more difficult, they still maintain a political closeness to the center by invoking the government’s language and widely publicized priorities. This combination works in their favor because they are still able to claim an “alliance of goals” with the central government, without actually experiencing the national government’s interference.
Psychological Distance

Psychological distance from the standard Party views regarding protest, loyalty, and stability in the countryside has been a gradual process. It began when the state withdrew from the economic and social welfare sectors of rural life. The CCP lost much of its ability to dominate and monitor the citizenry’s activities. Rural traditions—“superstitions”—that had been banned during the Maoist era, like folk religion and lineage halls, were revived. These indigenous resources became sources for support for rural families and furthered lessened the peoples’ dependency on the state. Local practices and temples also became sources of conflicting loyalty. The ways in which religion and family networks can create detachment from Party dictated views have been examined above; however, one must analyze this case as a process, not simply the replacement of one (indigenous resources) over the other (government). The state-rural relationship has been one of long-term neglect on the state’s part, which has given rise to egregious inequalities between the cities and the countryside. The second part of this process is the rise in grievances in the rural areas because of this neglect. A result of this has been the revival of local traditions as a way to cope with the challenges of development and inequality.

In Dachuan, most means of change, like the court system, were denied to the peasants. They were unable to depend on the political hierarchy and therefore forced to express their anxieties through unofficial means, i.e. fertility temples and family networks. These resources provided a space where peasants could “honor symbols” representing birth and family, rather than the dominant political structure imposed by local officials, which subordinated the family unit below the wishes of the government. This “freedom” was the source of a shift in frame alignment. Dachuan’s residents began to hold the fertilizer factory wholly accountable for the damage its pollution was inflicting on the village. It is very unlikely that these protests would have been possible if the central government still maintained a strong presence in the countryside.
Rural Limitations

While Dachuan’s environmental protests raise the hope that contentious politics of this nature will spread into united, large-scale popular movements on the grassroots level, rural protest politics are limited by a number of factors. First, the aggrieved population in the countryside is comprised of poor peasants. They lack the resources and mobility to communicate with fellow villages. Secondly, as I reviewed above, a family or lineage, like the Kongs, will form the nexus of a movement and villages remain highly suspicious of outsiders, which make it difficult to organize. Lastly, there is always the possibility that protests will be met with swift local repression. In winter, 2005, for instance, police opened fire on a crowd of Dongzhou demonstrators, who were protesting illegal land seizures. Afterwards, in an effort to keep word of the incident from spreading, local officials ordered thousands of armed troops to patrol the perimeter of the village, located in Guangdong Province, to prevent anyone from leaving.169

It is therefore necessary for potential rural insurgents to negotiate social politics and the threat of repression by local elites. With these limitations placed on grassroots activities, it is far more difficult for rural insurgents to network and communicate as effectively as national activists. Ultimately, while local protests are tolerated more than nationally-led ones, their demands more often go unanswered.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Three Gorges conflict and the Dachuan protest movement provides strong evidence in support of the two theories proposed earlier in the Methodology section. Furthermore, a

number of important conclusions can be drawn about environmentalism in China, as well as about social movements in authoritarian regimes in general.

In terms of China’s nascent environmental movement, it is clear how shaky the legal protection is for the environment on both national and local levels. Even while the CCP purportedly acknowledges the country’s desperate ecological crisis and takes steps to address it with legal measures, the Three Gorges Dam is in clear violation of those laws. Similarly, further down the political hierarchy, local corruption has enabled the Dachuan fertilizer factory to resist compliance with central government edicts. In the latter case, this is possible because rural government corruption and potential profit has trumped weak central surveillance. In the former, government “pet projects” are above SEPA recommendations or any environmental regulations.

If the state is unwilling to support it’s Environmental Protection Agency even in the face of government connected projects, then economic ambitions will continue to prevail over China’s ecological needs on every level of the political hierarchy. Throughout this thesis, one sees instances where SEPA or local regulatory bodies are unable to use their powers to enforce “green” regulations. This only deepens the country’s environmental crisis.

China’s “green” movement can be divided into two separate entities—the national and the local. There is a markedly different scope to the type of activities initiated on each level. Nationally, activists tend to be more educated; they are journalists, academics, and scientists. They have more sophisticated resources like newspaper and media at their disposal. The relationship between environmental activists and government elites can be ambiguous; often the influence or success an NGO has is based on its members’ guanxi. Effective attempts to influence the polity come from quiet, inside exchanges of information and legitimacy rather than outside attacks on the political system.
While national-level insurgent activities are limited, the government has been receptive to any assistance and information the movement is able to provide to it. As this partnership has emerged, it has pushed the CCP into new forms of collaboration and weakened its ability to control associations. However, to a certain extent, this has also defanged the environmental movement. Rather than push for the structural changes needed for comprehensive environmental protection, national ENGOs are relegated to recycling drives and Earth Day tree-planting.

On the local level, one sees that grassroots activism has less to do with “broader goals,” like environmentalism, but issues such as survival and the immediate threat that pollution poses to one’s livelihood. These issues have been incredibly useful frames for village leaders, who have been successful in uniting the peasants behind common goals like clean water. The modest extent of their demands is one of the primary reasons why the government has been more or less sympathetic to their protests. Furthermore, rural protests often serve the same purpose as ENGOs; disruption uncovers local level corruption and official deviance from central Party guidelines.

Unfortunately, the central government is not nearly as responsive to the needs of grassroots protestors as they are to ENGOs. The CCP’s attempts to “green” the countryside are often sabotaged by local corruption or simply local economic needs. The vast inequalities that exist between the countryside and the cities ensures that no environmental plan will succeed until the government starts investing in quality-of-life measures for rural residents, including healthcare and education.

I have consistently argued that the differences in urban and rural tactics and the level of social disruption they are “permitted” to cause can be explained by distance. This is a key variable in China’s social movement equation because it can be used to explain what conditions will give rise to protests. On the national level, rapid economic development opens the national polity to competing pressure, particularly from international sources. This creates political opportunities for activists to exploit, like
elite divisions. The way in which insurgents will read these cues as well as react to new opportunities is based on their physical and political distance from the center. These will then facilitate or inhibit psychological distance. Only when insurgents are psychological “far” enough from the polity is their cognitive liberation possible. As was seen, even though post-Tiananmen gave rise to a number of anti-dam sentiments internationally and domestically, the omnipresent threat that potential activists perceived the CCP to pose inhibited any ability they could have had to read those new developments.

Locally, rapid economic development has exacerbated the inequalities between rural and urban areas, giving rise to a number of grievances, including the health hazards posed by industrialization. Attempts to address these problems through national policy often places pressure on local elites to comply with national edicts, creating divisions and different levels of sympathy for the rural peoples plight among them. Aggrieved populations will often take advantage of these elite divisions. Physical distance combined with a high level of grievances lowers the perception of cost/threat and creates greater psychological distance. This often leads high social movement activity. In the case of Dachuan, the closed political opportunity structure has only deepened the village’s grievances and they have turned more to their own indigenous resources to sustain a high level of activity against the fertilizer factory.

This analysis shows that it is possible for spaces to exist, even in authoritarian regimes, which make it possible for dissent to foster and emerge. Both of the case studies demonstrate how distance and perceptions about space either encouraged or inhibited the insurgents’ activities. Furthermore, it demonstrates how distance continues to be a major influence in government-NGO relations in modern Chinese politics.

Additional research is necessary in order to determine whether this formula is specific to the unique characteristics of the Chinese state, or if it can be applied on a widespread basis. It would be interesting to test the strength of this framework in other authoritarian environments, particularly where a stark dichotomy exists between rural and urban protests. My research suggests that the level of
activity in rural and urban communities is highly dependent on their physical and political distance from centers of power, but even more importantly, on their perceptions of this distance.

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